

Town of Stonington Conservation Commission
Minutes of a Regular Meeting held on January 23, 2023
Police Station Department Meeting Room, 173 South Broad Street, Pawcatuck, CT

1. Call to order - Chairman Stuart Cole called the meeting to order at 7:07 pm. Members present were Frances Hoffman, Michael Schefers, Ben Baldwin and Stephanie Hayes-Houlihan. Members RaeVen Kelly Dinwoodie and Jim Friedlander were not present. Members of the public were present.

2. Review of Town Developments and Proposals

a. PZ2235SD Old Stoneridge, LLC – *Residential Subdivision application for the creation of two lots. Property located at 111-113 Montauk Ave., Stonington. Assessor's Map 131 Block 3 Lot 6. Zone RR-80.* Tower Planner Keith Brynes had previously distributed the application and proposed subdivision plan by email. Normand Thibeault, Jr., P.E., of Killingly Engineering Associates, LLC presented the proposed two-lot subdivision of the 32.866-acre lot into 30.996-acre 111 Montauk Avenue containing both existing residences on a rear lot with a 40-ft. wide access strip and 1.870-acre 113 Montauk Avenue, a front lot with deeded access over the other lot's access strip. The application stated that the existing residences will be removed, but Mr. Thibeault said one may be retained as secondary to a proposed residence as both are over 100 years old. Mr. Thibeault was unaware of any deeded access to the west rear from Cove Road, shown on the assessor map. Ben Baldwin noted that the property was the site of the Stoneridge Country Club or speakeasy which burned down about 90 years ago.

The application also states that the parcel has not been part of a tract which was previously subdivided, but Commissioners were aware of the sale of house lots (131-3-6C and 6D) in front of the applicant's parcel in recent years by the same sellers and appear to have been divided from it at some time. Confirmation of whether the applicant's parcel was subdivided is required as an open space set-aside or a fee in-lieu of open space may have already been made.

The applicant has requested a waiver from the requirement for an open space set-aside or a fee in-lieu of open space because the lots will be developed for 2 family members. This exemption is available for certain relations, per the Subdivision Regulations, but information on the relationships was not provided. In addition, the owner is an LLC and the Commission is uncertain whether such an entity may apply for an exemption. Stuart Cole said that a ruling from the town attorney may be required. Michael Schefers noted that the Town Planner wrote that he is uncertain if the subdivision complies with the exemption requirements.

While the application states that no other open space properties abut, the Commission noted the property abuts Avalonia Land Conservancy's Knox Family Preserve. Ben Baldwin noted that this preserve presently has access from Route 1 via an easement which was temporarily restricted or closed in 2020 due to COVID-19 and that additional access would likely be welcomed. The application also stated the property is not within a flood zone although the rear is within the 100-year flood zone, per the Town GIS. It is unclear if a Coastal Area Management (CAM) permit is being applied for as its rear portion is within the CAM boundary.

MOTION: Review is continued until the next meeting as the Commission needs clarification on whether an LLC can meet the requirements of the requested exemption and whether a previous subdivision which created the 4 small front lots (131-3-6A, -6B, -6C and -6D) had an open space set-aside or fee in-lieu (Ben Baldwin, Frances Hoffman). Passed unanimously.

3. Old Business

e. Installing signs on Town open space properties – Ben Baldwin said the Highway Department replaced a damaged Stonington Conservation Area marker on the access strip to 23 Bittersweet Way.

d Discussion of 2015 Plan of Conservation and Development – and *f. Discussion of process for preparing and adopting new Open Space Plan* – Michael Schefers said the Open Space Plan Committee will meet soon, that the Town of Redding plan (<https://townofreddingct.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/01/Open-Space-Plan-draft-4.11.19.pdf>) is being examined as a template. The Southeastern CT Council of Governments (SCCOG) is holding Open Space Plan Visioning Workshops on 2/11, 2/13 (via Zoom), and 2/15.

4. Open Space Parcels

a. *Discussion of parcels for preservation* – Michael Schefers spoke about the historic review of properties such as the residences proposed for demolition at the proposed Old Stoneridge, LLC subdivision, as recommended by the 2015 POCD.

Ben Baldwin noted that several large parcels are available such as the 39-acre former Eyles lot on Pequot Trail just east of Road Church. It runs south and abuts 42-acre 362 Flanders Road which just received approval to upgrade its access road for a future development. The 48-acre Abed property on the north side of Pequot Trail at Exit 91 sold recently to a developer. The 200-acre Franchi property is presently off the market. A 28-acre lot on the south side of the proposed battery site, described at the May 2022 meeting, is on the market and a plan used in marketing shows that access is across the land of Amon's Stack, LLC, the proposed battery site.

b. *Correspondence* - received 1) Notice of application for a 10-year renewal of interconnection between Aquarion and Groton Utilities water systems on Route 1 in Mystic, 2) Wood-Pawcatuck Watershed Association fund drive request.

5. New Business

a. *Comment* – Fran Hoffman commented on the protection of insects such as fireflies. A professor from the Univ of Delaware studying insects suggesting time is running out to save the planet and everyone can and should do something, even plant a few pollinator plants. This could be part of an Open Space Plan. Stephanie Hayes-Houlihan said there has been a repeated outcry when the town sprays herbicides along roadsides.

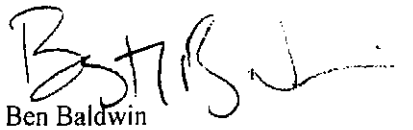
b. *Comment* – Stephanie Hayes-Houlihan spoke about searching for and planning a dog park for Stonington. Stuart Cole said the Circus Lot on Noyes Avenue in Pawcatuck. Stephanie Hayes-Houlihan said some landowners rent their property short-term to dog owners. Fran Hoffman suggested that some businesses with oversize lawns in town might be approached.

c. *Comment* – Stuart Cole asked about the zoning rewrite meeting. Ben Baldwin forwarded the PZC agenda for the virtual workshop on 1/24/2023 of the Comprehensive Zoning Rewrite Project with consultant, FHI Studio.

6. **Review of draft minutes – 11/28/22 – MOTION:** To approve the minutes for the meeting held on 11/28/2022 as written (Michael Schefers, Fran Hoffman). Passed unanimously.

7. **Adjournment - MOTION:** To adjourn the meeting (Michael Schefers, Frances Hoffman). Passed unanimously at 8:30 pm.

Minutes submitted by



Ben Baldwin

Secretary, Town of Stonington Conservation Commission

Approved by the Commission at a Special Meeting on March 6, 2023