

**SOUTH HADLEY CONSERVATION COMMISSION  
VIRTUAL MEETING MINUTES  
JANUARY 3, 2024**

**Present:** Neva Tolopko, Chair; April Doroksi, Vice-Chair; Bill DeLuca, Member; Garth Schwellenbach, Member; Tom Dennis, Member; Kathy Davis, Member; Louise Croll, Associate Member; Rebekah Cornell, Conservation Administrator; and Colleen Canning, Planning/Conservation Coordinator

Chair Tolopko called the meeting to order at 6:01 PM and reviewed the virtual meeting protocols.

3 attendees were present at the meeting according to the Zoom Attendance report.

**Agenda Item #1 --- Open Public Forum**

No members of the public spoke during the open forum.

**Agenda Item #2 --- Minutes**

Draft minutes of the December 6 meeting were sent to the Commission for review.

**Motion:** Commissioner Schwellenbach moved to approve the December 6 meeting minutes. Commissioner Davis seconded the motion. Five (5) out of six (6) Commissioners present voted in favor of the motion through roll call vote. Commissioner Dennis abstained from the vote as he was not present at the meeting.

**Agenda Item #3 --- Public Hearing to consider a Notice of Intent filed by Berkshire Design Group to secure an Order of Conditions for proposed work within buffer zone. The project includes an addition to a single family home and detached garage and a new septic system at 125 Amherst Rd (Map 52 Parcel 249)**

The applicant's representative, Ryan Crandall of Wright Builders, was present at the meeting along with design consultant Doug Serrill of Berkshire Design Group.

Commissioner Schwellenbach abstained from the hearing as his employer had a professional relationship with one of the applicant's consulting firms.

Doug Serrill explained that a Notice of Intent had been filed to allow the following site work at 125 Amherst Road: 1) expansion of an existing single family home to connect the residence to an existing detached garage; 2) installation of a new, re-sized septic system, and 3) removal of trees to allow site work. At the time of initial development, the house and associated site work was constructed partially within the 50' Conservation Zone (the Inner Buffer Zone) and Outer Buffer Zone. The addition was proposed within the Conservation Zone at an area of existing lawn. The existing septic tank would be removed and relocated to an area of existing lawn. Site work would require removal of several trees. Due to site constraints, the required ratio of mitigation plantings

did not appear practicable so a collection of small trees, shrubs, and seed mix was proposed. Additionally, a 300 sq. ft. rain garden was proposed to help mitigate the additional impervious surface.

Chair Tolopko wanted to confirm that the addition would be on existing lawn. Doug Serrill confirmed that it would be.

Chair Tolopko asked if fill would be needed for the new septic system. Doug Serrill responded that a small amount of fill may be needed. Ideally, soil from the foundation of the addition would be used for septic and additional soil would be brought in if needed.

Commissioner Dennis was pleased with the rain garden design and felt that the overall site conditions were improved. Chair Tolopko recommended that a special condition be added to require the applicant to maintain the rain garden and guarantee plant survivability.

Commissioners discussed the amount of trees proposed for removal and the mitigation offered. Associate Member Croll asked what variety of ServiceBerry was proposed. Doug Serrill responded that the ServiceBerry would be a large shrub that could grow to 20-25'. Vice-Chair Doroski asked for clarity on the amount of trees proposed for removal and their replacement ratio. Doug Serrill replied that 11 replacement trees were needed based on the replacement ratio. 15 shrubs, 2 understory trees, and herbaceous grasses were proposed as mitigation. Ryan Crandall added that the property owner also intended on managing invasive Bitter Sweet. Commissioner DeLuca noted that the Commission could require payment 'in lieu' of mitigation when on-site mitigation was not possible. However, Commissioner Dennis felt the replacement ratio was only guidance and the applicant's proposal allowed for overall improvement of the site.

Vice-Chair Doroski asked if the rain garden was appropriately sized for the new impervious surface. Doug Serrill responded that an engineer reviewed the plan and layout.

Commissioners discussed their concerns for increased impervious surface within the 50' Conservation Zone.

Commissioners reviewed special conditions as Administrator Cornell provided in the meeting background materials. New conditions would be included to require long term maintenance of the rain garden. Commissioners discussed potential for mitigation along a small slope to the north west of the home. Initially, the location was proposed to only be loamed and seeded. Commissioners discussed a more robust planting plan at that location. Ultimately, the Commission decided to condition a pre-construction meeting with the Conservation Administrator to decide what planting mitigation would be most appropriate.

**Motion:** Vice-Chair Doroski moved to issue a waiver for work within the 50' Conservation Zone and moved to issue Order of Conditions DEP File #288-0489 for an addition to a single family home, installation of a new septic system, and associated site work at 125 Amherst Road with special conditions as discussed during the hearing. Commissioner Davis seconded the motion. Five (5) out of five (5) voting members voted in favor of the motion through roll call vote.

#### **Agenda Item #4 --- Black Stevens Conservation Area – Mountain Biking**

The discussion regarding mountain biking at Black Stevens had been ongoing. Modifications to the trails had been observed which included the construction of jumps and removal of trees. This required corrective action from the Conservation Administrator and Volunteer Conservation Crops to attempt to return the trails to their normal state. There was still a number of work that needed to be done. As this was a recurring problem, Administrator Cornell brought the issue to the Commission. Trail cameras had recently been installed but no unauthorized activity had been observed.

