

Town Meeting Minutes
May 22, 2024

The Town Meeting was called to order at 6:30 PM by First Selectman David Lahm with approximately 50 people in attendance. Mr. Lahm, on behalf of the Board of Selectpeople, thanked all for attending, welcoming everyone to one of the last few remaining truly democratic processes. He stated that they are the town's legislative body. The Meeting was then organized by the selection of Don Gerber as Moderator. The Moderator asked Linda Winzer, Town Clerk, to read the Call to the Meeting:

“Electors and citizens qualified to vote in Town Meeting are hereby warned and notified that a TOWN MEETING will be held at the Lyme Town Hall, 480 Hamburg Road, Lyme, Connecticut, Wednesday, May 22, 2024, at 6:30 P.M. EDT for presentation of the following agenda:

1. Acknowledge receipt of the Town of Lyme Annual Report for the Fiscal Year ending June 30, 2023.
2. Consider and act on an ordinance concerning the authorization of the Conservation Commission to promulgate and enforce Forestry Regulations.
3. Consider and act on estimates and recommendations of the Board of Finance for the Fiscal Year ending June 30, 2025.

Please remember to license your dog(s) during the month of June.

Dated at Lyme, CT this 15th day of May 2024
David M. Lahm
For the Board of Selectmen”

The first order of business to come before the Meeting was to acknowledge receipt of the Town of Lyme Annual Report for the Fiscal Year ending June 30, 2023.

Moved and seconded. There was no discussion. Voted: affirmative. The vote was unanimous.

The second order of business to come before the Meeting was to consider and act on an ordinance concerning the authorization of the Conservation Commission to promulgate and enforce Forestry Regulations.

“Be it ordained by the Town of Lyme (“Town”), acting by Town Meeting, its legislative body:

WHEREAS, the Town is one of twenty (20) Connecticut towns authorized by the Connecticut legislature to regulate forest practices within Town borders, other than state-owned forest land; and

WHEREAS, Connecticut General Statutes § 23-65k permits the Town, acting through its inland wetlands agency, to adopt regulations to protect the Town's forest land; and

WHEREAS, the Town Conservation Commission, acting pursuant to ordinance as the Town's inland wetlands agency, is the appropriate agency to be regulating forest practices in Town.

NOW THEREFORE BE IT

RESOLVED, that the Town of Lyme Conservation Commission, acting as the Town of Lyme inland wetlands agency, is authorized and directed to promulgate regulations that are consistent with Department of Energy and Environmental Protection (“DEEP”) regulations and necessary to protect forest land within the Town of Lyme, except for state-owned forest land managed by DEEP; and be it

FURTHER RESOLVED, that such Conservation Commission shall be the sole municipal agent for regulation of forest practices within the Town of Lyme.”

Moved and seconded.

David Lahm stated that previously, forestry practices went through the Planning and Zoning Commission. The state changed the regulatory scheme so that all forestry activities have to go through the Conservation Commission, acting as the Town of Lyme Inland Wetlands Agency. All this is doing is administratively moving the responsibility for this area of regulation from the Planning and Zoning Commission to the Conservation Commission. The Conservation Commission will then promulgate regulations through the normal practice which is to publish them, have a public hearing and discussion. This is not changing how forests are being regulated at this time, it is just bringing us in line with the new state statute regarding who can regulate forestry.

Bob House stated that the City of New London recently had a problem with its Shade Tree Commission. They were liable for a large adverse judgment against them. Someone sued the Commission regarding the care of public trees. Mr. House wondered if this had been checked out. Mr. Lahm stated that it has been checked out, as this is just changing the responsibility from the Planning and Zoning Commission to the Inland Wetlands/Conservation Commission. Nothing is being changed in terms of how things are done. When it comes time to promulgate regulations, it will go through the regular process of drafting the regulations, being reviewed by the Town’s land use attorney, then going through public comment. What is being proposed today has zero legal liability.

Wendy Hill asked how this would affect her job as Open Space Coordinator and manager of the forests. Mr. Lahm stated that it would not affect it at all; she would just have to answer to the chair of the Conservation Commission as opposed to the chair of the Planning and Zoning Commission.

Dick Lee asked if the Town has the ability to establish any regulation that is not currently in place with the Department of Energy and Environmental Protection (DEEP)? Mr. Lahm stated that we cannot regulate an area that DEEP has control of. We can create stricter regulations; however, we cannot create more lenient regulations.

Ross Byrne, Zoning Enforcement Officer, stated that draft regulations have been written. The template came from DEEP. The regulations were then adjusted for Lyme’s concerns, being stricter in certain areas. The regulations were then sent back to DEEP for informal approval. The regulations will then come back to the town for a public hearing, then go back to DEEP for final approval. Mr. Byrne stated that this is only for commercial activities - 50 cords of firewood or more, 25,000 square feet of lumber.

Voted: affirmative. The vote was unanimous.

The third order of business to come before the Meeting was to consider and act on estimates and recommendations of the Board of Finance for the Fiscal Year ending June 30, 2025.

Moved and seconded.

Alan Sheiness, Chair of the Board of Finance, gave a presentation of a summary of the budget for the year ending June 30, 2025, which is attached to these minutes. He stated that determination of the mill rate was interesting this year due to the revaluation. Higher property values mean a lower mill rate. The Board of Finance looks at the General Fund versus budget/expenditures to arrive at a good and fair mill rate, and simultaneously not going below two months of operating expenses in reserve. Following the presentation, Mr. Sheiness asked for questions.

Beverly Crowther stated that she regrets nothing being budgeted under Affordable Housing. Mr. Sheiness responded that there is a modest fund for affordable housing now, and the Town is in a position to fund an affordable housing project when needed.

Voted: affirmative. The vote was unanimous.

Mr. Lahm added a closing comment relative to Ms. Crowther's comment. Coming up later this year or early in 2025, a questionnaire for the Plan of Conservation and Development (POCD) will be available to residents to complete. In that questionnaire, there will be questions pertaining to many issues that involve the Town's land use, and there will also be questions regarding what direction the Town should take relative to affordable housing. Mr. Lahm encouraged all to fill it out to make their views known.

The moderator announced that the Board of Finance would meet immediately following the meeting to set the mill rate.

There being no further business to come before the Meeting, a motion was made and seconded to adjourn the Meeting. Voted: Affirmative. The Meeting was adjourned at 6:58 PM.

The Board of Finance met immediately after the meeting and set the new mill rate at 14.50.

Recorded by: Linda Winzer, Town Clerk