



TOWN OF LEDYARD
CONNECTICUT
TOWN COUNCIL
HYBRID FORMAT

741 Colonel Ledyard Highway
Ledyard, CT 06339

860 464-3203
Roxanne Maher

Chairman Kevin J. Dombrowski

MINUTES
LAND USE/PLANNING/PUBLIC WORKS COMMITTEE –
REGULAR MEETING

Monday, December 5, 2022

6:00 PM

Town Hall Annex Building

DRAFT

- I. CALL TO ORDER – The meeting was called to order by Councilor Paul at 6:00 p.m. at the Council Chambers, Town Hall Annex Building.

Councilor Paul welcomed all to the Hybrid Meeting. He stated for the Town Council Land Use/Planning/Public Works Committee and members of the Public who were participating via video conference that the remote meeting information was available on the Agenda that was posted on the Town’s Website – Granicus-Legistar Meeting Portal.

- II. ROLL CALL –

Attendee Name	Title	Status	Location	Arrived	Departed
Gary Paul	Committee Chairman	Present	In-Person	6:00 pm	6:31pm
John Marshall	Town Councilor	Present	In-Person	6:00 pm	6:31pm
S. Naomi Rodriguez	Town Councilor	Present	In-Person	6:00 pm	6:31 pm
Kevin Dombrowski	Chairman	Present	In-Person	6:00 pm	6:31 pm
Dave Holdridge	Conservation Commission Member	Present	In-Person	6:00 pm	6:31 pm
Roxanne Maher	Administrative Assistant	Present	Remote	6:00 pm	6:31 pm

- III. CITIZENS' PETITIONS

Mr. Dave Holdridge, 29 Churchill Road, Ledyard, Conservation Commission Member, stated he was present this evening to appeal to the Town Council to write a letter to the Groton Utilities Commission in support of public trails on the reservoir property. He provided some background explaining that the Tri-Town Trail Committee began work on the Tri-Town Trail initiative in 2008 with the vision of connecting municipalities, economic centers, and residential areas for the public to enjoy the beauty of the natural resources we have here in southeastern Connecticut through passive recreation, such as hiking and bicycling. He stated the 14-mile Master Plan clearly defined the recreation trail traversing through the Groton Reservoir. He reviewed a map that showed the trail going on the reservoir property along side the lakes. He stated when the idea of the recreational trail was conceived the three towns, Ledyard, Groton and Preston each appointed three residents to serve on a Joint Tri-Town Trail Committee. He stated the Joint Committee worked with a consultant to develop the Master Plan. He stated during that time the Joint Committee, of which he was a member, requested Groton Utilities grant permission for the recreational trail to pass thru the reservoir property; however, he stated their request was denied at that time.

Mr. Holdridge continued by explaining during the past decade there has been a turnover in the Groton Utilities Commission members and due to some retirements a change in staff. He explained that the Groton Utilities Commission has asked a consultant to provide a Report regarding the pros and cons of public access to reservoir properties. He stated the Report would be delivered to the Groton Utilities Commission within the next couple of weeks, and that the Commission would be revisiting the issue to grant public access to the reservoir property. Therefore, he noted this may be a good opportunity for Ledyard to restate their position supporting public access to the reservoir property allowing for the completion of the construction of the trail that would run through the reservoir. He noted that recently some Groton Utilities Commission Members, and Mayor Hendricks of the City of Groton, attended the Ribbon Cutting of the opening of the northern section of the Tri-Town Trail in Preston, and that they have since made positive comments regarding the recreational trail.

Mr. Holdridge continued by addressing concerns that former Utilities Commission members raised regarding the safety of the public water supply. He stated that recently the Tri-Town Trail Association held a Panel Discussion noting that one of the Panelists was a person who worked for the State Health Department and has been conducting water tests of all the reservoirs and water supplies throughout the State of Connecticut. He stated during the discussion a person from the audience asked the Panelist how many times she found a connection between recreational activity and contaminated water. He stated the Panelist stated that during the 20-years she has been conducting water tests that she has never found the water to be contaminated by the recreational use of reservoir properties, and she explained that the filtration systems were good.

