

**[D R A F T]**

**DURHAM CONSERVATION COMMISSION**  
**Monday, June 23, 2025**  
**DURHAM TOWN HALL, COUNCIL CHAMBERS**  
**7:00 p.m.**

**MEMBERS PRESENT:** Dwight Trueblood (Chair); Darrell Ford (Town Council Representative); Jacob Cragg, Nick Lanzer, Anne Lightbody, Neil Slepian (Vice Chair); Alternates: John Nachilly and Ben Phelps

**MEMBERS ABSENT:** Steve Moyer (Alternate)

**ALSO PRESENT:** Michael Behrendt, Durham Town Planner and Land Stewardship Coordinator Veronique Ludington

**I. Call to Order**

Chair Dwight Trueblood called the meeting to order at 7:01 p.m.

**II. Land Acknowledgement Statement**

The Chair read the Land Acknowledgement Statement.

**III. Roll Call and Seating of Alternates**

Roll call attendance was taken.

**IV. Approval of Agenda**

Chair Trueblood proposed to add a new time-sensitive item that came to the Commission today: the removal of a boardwalk at the Cottages of Durham. It was agreed to add it after the Land Stewardship Update.

***The agenda was APPROVED unanimously as amended by a show of hands, 6-0.***

**V. Public Comments: None.**

**VI. Land Stewardship Update**

Veronique Ludington reported the Land Stewardship Subcommittee had their May meeting at Wagon Hill Farm, where they learned about the shoreline restoration project and toured the historic building currently undergoing renovation.

It was decided to hold the Bio Blitz on May 17, 2026, in the interest of allowing enough time to prepare. They will meet with UNH Cooperative Extension in the fall to discuss ideas. Durham did not receive the technical assistance grant, but will still receive one-time assistance.

Enock Glidden was contracted to study trails for accessibility last year. He will be looking at Wagon Hill, Oyster River Forest, Thompson Forest and Jackson's Landing on July 12th and 13th.

Invasives have been pulled from the loop trail at Jackson's Landing. She thanked Neil for his help. She walked Oyster River Forest meadow with Ellen Snyder, who's been doing a lot of work over the past decade with a wild parsnip infestation. They will revisit in July, but the infestation seems to have been contained.

Ms. Ludington will be doing trail clearing at Stolworthy with volunteers for the next few weeks. She showed a photo of the finished bridge at the marsh at Crommet Creek, which offers a lot of nice views and an alternative to the stone bridge below. With the help of volunteers, trails were brushed, signs were moved and replaced on the Sweet Trail.

**VII. Removal of Boardwalk Area.** The Cottages of Durham. Paul Rasmussen, Planning Board Chair.

Mr. Rasmussen apologized that the Planning Board doesn't currently have representation on the Conservation Commission. Mr. Kelley couldn't continue due to work commitments and he (Paul) is personally already covering four boards. The Commission should feel free to reach out to him, however, if there's a particular meeting they would like him to attend.

Referring to the proposed modification to an existing site plan for the Cottages, he said this normally wouldn't come before the Commission but the work is occurring in the upland buffer. He's here to solicit comment from the Commission to take to the Planning Board this week.

Mr. Rasmussen said the developer wants to remove an old boardwalk (wooden bridge). He showed photos, highlighting disrepair. The boardwalk goes through the upland wetland, which is a direct feeder to the Oyster River. In his view, it's fine to remove it if precautions are taken to protect the wetland during removal.

Chair Trueblood asked why it was originally installed and Mr. Rasmussen said it provided the only access to a UNH bus stop at one time. But about two years ago, two bus stops were added, making the boardwalk unnecessary. In answer to a question, Mr. Rasmussen said if it's removed, no one will likely be walking in that area because it's fenced.

Vice-Chair Slepian expressed that the developer should be careful about not creating a lot of debris into the Oyster River feeder during demolition. Mr. Rasmussen said that will be part of the terms of removal set by the Planning Board.

Ms. Lightbody said when it was in nicer condition, the boardwalk (with signage) could have directed attention to the wetlands, which are very nice. She sees it as a missed educational opportunity.

