



**CITY OF TORRINGTON
CONSERVATION COMMISSION
Regular Meeting Minutes
October 19, 2023 Regular Meeting**

1. Call to Order:

Meeting called to order at 6:30 pm

Members present in person in Room 215 of Torrington City Hall unless otherwise noted.

Roll Call & Announcements: Members present: Christine Altman (Chair), Steve Ivain, Karen Svetz, and Erin Stelma
Members Absent: Dan McGuinness, Michael Kaneb, and Jeremy Spitz
Staff: Nate Nardi-Cyrus – Assistant City Planner
Members of the public: George Craig

2. Minutes:

a. September 11, 2023 Regular Meeting

A motion to approve the minutes was made by Mr. Ivain, seconded by Ms. Stelma. All commissioners voted aye.

3. New Business:

a. Elect Vice-Chair

Mr. Ivain was nominated by Ms. Svetz to be Vice-Chair of the Conservation Commission. All members voted aye.

b. Landscaping zoning regulation update

Mr. Nardi-Cyrus shared his draft update to the City of Torrington's landscape zoning regulations, which would require the use of native tree/shrubs vs recommending, among other minor language tweaks. Ms. Stelma articulated some concerns about overburdening small businesses and farms by requiring native trees/shrubs vs recommending them. Ms. Altman indicated that most property improvements large enough to trigger adherence to the landscaping regulation are taken on by the property owner, which is usually not a small business. Mr. Nardi-Cyrus offered the possibility of exempting farms from this regulation but that should be done outside of this minor revision, during a larger agricultural overhaul of zoning regulations. The landscaping regulations are also written to allow flexibility with the requirements, at the discretion of the Planning and Zoning Commission. The group agreed that given the important role native plants provide in the environment, the Commission's charge to enhance the natural environment, and the current language in the regulation allowing the use of non-native plants, that requiring the use of native plants would be something the Commission should support. The question was whether it was an unreasonable burden to small businesses to have their choices limited to native species. Mr. Nardi-Cyrus agreed to 1) bring a

typical plan set to the Commission for discussion at the next meeting and 2) explore the cost differences between native and non-native trees/shrubs at home depot (a reasonable landscaping resource for a small business). Mr. Nardi-Cyrus also encouraged the commissioners to explore other communities' landscaping regulations to bring to the discussion.

4. Old Business

a. Eastside Flooding Issues

As a first step in addressing these issues, Mr. Nardi-Cyrus recommended the Commission send out a mass mailing with a stream maintenance pamphlet created by the Commission about 15 years ago. This mailing would target property owners who have streams running through their lots in the southeast portion of the City. Mr. Nardi-Cyrus indicated he would get the City GIS Manager to generate an address list and then the Commission could stuff and mail envelopes during the next meeting. The Commission agreed.

As a long-term step, Ms. Svetz discussed her research into funding from FEMA and state sources to initiate planning efforts aimed at mitigating flooding issues in this part of the City. Mr. Nardi-Cyrus noted that these sources require projects be identified in a Hazard Mitigation Plan, like the one developed for the NH COG in 2019. Unfortunately, the 2019 plan is for the entire COG region and probably does not have specific enough recommendations to be cited in a grant application. Ms. Svetz indicated the NV COG had created individual plans for municipalities and that maybe the NH COG would be interested in doing the same. Ms. Svetz said she would follow-up on how NV COG funded Hazard Mitigation Plans and would get back to the commission during the next meeting.

b. Schedule HVA Wildlife Crossing Assessment Training

Mr. Nardi-Cyrus explained to the Commission that after speaking with Julia Rodgers, she said she can be flexible with any dates during any time of year and that she has no preference. In that case, the commission agreed an early April or late March date might help them observe the presence of vernal pool-breeding amphibians and could be promoted in conjunction with Earth Day events. Mr. Nardi-Cyrus will reserve a date that works for HVA and get back to the Commission at the next regular meeting.

c. Earth Day Planning

The Commission discussed the spring event generally and agreed they should engage with the Torrington Public School teachers, Lindsay Sullivan (STEM Coordinator) and Jon Cahill (Math Teacher), who supervise the Torrington High Environmental Club, to involve them in this and other Commission efforts. Mr. Nardi-Cyrus will reach out to them prior to the next meeting.

d. Food Forest Planning Update

The Commissioners present during the October 11th open space investigation described their walk along the Naugatuck River Greenway trail to two potential food forest sites. Upon further investigation, both sites will not work. Mr. Nardi-Cyrus said he visited Borzani and Donahue Parks to determine who maintains the existing gardens there. The Borzani Park garden is managed by the Master Gardeners and Mr. Craig indicated the Donahue Park garden is maintained by LARC. Mr. Nardi-Cyrus will follow-up with both groups, as communications with the Park and Rec director continue to be challenging.

e. Red Mountain Trail Update

The internal working group kick-off meeting was held September 28th. The City engineer will contact our retained engineering consultant to start scoping work on a redesign of prior drafted plans.

f. Open Space Inventory

The Commission visited two small open space parcels buffering the Gulf Stream just upslope of Park Avenue. There was some encroachment by a neighboring house lot but it was only residential landscaping, so it was not considered a high priority for enforcement. The next inspection will be on 11/22/23, with folks parking near the Stillwater Dam (Stillwater Dam Road).

g. Natural Resources Inventory

Nothing new to report.

5. Adjournment:

A motion to adjourn was made by Mr. Ivain, seconded by Ms. Svetz. All commissioners voted aye.

Meeting adjourned at 8:03 pm.

Nate Nardi-Cyrus

Nate Nardi-Cyrus, Assistant City Planner
Staff to Conservation Commission