Mr. Holdridge stated many reservoirs in Connecticut and across the country allow for public access and have recreational trails, noting that the Hartford Reservoir, the New Haven Reservoir and the Mansfield Reservoir have recreational trails as well as picnic areas. He stated the UConn College Students use the Mansfield Reservoir all the time; and that some reservoirs allow fishing and boating. However, he stated the Tri-Town Trail Association was not asking for boating and fishing noting that they were only asking for a recreational trail to cross over the Groton Reservoir.

Mr. Holdridge stated in 2012 the Town Council sent a letter to Mayor Galbraith to support public access and the construction of a recreational trail through the Groton Reservoir property and he asked that the Town Council restate their support at this time. He stated Ledyard has a beautiful piece of open space in the middle of town that the public cannot access.

Councilor Rodriguez questioned the reason Groton Utilities Commission would not allow public access to the reservoir property. Mr. Holdridge stated that the Utilities Commission wanted to protect clean water.

Chairman Dombrowski recalled in years past that the Groton Utilities Commission denied the request for the Tri-Town Trail to run thru the reservoir property. He went on to state that although the Groton City Council, who owned Groton Utilities, received a presentation regarding the Tri-Town Trail; that there was no interest to open a dialogue, noting that they refused to discuss the matter.

Councilor Paul stated all other reservoir properties allow public access for recreational activity, noting that the Groton Reservoir was the only one he was aware of that does not allow public access. He stated having people on a trail has been positive, noting that they pickup litter along the way. Therefore, he questioned whether Mr. Holdridge believed that there would be more support from the Groton Utilities Commission at this time to allow public access to the reservoir property. Mr. Holdridge stated during the past ten years that there have been some changes in the members of the Groton Utilities Commission, and therefore, there may be some interest in allowing public access to the reservoir property. He also stated by having law abiding citizens on the property that it prevented mischief.

Chairman Dombrowski stated that he supported public access to the Groton Reservoir property and the Tri-Town Trail Master Plan. He questioned whether other parties, such as the Town of Preston and the Tri-Town Trail would also be submitting letters to the Groton Utilities Commission to support the initiative.

Mr. Holdridge stated the Groton Utilities Commission hired a Consultant who would be providing a Report that describes what other reservoirs do about recreational trails. He thanked the LUPPW Committee for their time this evening.

IV. PRESENTATIONS/INFORMATIONAL ITEMS – None.

V. REVIEW AND APPROVAL OF PRIOR MEETING MINUTES

MOTION to approve the Regular Meeting Minutes of November 7, 2022
Moved by Councilor Rodriguez, seconded by Councilor Marshall
3 - 0 Approved and so declared

VOTE:

VI. OLD BUSINESS

1. No Action on the Town-owned property; and update accordingly for the “*Assignment of Administrative Control of Town-Owned and Town-Leased Property*”.

Councilor Rodriguez stated the GIS System update work was nearly complete. Therefore, she stated the LUPPW Committee would be able to address the *Assignment of Administrative Control of Town-Owned and Town-Leased Property* in January, 2023.

RESULT: NO ACTION

Next Meeting: 01/09/2023 6:00 p.m.

2. Enforcement of regulations to address blight issues.

Councilor Rodriguez noted at the LUPPW Committee’s November 7, 2022 meeting that Land Use Director Juliet Hodge stated in working to address blighted properties that they found that Ordinance #300-012 (rev 1) “*An Ordinance Concerning Blight and Public Nuisance for the Town of Ledyard*” needed to be updated.

Chairman Dombrowski stated the main reason there has not been much Blight Enforcement activity was because the Land Use Department has been short staffed for a quite some time. He went on to note that the reasons the LUPPW Committee had this item on their agenda was:

- To be aware of whether blight issues were being identified and addressed, not to necessarily be informed of the location, etc.; and
- To monitor how effective Ordinance #300-012 (rev 1) was; and to see if the Ordinance needed to be adjusted.

Chairman Dombrowski continued by stating that the goal in addressing blighted properties was to obtain voluntary compliance, without having to invoke the provisions in the Ordinance. He went on to state that fortunately most property owners were coming into compliance voluntarily, once they were notified that their property was in violation of the Blight Ordinance.

RESULT: DISCUSSED

Next Meeting: 01/09/2023 5:30 p.m.

3. No Action on the Potential future uses for the 101.80-acre Clark Farm property located at 1025 Colonel Ledyard Highway.

RESULT: NO ACTION

Next Meeting: 01/09/2023 6:00 p.m.