. Administrator Cornell suggested that adolescents may have made alterations to the existing trail. The Commission discussed how involved and engaged the adolescent group should be in establishing a mountain bike trail. Regardless, all Commissioners present expressed theoretical support for establishing a mountain bike trail. Administrator Cornell would seek guidance from Town Counsel prior to additional consideration.

#### **Agenda Item #5 --- Conservation Area Land Management Plan 2024**

Administrator Cornell shared the drafted 2024 land management plan with the Commission prior to the meeting. The document was updated yearly to reflect the management needs for each Conservation Area.

Chair Tolopko recommended that cost estimates be updated to reflect cost increases related to inflation. If the management plan was used to justify funding allocation at Town Meeting, updated estimates could be used to seek more funding.

Commissioner DeLuca recommended that Rangeview Meadow Conservation Area be included in the management matrix.

**Motion:** Commissioner DeLuca moved to accept the *2024 Conservation Land Management Plan* with the included reference to the Rangeview Meadow Conservation Area. Commissioner Davis seconded the motion. Six (6) out of six (6) commissioners voted in favor of the motion through roll call vote.

#### **Agenda Item #6 --- Administrator's Report**

Administrator Cornell detailed the following items:

- *Holyoke Gas & Electric (HG&E) Management* – Administrator Cornell attended a recent public hearing for HG&E's land management plan. She shared that the utility company committed to not using Glyphosate products in South Hadley.
- *Board of Health* – Chair Tolopko, Member Davis, and Member Dennis attended a recent Board of Health (BOH) meeting to discuss the Property Maintenance Bylaw. She shared that the BOH was interested in moving discussion forward to repeal or modify the bylaw's existing language. The Conservation Commission could collaborate on the effort if needed.

- *Subcommittee Updates* – The Growing Wild Subcommittee met prior to tonight’s regular meeting. The Diversity Equity and Inclusion (DEI) Subcommittee would meet next on February 7.

**Agenda Item #7 --- Other New Business**

There was no additional new business to discuss.

**Adjournment**

**Motion:** Commissioner Schwellenbach moved to adjourn the meeting. Commissioner Davis seconded the motion. Six (6) out of six (6) Commissioners voted in favor of the motion through roll call vote.

The meeting adjourned at 8:35 PM.

Respectfully Submitted,  
Colleen Canning, Planning/Conservation Coordinator

**Appendix**

Document	Document Location
Zoom Attendance Report	Attached
NOI #288-0489 -125 Amherst Road	Conservation Files
Conservation Area Land Management Plan 2024	Conservation Files

Attendee Report

Report Generated: 2/12/2024 13:54  
Topic Webinar ID Actual Duration (minutes) Unique Viewers Total Users  
Conservation Commission 863 6138 2500 220 4 21

Host Details

Attended	User Name (Original Name)	Join Time	Leave Time	Time in Session (minutes)
Yes	Rebekah Cornell (Town of South Hadley 3)	1/3/2024 16:57	1/3/2024 19:07	130
Yes	Rebekah Cornell (Town of South Hadley 3)	1/3/2024 19:09	1/3/2024 20:37	88

Panelist Details

Attended	User Name (Original Name)	Join Time	Leave Time	Time in Session (minutes)
Yes	Kathy	1/3/2024 16:57	1/3/2024 17:36	39
Yes	Kathy	1/3/2024 18:00	1/3/2024 20:37	157
Yes	Colleen	1/3/2024 17:58	1/3/2024 19:07	69
Yes	Colleen	1/3/2024 19:07	1/3/2024 20:37	91
Yes	Garth	1/3/2024 17:59	1/3/2024 20:37	158
Yes	Louise	1/3/2024 17:57	1/3/2024 20:37	161
Yes	Ryan Crandall	1/3/2024 18:04	1/3/2024 19:27	84
Yes	Neva	1/3/2024 17:12	1/3/2024 17:36	24
Yes	Neva Tolopko (Neva)	1/3/2024 17:54	1/3/2024 20:37	163
Yes	Doug Serrill	1/3/2024 18:03	1/3/2024 19:27	84
Yes	Tom	1/3/2024 16:58	1/3/2024 20:37	219
Yes	April	1/3/2024 18:00	1/3/2024 20:37	157
Yes	Bill	1/3/2024 17:58	1/3/2024 20:37	160

Attendee Details

Attended	User Name (Original Name)	Join Time	Leave Time	Time in Session (minutes)
Yes	Town of South Hadley 3	1/3/2024 19:07	1/3/2024 19:08	2
Yes	Town of South Hadley 3	1/3/2024 19:08	1/3/2024 19:09	1
Yes	Ryan Crandall	1/3/2024 18:00	1/3/2024 18:04	4
Yes	Doug Serrill	1/3/2024 17:58	1/3/2024 18:03	6
Yes	PS	1/3/2024 17:59	1/3/2024 17:59	1
Yes	PS	1/3/2024 18:00	1/3/2024 18:03	3