

**SOUTH HADLEY CONSERVATION COMMISSION
VIRTUAL MEETING MINUTES
JULY 5, 2023**

Present: Neva Tolopko, Chair; Bill DeLuca, Member; Garth Schwellenbach, Member, Kathleen Davis, Member; Tom Dennis, Member; Louise Croll, Associate Member; Terry Rosenfeld, 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.

Agenda Item #1 --- Open Public Forum

No members of the public spoke during the open forum.

Agenda Item #6 --- Other New Business

A new Associate Commissioner, Terry Rosenfeld, was in attendance at the meeting. Commissioners and department staff introduced themselves and welcomed him to the Commission.

Agenda Item #2 --- Minutes

Draft minutes of the June 21 meeting were sent to the Commission for review.

Commissioner Davis moved to approve the June 21 meeting minutes and Commissioner DeLuca seconded the motion. Three (3) out of five (5) commissioners present voted in favor of the motion through roll call. At least four (4) votes of approval were needed for the motion to pass. Approval of the June 21 minutes would be tabled until the Commission's next meeting.

Agenda Item #3 --- General Bylaw §179-4 Property maintenance

Stephen Franz, Board of Health member, was present at the meeting.

Administrator Cornell explained that the Town had a general bylaw with language that required grass to be no longer than 6 inches. This general bylaw seemingly would discourage residential property owners from reverting their lawn into a naturalistic landscape as was one objective of the Commission's *Growing Wild* initiative. The bylaw defined the Police Department and the Board of Health as enforcement entities. As such, the Board of Health had been informed of the Commission's interest in seeking a change of the bylaw. It was understood that no fines had been issued under the bylaw to date. Administrator Cornell recommended that language within the bylaw either be removed or modified to allow for exclusions. A thorough review of Town Meeting action to understand the history of the bylaw was underway.

Stephen Franz provided language for a ‘non-binding resolution’ to support the Commission’s efforts. However, only action of Town Meeting could change the bylaw.

Chair Tolopko asked if the Board of Health had concerns with removal or alteration of the language in the bylaw. Stephen Franz responded that he was not aware of any concern but the Board of Health was expected to discuss the topic at a future meeting.

Commissioner Davis shared that she had spoken with citizens who were concerned about grass height at a neighborhood property so she referred them to the Health Department. The concerned citizens feared that tall grass would lead to increased wildlife. Associate Commissioner Rosenfeld cautioned that unintended consequences could arise from changing the bylaw such as blighted properties. Administrator Cornell later explained that properties which were abandoned needed to be filed with the Building Commissioner per *Chapter 179-3 Blighted and Vacant property*.

In reply to the stated citizen concern, Associate Commissioner Croll noted that wild animals were also present on well-manicured lawns. Commissioner DeLuca supported removal of the language limiting grass height. Commissioner Dennis shared that he installed educational signs after complaints were received regarding the pollinator meadow in his yard which seemed to quell concerns.

Consideration for amendments to the property maintenance bylaw would continue at a future meeting.

Agenda Item #4 --- 6:30 Public Meeting to consider a Request for Determination filed by Don & Virginia Lonczak for slope stabilization and related work within buffer zone at 14 Stonegate Dr (Map 42 Parcel 75)

Administrator Cornell explained that the applicant requested a continuation of the public meeting. As an engineering consultant had been hired, additional application materials were expected to be provided before the Commission’s next meeting.

Motion: Commissioner Schwellenbach moved to continue the public meeting to July 19, 2023 at 6:30 PM. Commissioner Davis seconded the motion. Five (5) out of five (5) commissioners voted in favor of motion through roll call.

Agenda Item # 6 --- Administrator’s Report

Administrator Cornell detailed the following items:

- *Future meetings* – The following items would be considered at future meetings: 1) question and answer session with Mark Stinson from MassDEP; 2) discussion on farm field management practices; and 3) Notices of Intent for projects at 21 North Sycamore Knolls and Pearl Street.
- *Judd Brook Sewer* - The Commission could anticipate reissuance of an NOI to DPW for repair of the Judd Brook Sewer interceptor.

- *Scout Projects* – Administrator Cornell was working with a girl scout to re-blaze trails at Black Stevens and was also working with boy scouts for repairs at Canal Park.
- *Volunteer Conservation Corps* – Due to anticipated high temperatures, the volunteer event scheduled for Saturday, July 8 would be canceled.

Agenda Item #7 --- Other New Business

- *Diversity Equity & Inclusion (DEI) Subcommittee* – Commissioner Davis was working with the Hampshire Bird Club to host an event in September at Texton Park. Subcommittee members agreed to host a subcommittee meeting prior to the Commission's next regular meeting on July 19.
- *Growing Wild Subcommittee* – Subcommittee members agreed to host a meeting at 9:00 AM on July 11.
- *Public Lands Brochure* – New brochures had been printed and were available through the department office and other key locations around Town.

Adjournment

Motion: Commissioner DeLuca moved to adjourn the meeting. Commissioner Schwellenbach seconded the motion. Five (5) out of five (5) commissioners voted in favor of the motion

The meeting adjourned at 7:09 PM.

Respectfully Submitted,
Colleen Canning, Planning/Conservation Coordinator