



# TOWN OF GREENWICH

Town Hall • 101 Field Point Road • Greenwich, CT 06830

Conservation Commission  
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Patricia Sesto  
*Environmental Affairs Director*

## **Conservation Commission Meeting via a Zoom virtual meeting. May 7, 2020**

### **Minutes**

#### **Attendance:**

**Members present:** William C. Rutherford, Nancy S. Dickinson, Gary Silberberg, Eric V. P. Brower, Sue Baker, Urling Searle, Laura di Bonaventura, Theodore H. Walworth III

**Staff present:** Patricia Sesto, Sarah Coccaro, and Aleksandra Moch

**Audience Present:** Francia Alvarez, Tree Conservancy, and Peter Schweinfurth

**Technical support team:** Jenny Larkin and Craig Jones

**Commission Discussion Session – 7:00 p.m.**

#### **1) Call to Order**

Meeting called to order at 7:00 pm by Sesto. She introduced the rules of conducting a virtual meeting.

#### **2) Seating of Alternates:**

Walworth was seated for Henrey.

#### **3) Review and approve minutes of April 5, 2020 meeting:**

Motion was made by Silberberg and seconded by Walworth to approve the minutes as presented. The motion passed unanimously.

#### **4) Review of Correspondence:**

No correspondence

#### 5) Chairman's Report:

Rutherford welcomed the commissioners back. Baker asked about the new rules at recently reopened Greenwich Point. Sesto gave a short summary of the changes. Dickinson reported observing visitors following the new guidelines when walking through the beach.

#### 6) Staff Reports

Sesto stated the Town is on track to open the Town Hall on May 21<sup>st</sup>. When open, the public will be allowed by appointment only. The department has a generic email address to communicate with customers. Responses are provided in timely fashion. A Plexiglas shield was installed at the counter for future interaction with the public. The staff will be wearing masks when in the office. Future guidelines will follow the executive orders and directions provided by the Governor's office.

Sesto was pleased to report the staff was working hard, continuing all the programs to the extent possible.

##### a) Conference/Program reminders:

- Sustainable CT webinars and events - ongoing <https://sustainablect.org/resources-newsevents/upcoming-events/>
- "The Decline of Horseshoe Crabs in Long Island Sound; Why Should We Care?" webinar, Thursday, May 7th 4:00-5:00pm.

#### 7) Ongoing projects

A written report was provided by staff and forwarded to the CC members on the topics below:

- a) *Phragmites* removal at Bruce Park
- b) Pollinator Pathway – North Street project

#### 8) Fisheries/Wildlife

A written report was provided by staff and forwarded to the CC members on the topics below

##### a) Fishway

di Bonaventura questioned the low fish count this year. Coccaro stated cold water is most likely the reason for the late start. She was optimistic about the rest of the season. Several dams in our area have been removed, which may cause wider distribution of fish among other rivers.

- b) Canada Geese
- c) Purple Martins
- d) Horseshoe Crabs

Brower expressed his worries about the declining population of horseshoe crabs. Coccaro summarized the recent webinar featuring Dr. Matthey overlooking horseshoe crab program at Sacred Heart University. She pointed out habitat loss,

harvesting, and predation as main reason for the decline. The drop in their population has been observed since mid-1950's.

The monitoring program that engages citizen science included twenty years of tagging. Due to the epidemic, there will be not tagging this year, so the accuracy of the count may be impacted. In addition, due to the social distancing requirement, the count would not include any social gathering or educational programs.

Baker pointed out the monitoring protocol does not reflect the character and specific conditions of Greenwich beaches; therefore, the count misses some valuable areas which she believed will yield higher numbers. Baker agreed the predation by raccoons has increased significantly over the last few years.

Brower asked about any study done on growing raccoon population at Greenwich Point. Coccaro stated Sesto and she are working with Parks and Recreation to have the racoon trapping done in spring, prior to breeding season for the crabs.

## **9) Education/Outreach**

A written report was provided by staff and forwarded to the Conservation Commission members on the topics below:

### **a) Earth Week in schools - recap**

Coccaro stated the earth week of action, April 20-24, was revised due to the pandemic. The planning phase took a long time and energy, involving the superintendent and principals of public and private schools, to plan of an active five-day program. In response to stay at home order, one-page document was drafted and shared with all schools, providing instructions for each day activities at home. The information was also posted on the town's website and many schools offered it electronically as well. Technical support for the program was provided over the phone. The program received a lot of responses from the parents and students. Several actions were documented on videos and shared with others.

di Bonaventura provided a list of lessons learned:

1. It was at a ground scale so difficult to measure.
2. It was better implemented when at home with the entire family involved.
3. A portion of the program was imbedded into curriculum at GCD and included measuring the carbon footprint by doing a worksheet on meatless day.
4. New connections between the schools were developed when acting in concert.
5. Teenagers do not like to post their pictures when doing green projects.
6. Press cover was missing.