Chair Trueblood said he doesn't see removal as an issue if no one will be walking where the boardwalk is now, potentially increasing erosion. Mr. Rasmussen will convey to the Planning Board that the Conservation Commission has no objections to removal of the boardwalk.

**VIII. 45 Oyster River Road – Gravel Area.** Permitted Use B application to extend and raise the grade of an existing gravel area behind the house in the Shoreland Protection Overlay District. Bruce and Nancy Walker, property owners. Phil Belmont, agent and contractor. Map 113, Lot 18. Residence A District.

Phil Belmont, a local landscaping contractor, said the applicant is looking to install some landscape timbers for an existing gravel area, raising the grade a little to make more room for a ladder for window cleaners. It will extend the gravel a couple of feet and be pitched away from the house.

Vice-Chair Slepian asked about site preparation as the gravel area is being extended five feet. How much beyond that will be excavated? Mr. Belmont said it would only be a few inches and the excavated material will be hauled off site.

89 No plantings will be removed and no additional plants or materials will be added. Mr.  
90 Slepian asked about laying a fabric material to prevent weeds and Mr. Belmont said that  
91 won't be done in this case because it's an existing gravel area.

92 Mr. Nachilly asked if there are existing gutters to catch runoff. It was determined the  
93 slope is well-vegetated to control runoff.

94 ***Chair Trueblood MOVED to indicate to the Planning Board that changes proposed in***  
95 ***the gravel area behind the property at 45 Oyster River Road are minimal and will not***  
96 ***impact the Conservation Overlay District adversely; SECONDED by Mr. Cragg;***  
97 ***APPROVED unanimously by a show of hands, 6-0, Motion carries.***

98 **IX. Public Hearing – Conservation of Gsottschneider Property.** Proposed contribution of  
99 \$50,000 from the Town's Conservation Fund toward the acquisition of land in fee simple  
100 for a 29 +/- acre vacant parcel owed by the Gsottschneider Family Trust. The Nature  
101 Conservancy is coordinating with The Southeast Land Trust on the acquisition to protect  
102 this forested lot in the Lubberland and Crommet Creek area. Presented by Lori Sommer,  
103 Coastal Watershed Land Conservation Manager, and John Plummer, Land Protection  
104 Specialist, The Nature Conservancy.

105 Lori Sommer (Coastal Watershed Land Conservation) and John Plummer (The Nature  
106 Conservancy) are present to discuss the proposal. Chair Trueblood noted they presented  
107 to the Commission last month but will enumerate the benefits and funding request  
108 again. He commented there appeared to be no one present for the public hearing.

109 Mr. Plummer said the Nature Conservancy began working with the Gsottschneider  
110 family around 2018 to protect their property on Durham Point Road. It's 28-acres of  
111 working forest with some wetlands surrounded by adjacent conservation land in the  
112 Crommet Creek and Lubberland Creek conservation area.

113 Today, they are asking for \$50,000 from the town of Durham. At last month's meeting,  
114 they proposed a conservation easement, but in talks with the landowner immediately  
115 afterwards – a fee simple purchase was offered with no easements. The property would  
116 be open to the public. The landowners are offering the property, recently appraised at  
117 \$800,000, for \$500,000 – which is a significant charitable contribution.

118 The property contributes to about 6,500 acres of conservation and public land in  
119 Durham. The majority of the parcel is identified as priority lands under Coastal  
120 Watershed Conservation Land.

121 Mr. Plummer showed slides and described the forest, including a high-tension  
122 transmission line which provides shrubland; there are small wetlands and ephemeral  
123 streams. The entire property drains toward Little Bay. Ms. Sommer said one of the  
124 benefits of acquiring the property is to protect the wetlands and streams.

125 Mr. Plummer shared other highlights of the property:

- 126 • It's a priority area for the Great Bay Resource Protection Partnership.
- 127 • It's within a prioritized NH Fish & Game habitat block.
- 128 • The property is a New England Cottontail Focus Area.
- 129 • It provides an important connector to other conservation land.
- 130 • A good portion is designated for pollutant attenuation.
- 131 • It's within Tier 1 for Blanding's turtles and spotted turtles.