4. Security and safety concerns regarding the Park on East Street (Christy Hill Park).

Councilor Paul stated he visited the Park on East Drive and he noted the positive progress that has been made with the new lights, etc.

RESULT: NO ACTION

Next Meeting: 01/09/2023 6:00 p.m.

5. Discussion regarding the appropriate mechanism to provide information to residents pertaining to the structure and operation of land use processes in the Town of Ledyard.

Councilor Paul stated at the LUPPW Committee's October 3, 2022 meeting they heard comments from a resident regarding the Land Use process and the approval process. He went on to state that they also discussed the importance for residents to understand the complexities of Land Use noting that it involved Regulatory, State Statutes, the Plan of Conservation & Development (POCD), etc., and they discussed a mechanism to get this type of information out to residents.

Councilor Paul went on to note the awesome Informational Presentation that Public Works/Town Engineer Steve Masalin provided at the Committee's November 16, 2022 meeting; and he stated the Community Relations Committee discussed doing something similar to assist the Land Use Departments get information out to residents. He stated as they did for the Public Works

Presentation that they could post the meeting video on the town’s website for residents to view at a later time or to revisit if they had subsequent questions. He also stated that the LUPPW Committee previously suggested the Land Use Departments draft a *Frequently Asked Questions* (FAQ) that could be posted on the town’s website as well and shared on social media pages.

Councilor Paul stated the Community Relations Committee planned to work with Land Use Director Juliet Hodge after the holidays to coordinate and schedule an Informational Presentation sometime before May, 2023.

Councilor Rodriguez noted that the Parks & Recreation Informational Presentation that was held on April 11, 2022 was also excellent. She went on to comment that it was disappointing that the two Informational Presentations were not well attended.

RESULT: DISCUSSED	Next Meeting: 01/09/2023 6:00 p.m.
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VII. NEW BUSINESS

1. No Action on the Discussion and possible action on the MOTION to recommend the Town Council approve a proposed ***“Lease Agreement between Robert and Mary Graham and the Town of Ledyard”*** for the lease of approximately .75-acre +/- parcel on Bush Pond.

RESULT: NO ACTION	Next Meeting: 01/09/2023 6:00 p.m.
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2. No Action on the Discussion and possible action on the MOTION to recommend the Town Council set a Hybrid Public Hearing date for December 14, 2022; at 6:00 p.m. to be held in the Council Chambers, 741 Colonel Ledyard Highway, in accordance with CGS 07-163e, to receive comments and recommendations regarding the following:

“A proposed Lease Agreement between Robert and Mary Graham and the Town of Ledyard to enter into a 99-year lease for approximately .75-acre +/- parcel on Bush Pond (Lantern Hill Valley Park) with the following caveats:

1. *There shall not be any construction of a building on the parcel.*
2. *The town would be allowed to erect a gazebo.*
3. *The town would be allowed to place a port-a-john on the property seasonally.*
4. *Non-motorized activities would be allowed at the Lantern Hill Valley Waterfront park such as fishing, picnicking, canoeing, and kayaking.”*

RESULT: NO ACTION	Next Meeting: 01/09/2023 6:00 p.m.
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3. Any New Business proper to come before the Committee
- MOTION to recommend the Town Council issue a letter to Groton Utilities Commission and Groton Town Council, to endorse and encourage public access to the Groton Reservoir to continue the development of the 14-mile Tri-Town Trail as defined on Master Plan, to traverse through the Groton Reservoir for passive recreation.
Moved by Councilor Rodriguez, seconded by Councilor Marshall
Discussion: The LUPPW Committee noted Mr. Holdridge's comments earlier this evening (III Public Comments) and agreed to add this Motion to the Agenda this evening to issue a letter of support for the Groton Utilities Commission to allow public access to the reservoir property for the construction of the Tri-Town Trail.