Coccaro stated Fred Camillo delivered the Earth Day proclamation at two different occasions. Once at the Town Hall and once during the Arbor Day at North Mianus School. Nine schools got trees planted to celebrate.

### **b) Waste Reduction Program**

## **10) New Initiatives**

a) Electric School Busses

Moch stated a new Transportation and Air Quality sub-committee was established to take on the project. The commission will be working under the umbrella of Sustainability and Enhancement Committee. Currently the members are going through a training offered by Sustainable Fairfield County program learning about the opportunities of electric bus procurement options.

**11) Committee and Liaison Reports**

a) Sustainability and Enhancement Committee

Sesto reported the committee had a short discussion on the proposed tipping fees. A town hall waste recycling audit is planned.

b) Greenscapes Committee

Brower asked about plans for a narrow area of lawn located at the entrance to Stanwich Road in Cos Cob stretching out along the Post Road. Coccaro responded, in order to keep the consistency of the design, the committee will do the general planning for each area and reach out to the garden clubs for implementation.

c) Parks and Rec Board

Baker reported no meeting were conducted.

d) GRAB

Dickinson stated, both, the paper shredding and the hazardous waste disposal day planned in April were postponed.

e) Harbor Management Commission

Baker reported a zoom meeting was conducted on April 21<sup>st</sup> focusing on permitting and mooring. The Harbor Master position term is up this year so a search for a replacement is in place. The boat assigned to the Harbor Master is in state of disrepair and had not been launched yet.

**12) Old Business**

a) Sea Level Rise Study – update

Sesto stated the report on infrastructure had been completed, study of tidal ponds is next in line. There will be a public session on the project allowing for comments. The report is on track of being published by November

Brower was concerned about the Mill Pond and the future dredging proposal. He wanted to make sure the study group is aware of potential elevation changes dredging could cause affecting the existing bridges and spillways.

b) Mylar balloon – status

Silberberg sent a proposal. The state is currently working on similar initiatives, but not as strong as his. COVIT 19 had pushed the discussion to September session.

c) Energy Commission – update: no update

d) Aquarion Property @ Lake Ave

Sesto reported the final contract should be ready soon, but the RTM action will be postponed until September giving more time for the Greenwich Land Trust to raise the funds. There is a hope, this acquisition will be supported by a grant which if awarded will be split 50/50 between the Town and Greenwich Land Trust.

f) Pay-As-You-Throw

Sesto stepped back from publically promoting the program. A letter to the editor was published stating the Conservation Commission's position regarding this program. Unfortunately, there are plenty of people supporting the tipping fees in town. di Bonaventura pointed out the haulers produced a petition. Sesto was concerned the process resulted in distrust towards the haulers so the effort may not be recognized. Initially, the group came strongly against PAYT so now it is a little bit too late to turn things around. Silberberg drafted a support letter published today by Greenwich Time. Dickinson emailed her letter to RTM members in Riverside encouraging them to support PAYT.

### **13) New Business**

#### **a) Budget cuts**

Sesto reported the original budget guidelines allowed for up to a 2% increase. Due to the COVID 19 pandemic and the expected lost revenues and community hardship, departments were directed to revised their budgets to reflect a 0% increase. The operating budget was not appreciably impacted. The capital budget was affected. The \$75,000 allocated to address open space acquisition costs was cut. Likewise, \$100,000 marked to start implementation of the sea level rise study recommendation was deferred to the next fiscal year. This means implementation will be delayed by six months.

Baker asked for an update on the high water markers. Brower stated the elevations were established, but the physical preparation of the signs was delayed due to COVID 19 and the limited availability of the Parks and Recreation staff.

Baker expressed concerned about a potential use of artificial turf on private properties. Brower explained such use will violate the zoning regulations.

Baker also pointed out DPW has an application before the tree warden to remove multiple large tree in connection with sidewalk improvements. She stated her wish that DPW would be more focused on avoiding tree removal and called the members to provide a support to Parks and Recreation in trying to protect those trees.

### **14) Adjourn – next meeting is June 4, 2020**

A motion was made by Silberberg and seconded by Baker to adjourn the meeting. The motion carried unanimously.

The meeting adjourned at 8:38 p.m.

Submitted by,

Aleksandra Moch  
Environmental Analyst