

Holyoke Conservation Commission Meeting Minutes 01/26/2023 (Remote via Zoom)

Conservation Commission Members Present: Bernice Bowler (Chairperson), Jeffrey Horan (Vice Chairperson), Mary Moriarty, John Perdrizet and Chelsea Gazillo

Conservation Commission Members Absent: Rosemary Arnold

Staff Present: Yoni Glogower (Holyoke Conservation and Sustainability Director)

Members of the public present: Liam Cregan (Appalachian Mountain Club), Elbert Bowler

1. Call to Order

Chairperson Bowler called the meeting to order at 6:17 p.m. and explained the protocols of remote meetings.

2. Request for Determination of Applicability - Filed 1/3/23

Applicant: Appalachian Mountain Club

Location: West Cherry Street (MBP 200-00-002) (Gun Club)

Description: Construction of footpath bridging within the Buffer Zone of Banks and BVW

Liam Cregan introduced himself as the New England National Scenic Trail Coordinator for Appalachian Mountain Club. He explained that every summer since 2018 there has been a youth trail crew, consisting of Holyoke High School students, who work to improve the trail for a period of six weeks. This summer, the crew hopes to improve the trail on the Holyoke Revolver Club property. While sharing his screen to show photos and measurements, Mr. Cregan explained their desire to install four bog bridges over muddy wet areas that are adjacent to a wetland, as well as a foot bridge over a stream.

Chairperson Bowler questioned the location of the bog bridges as opposed to the wetland. Mr. Cregan stated that he believes all five bridges are within 50 feet of a wetland. The commission discussed that if constructed correctly, the proposal will protect the wetland and is an improvement, as the area is currently walked through.

Commissioner Gazillo questioned who would maintain the bridges if they begin to decay, break or are damaged from weather. Mr. Cregan explained that AMC has a volunteer program where volunteers go out about three times a year, sometimes more, to check on trail conditions and perform basic maintenance. If a structural issue was to be identified, it would be placed on the project list for the next trail crew field season to be fixed. Pat Henry is believed to be the trail steward for the section proposed to be improved.

Commissioner Perdrizet questioned if there is any history of motorized vehicle problems in the area, and Mr. Cregan indicated that there have been no reports that he is aware of, nor any evidence of such. After a brief discussion, it was agreed that the foot bridge would be 4 feet wide and 15 feet long (60 square feet), and the bog bridging would be a total of 160 square feet.

The commission confirmed this to be a negative 3 Determination, not requiring a Notice of Intent filing.

Mr. Cregan explained the contents of the Variance as Director Glogower shared it on the screen. Commissioner Moriarty reiterated that the proposal is an improvement and made a motion to approve the Variance. Commissioner Perdrizet seconded the motion, and the commission voted unanimously to approve the Variance.

Mr. Cregan indicated that they still need to check with the landowners to see if they are willing to let them use on-site trees to build the bog bridges. Pre-cut lumber will be used if they are not able to use on-site trees. The commission agreed to add a condition to use only hand tools within the buffer zone.

Commissioner Moriarty made a motion for a negative 3 Determination with the hand tools only condition. Commissioner Gazillo seconded the motion, and the commission voted unanimously to approve the negative 3 Determination.

3. Public Hearing – Notice of Intent WE 186-0294 (Continued from 12/8/22 Meeting)

Applicant: Delorean Power

Representative: BL Companies

Location: 361 Whitney Avenue (MBP 176-00-036)

Description: Construction of a better energy storage system within the buffer zone of Bordering Vegetated Wetlands.

Chairperson Bowler indicated that a request to continue to March 9, 2023 has been received. Director Glogower indicated that in the email containing the request for continuance, he was informed that there is a question of whether battery storage units can be located in the proposed zone which is currently being discussed in the City Council Ordinance Committee. They would like resolution in the zoning matter first before closing out this project, which they anticipate in March.

Commissioner Gazillo made a motion to continue the Notice of Intent to March 9, 2023. Commissioner Perdrizet seconded the motion, and the commission voted unanimously to approve the continuance.

4. Discussion - Upcoming Items for 2/9/23 Meeting

Director Glogower stated that the city engineer, Chris Baker, submitted eight Certificate of Compliance requests, which will be included on the agenda. Chairperson Bowler explained that something needs to be implemented to track Certificates of Compliance in an effort to ensure that contact is made after one year. Director Glogower agreed.

Director Glogower reminded the commission that they hope to have the draft fiscal year budget to review at the next meeting. He and Chairperson Bowler intend to meet at 10:00 a.m. on Monday to discuss the budget, but Vice Chairperson Horan may not be available due to an upcoming surgery.

5. Discussion - Conflict of Interest Training

Chairperson Bowler informed the commission that the conflict of interest training Director Glogower sent out via email is mandatory and must be completed. Upon completion of the training, each participant should receive a certificate via email.

6. Mail/other items not reasonably anticipated by the Chair

Chairperson Bowler informed the commission of an expired Order of Conditions for the South Hadley Electric Light Department (SHELD) that needs to be addressed. Director Glogower informed the commission of SHELD's request for a one-year extension on File No. 186-0278. Chairperson Bowler stated that the commission typically allows a one-year extension on an approved NOI.

Commissioner Moriarty made a motion to approve a one-year extension to January 2024 for SHELD project 186-0278, and the Order of Conditions to remain in place. Commissioner Perdrizet seconded the motion, and the commission voted unanimously to approve the extension.

Chairperson Bowler reminded commissioners to inform Commissioner Moriarty of any donations they intend to make in honor of the late Sue Ellen Panitch. Commissioner Moriarty stated that the following organizations were listed in Ms. Panitch's obituary: Connecticut River Conservancy, Therapeutic Equestrian Center, Sue Ellen Panitch Scholarship at Holyoke Community College, and Victor Panitch Scholarship Fund at Jefferson Medical College. The commission agreed that the donation would go to the Connecticut River Conservancy.

7. Adjourn

Commissioner Moriarty made a motion to adjourn the meeting. Commissioner Perdrizet seconded the motion, and Chairperson Bowler adjourned the meeting at 7:02 p.m.