City of Shelton Conservation Commission
Meeting Minutes for
April 4, 2018

Members Present: Tom Harbinson, Bill Dyer, Sheri Dutkanicz, Joe Welsh, Jim Tate, Allison Menendez. Absent: Ed McCreery.

Also present: Teresa Gallagher, Natural Resource Manager.

The meeting was called to order at 7:13 pm by Chairman Tom Harbinson.

Allison Menendez introduced herself to the committee as the newest member. She was instrumental in starting the community gardens, the dog park gardens, and the gardens at St. Lawrence Church. Her passion is landscaping and being in nature.

- Meeting Minutes: Jim Tate made a motion to approve the March 14, 2018 meeting minutes. Seconded by Bill Dyer. All were in favor.

- Public Portion: No one was present.

- Trails Committee Report. Bill Dyer summarized the Trails Committee meeting held immediately before the Conservation Commission meeting. See the Trails Committee meeting minutes for further detail.

- “Shelter Ridge” application IWC #17-14, 121-acre mixed use development located on Bridgeport Ave, Mill Street, Old Kings Highway, and Buddington Road. Inland Wetlands Public Hearing continued. Tom Harbinson noted that Inland Wetlands have had two meetings so far, and he gave a presentation at one of the meetings on behalf of the Conservation Commission. Bill Dyer read a letter from the Trails Committee at the meeting and Terry Gallagher also spoke on behalf of Trails. Terry Gallagher noted that the Herald incorrectly identified him as an “associate of SOS.”

Terry Gallagher also attended the second hearing date on March 27, and during that meeting attorney Dominick Thomas said if the Conservation Commission wanted to save the land on the west side of the ridge, they would need to go to the Board of
Aldermen and persuade them to seize the land by eminent domain. Jim Tate noted that it’s come across that Conservation is in favor of the project. Allison Menendez agreed, and said that was the impression she had been getting. Tom Harbinson said we don’t want to come across as obstructionist. Jim Tate countered that it’s not the Conservation Commission’s role to concern itself with favoring a development, but in preserving the key natural resources that have been identified, which in this case is the ridgetop and everything to the west of it. That should be the focus.

Teresa Gallagher said she was concerned that the applicant’s attorney is promoting the City getting 25 acres of open space, but most of the proposed open space consists of steep slopes, graded areas, wetlands, and utility easements, with no recreational opportunities. She included a map in her previous reports, submitted to P&Z and Inland Wetlands, showing the proposed open space with all the steep slopes, wetlands, and disturbed areas highlighted. The open space will require management by the city, and the Board of Aldermen has shown a reluctance to accept some of these marginal areas. Joe Welsh cited the Cranberry development on Armstrong Road, where BOA refused to accept the Open Space. Teresa Gallagher said that even if the dedicated open space is not conveyed to the City and remains private, there are still potential management issues if there is an encroachment onto that area. Perimeter areas are where the most problems occur, and for this proposal there are steep fill slopes and disturbed areas intruding over the boundary line into the open space, with parking areas at the top. As an example, in our experience with the Litter Committee, we find it’s a common problem for landscaping crews to clean parking areas by blowing the litter down the nearest wooded hillside. This has happened in Huntington Center, with litter blown into Means Brook, and the old ASF Sports building, with litter blown down onto the steep bank of the Far Mill River. In the case of Shelter Ridge, that steep slope is above Mill Street and the litter would be highly visible. People would want the City to go clean up its open space.

Joe Welsh said the open space should “meaningful”. Commissioners agreed. The concern is that the commissioners and the general public are under the impression that the Conservation Commission supports the open space proposal. Tom Harbinson said we should focus on public “purpose” rather than public use, because a public purpose might include watershed protection while “use” seems to mean trails and ballfields. Teresa Gallagher was directed to draft a letter from Conservation expressing the Commission’s dissatisfaction with the open space as shown.

- Booth Hill Estates application IWC #18-2 and PZC #18-05. DRD Subdivision with 23 lots on 22.7 acres at the corner of Waverly and Booth Hill Roads with 6.1 acres of open space. Conservation submitted a letter to the Planning and Zoning and Inland Wetlands Commissions.
Executive Session: At 8:46 pm Tom made a motion to go into Executive Session for the purpose of discussing land acquisition. Seconded by Sheri Dutkanicz. All were in favor. The Commission came out of Executive Session at 8:00 pm. Tom Harbinson will write a letter to the Mayor regarding one of the properties discussed.

Tom Harbinson noted that the Board of Aldermen recently approved the purchase of 2.7 acres of land from Basil Dikovsky on Old Town Road.

Comments by members:
- Bill Dyer said he was still very concerned about the Lane Street bridge replacement.
- Joe Welsh attended the CLCC conference.
- Allison Menendez said she wanted to walk the Pearmain Path.
- Sheri Dutkanicz went to a workshop called “Nature as a Healer”

Jim Tate made a motion to go back into Executive Session for the purpose of discussing personnel issues at 8:10 pm. Bill Dyer seconded. All were in favor. Teresa Gallagher was asked to leave the meeting. The Commission came out of Executive Session at 8:14 pm.

Bill Dyer made a motion for Chairman Tom Harbinson to draft a letter to the Mayor regarding a personnel issue. Seconded by Joe Welsh. All were in favor.

The meeting was adjourned at 8:15 pm.

Meeting minutes were prepared by Teresa Gallagher and should be considered in draft form until adopted at the next meeting. Audio tapes of the meeting are on file in the Town Clerk’s office.