Chairman Dombrowski noted the Groton Utilities Commission Minutes included the following:

October 19, 2022 Meeting Minutes:

Tri Town Trails Association

Director Gaudet stated a group attended a meeting with Weston and Sampson and Chairperson Hedrick to review the extensive draft report that included regulatory requirements of GU owned land, survey respondents and considerations Groton Utilities needs to make. Scott Bighinatti is gathering additional information from the Groton Utilities team and will present to the Groton Utilities Commission at a meeting in the near future. The Commission would prefer to receive the final report prior to the present

November 16, 2022 Meeting Minutes:

"Tri Town Trails Association:

Director Gaudet reported that the draft report is being completed by Scott Bighinatti, CFM of Weston & Sampson. Mr. Bighinatti is waiting for final comments from Tri Town Trails. It is expected that the Commission will receive the report at least two weeks prior to Mr. Bighinatti's Power Point Presentation that will be given in the December meeting. Chairperson Hedrick stressed that there would be no action regarding this in December.

Chairperson Hedrick asked if the Commissioners had set up a tour of the Watershed that was offered by the Utility. He said he and Commissioner Godley attended a recent tour. Commissioner Godley said the staff was extremely knowledgeable and the experience will help the Commission to make an informed decision. Commissioner Zuliani confirmed that he has replied that he will be attending on Friday"

Chairman Dombrowski stated based on the Groton Utilities Commission Minutes that the timing for Ledyard to provide a letter of support to allow public access to the Reservoir for passive recreational trails was crucial. He also noted the popularity of the Tri-Town Trail, noting that he always sees people using the sections of the Trail that have been completed.

Councilor Paul stated the Tri-Town Trail Association had a lot of momentum and he agreed with Chairman Dombrowski and Mr. Holdridge that the timing to provide a Letter of Support was crucial at this time. He also commented on the importance to access the reservoir for the completion of the construction of the 14-mile Trail as designed, from Bluff Point to the Preston Plains Park.

The LUPPW Committee noted that the *Letter of Support* should also include a *List of Points for Consideration*, as Mr. Holdridge discussed, to address the benefits of public access to the reservoir and previous comments and concerns regarding public access to the reservoir.

Summary of Ledyard's Points of View for Groton Utilities Consideration

Trails bring benefits to communities:

- ✓ Several studies across the country show that established trail systems generate millions of dollars in economic activity.
- ✓ Trails encourage a healthier quality of life, safer pedestrian and bicycle movement, appreciation of the natural environment, and higher property values.
- ✓ According to real estate publications, "*Trails consistently remain the number one community amenity sought by prospective homeowners.*"

Trails will provide benefits for Groton Utilities:

- ✓ Trail access would be a public relations bonanza for Groton Utilities. Other water companies in Connecticut have cited dozens of benefits that they derive from a positive relationship with their neighbors and with the municipalities.
- ✓ Through interpretive signage and trail brochures the public will be educated on healthy watersheds and the filtration process.
- ✓ The larger presence of law-abiding citizens on reservoir properties has shown to reduce vandalism and other mischief.
- ✓ Grants are available from the State of Connecticut to buy open space and watershed lands.
- ✓ Ledyard has a growing Open Space purchase fund. If public access could be assured, there would be opportunities for Groton Utilities to coordinate with government and conservation groups to purchase additional watershed lands.

Arguments against trails on reservoir properties have little basis:

- ✓ Trails are not a real threat to clean water. In looking closely at the water testing that has been done over the past 20 years at other reservoirs in Connecticut, the findings have shown that there has never been a connection between recreational activity and contaminated water.
- ✓ Groton Utilities would have almost no liability exposure from personal injuries. In fact, Connecticut has a very strong statute protecting water companies from liability unless the company commits willful or wanton acts.
- ✓ Litter removal and trail obstructions are easily solvable issues. Several civic groups have already come forward to help local trail groups with litter removal and trail maintenance. There will be no shortage of volunteers for these tasks.

- ✓ Other water companies report that there has been no significant increase in costs resulting from new trails. In fact, trail grants and fund-raising activities often help to alleviate costs that had previously been the sole responsibility of the water companies.

VOTE: 3 – 0 Approved and so declared.

RESULT: 3 – 0 APPROVED AND SO DECLARED
MOVER: S. Naomi Rodriguez, Town Councilor
SECONDER: Gary Paul, Town Councilor
AYES: Gary Paul, John Marshall, Naomi Rodriguez

IX. ADJOURNMENT-

Councilor Rodriguez moved the meeting be adjourned, seconded by Councilor Marshall.

VOTE: 3 - 0 Approved and so declared, the meeting was adjourned at 6:31 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Gary Paul
Committee Chairman
Land Use/Planning/Public Works Committee