

MINUTES

Inaugural Meeting on Friends of Auerfarm State Park

4-H Education Center at Auerfarm (158 Auer Farm Road, Bloomfield)

Tuesday, July 26th at 6:30 p.m.

Meeting Attendees:

Pamela Adams, Gene Aultz, Floyd Bagwell, Jr., Rep. David Baram, Stephen Bayer, Dale Bertoldi, Sen. Beth Bye (host), Steve Dombrowski, Eileen Grant, Eric Hammerling, Howard Harper, Cary Henderson, Fred Hesketh, Doris Johnson, Diane Joy, Donna Landerman, David Lauretti, Marie MacDonald, Sharon Mann, Marlay Mayes, Cindy McGinty, Nick Miller, Vikki Reski, Zellene Sandler, Beth Schiro, Elba Schulman, Syd Schulman, Drew Stone, Lindsay Suhr, Tom Tyler, Linda Vossen

Expressed interest but unable to attend:

Kevin Gough, John Larkin, Paula Jones, David Mann, Phil Schenck

1. Introductions, Interests & Aspirations for Auerfarm State Park

• Who are you?

A wide variety of individuals attended the meeting including neighbors, land trust representatives, Auerfarm 4H Board members, an historical society member and journalist, a local bank representative, State representatives and employees, Scout troop leaders, and various interested community members.

• What are your interests in the Park and what would you like to see for the Park's future?

- Connectivity to 4H property and the Metacomet Trail via new trail system including handicap accessible trail
- Spread the word and market this site regionally
- Bring people in for the views and educational programs
- Enhance education for youth
- Ensure easement restrictions are followed
- Sponsorships for programs
- Connect urban youth and adults to the park and nature
- Connect this park to local neighborhoods
- Educational hikes
- Bird watching
- Add value to the park through trails and programming
- Expand network of collaborations through Friends Group
- Bring in and inspire young men through scouts
- Increase usage and community awareness

2. Background info about Auerfarm State Park

- **The Park origin story**

Beth Schiro wanted to complete her parents' wishes of seeing the property protected and open to the public for education and trails. When she acquired complete ownership of the 40 acres in 2006 she began to talk with the state and different conservation organizations to ensure this land was protected. After many years with input from numerous individuals, the property was deeded to the State of CT at the end of 2014 with a conservation easement in favor of the [Connecticut Forest & Park Association](#) (CFPA).

The state goes through a long process to determine if a property should be added to the State Park System and often turns away many parcels. This property was appealing because of the potential for connectivity with other protected lands, the closeness to a large urban population, etc.

- **Conservation Easement details**

The way the legislature works right now, state lands are at risk every year from something called the Conveyance Act, which allows legislators to give away all or parts of state owned property to municipalities, developers, etc. without a public hearing. To protect against this happening on Auerfarm State Park Scenic Reserve, Beth Schiro gave the CFPA a conservation easement before donating the land to the State. This easement takes away the development rights from the state and establishes specific restrictions on the property's use. The easement also creates a watchdog for the property by making CFPA responsible for completing yearly monitoring inspections to ensure the easement language is being honored. The conservation easement (handed out at the meeting) goes into a lot of detail about options for parking, treatment of existing buildings, etc. It was suggested that a summary of what is or isn't allowed on the property be created to help understand limitations for everyone involved. Eric and Lindsay at CFPA agreed to put that summary together based upon the easement for discussion at the next meeting.

3. How can a "Friends Group" support the Park and vice versa?

- **What do some other Friends Groups do?**

Pam Adams and Eileen Grant from the Friends of Connecticut State Parks (FCSP) gave some background on various "Friends Groups" for different State Parks around the state. There are currently 23 groups in Connecticut and their focus and makeup are all different. Some have a very narrow focus, while others cover a diverse mix of programs and areas. Some tips suggested by FCSP are to start with baby steps, develop a mission and a basic operational framework, keep the lines of communication open with CT DEEP, and then build from there based upon the interests of members of the group. There is a handbook with steps for starting a friends group on the FCSP website.

- **What are the best partnerships with CT DEEP?**

The best partnerships are ones that follow individuals' interests, but keep the lines of communication open. These groups are not designed to be directed by CT DEEP, but

instead to enhance and add to the work that DEEP is already doing within the framework of the group's created mission statement.

- **What are some models for “organized” Friends Groups?**

Some groups immediately work towards becoming a private 501c3 organization and others find an established 501c3 as a host (i.e. Friends of Goodwin Forest & CFPA partnership). There are many wonderful examples of friends groups across the state and they would be good resources as this group is getting started. There is contact information for the various groups on the [FCSP website](#).

4. **Where do we go from here?**

- **Who else should be invited to participate?**

- MDC representative – Eric Hammerling agreed to make invitation
- Balbrae condo representative – Nick Miller agreed to make invitation
- Direct neighbors – not yet determined how to best reach out
- Town representatives (Town Manager was unable to attend but has expressed interest and support)
- Local church groups – not yet determined how to best reach out

- **What kinds of activities could be planned to start engaging the public?**

- See below.

- **Open questions for future discussion?**

- What are the “baby steps” that we should start defining for the group?
 - Working on mission for Friends
 - Fostering better public understanding and appreciation for Park through
 - Events or other activities to engage the public?
 - Clarifying (to the extent possible) differences between State Park and 4H Center
 - Signage & website info?
 - Help with management plan for Park?
 - Building removal, defined public access, and other lingering issues
 - Encouraging synergy between 4H, Park, and Friends for some management aspects, etc.

- **When should we next meet?**

Mid-to-end of August was proposed for next meeting. Two potential meeting dates will be sent by Eric H. in early August.