132 The proposal calls for the property to be owned by the Nature Conservancy or SELT.  
133 Project costs were previously \$475K and now \$500K. SELT will cover the difference.

134 Ms. Sommer said they are seeking funds from LCHIP and one of the requirements is to  
135 allow public access. Ms. Lightbody asked if the LCHIP grant doesn't come through, are  
136 they still committed to allowing public access and Ms. Sommer responded yes.

137 Vice-Chair Slepian mentioned one trail already on the property (primarily for access to  
138 tree cutting) and asked if The Nature Conservancy or SELT would be interested in adding  
139 additional trails. Ms. Sommer said there are no plans to do so at this time. There are  
140 other trails within the Crommet Creek/Lubberland area with more parking and easier  
141 access.

142 Vice-Chair Slepian asked if hunting is allowed and who decides that. Ms. Sommer said in  
143 general SELT properties are open for hunting; hunters are expected to abide by all state  
144 laws.

145 Chair Trueblood asked Mr. Nachilly, who works for Eversource, about maintenance of  
146 the power lines. Is parking and having people walk along there problematic? Mr.  
147 Nachilly replied there are no restrictions. While Eversource has construction/  
148 maintenance rights through the area, individual landowners are the ones who post "no  
149 trespassing" signs.

150 Mr. Nachilly thinks it would be beneficial if SELT could work out agreements with  
151 abutters to allow access from adjoining properties. He said in NH if you allow access,  
152 liability is limited.

153 Ms. Lightbody asked Mr. Behrendt about the funding. Since she's relatively new to the  
154 Commission, she wanted to know the context for spending \$50K. Mr. Behrendt replied  
155 the source of Conservation funding is the Change in Use tax, i.e., when a property goes  
156 out of current use -- one hundred percent of the tax goes into the Conservation Fund,  
157 which is under the sole discretion of the Commission.

158 He said with the exception of RiverWoods, the town hasn't had any significant  
159 developments in recent years. Most of the funds spent from the Conservation Fund are  
160 small amounts -- \$3K to \$5K for trail maintenance, e.g. About three years ago, \$30K was  
161 spent on the Pike Property. The current balance is about \$152K. In his view, the amount  
162 being requested seems sustainable, given the history over the last twelve years.

163 Mr. Behrendt said there was a public notice posted for an easement, but this project is  
164 actually a purchase. He doesn't believe the slight modification is an issue.

165 Mr. Ford asked for clarification: is this a public hearing? Chair Trueblood said it is. Mr.  
166 Behrendt noted you have to officially open and close a public hearing. It was unclear if a  
167 public hearing had officially been opened, but the Chair called for a motion to close the  
168 hearing.

169 ***Mr. Ford MOVED to close the public hearing; SECONDED by Mr. Cragg; APPROVED***  
170 ***unanimously by a show of hands, 6-0, Motion carries.***

171 Mr. Plummer briefly described how funds could be disbursed, either before the closing  
172 or afterward and Mr. Behrendt said the Commission should consult with Gail Jablonski,  
173 the town's business manager, regarding dispersal of funds.

174 ***Ms. Lightbody MOVED to authorize \$50K from the Conservation Fund for the purchase***  
175 ***of the [Gsottschneider] property; SECONDED by Mr. Lanza, APPROVED unanimously by***  
176 ***a show of hands, 6-0, Motion carries.***

177 Ms. Sommer and Mr. Plummer thanked the Commission for their support. In answer to  
178 a question about the timeline, Mr. Plummer said they are hoping to have an option  
179 signed in the next few days and for the closing to take place in May 2026.

180 **X. Annual Meeting.** Discussion of the past twelve months and the coming year  
181 (postponed from the prior meeting).

182 Chair Trueblood opened discussion about the Commission's goals in the coming year  
183 and said they should be cognizant of the town's Master Plan. He noted this past year  
184 had been consumed with the re-writing of the ordinances, but that is behind them now.

Vice-Chair Slepian noted some of the items in the Master Plan are being addressed through the proposed ordinance changes, including:

- Increasing buffers to help protect drinking water and wetlands
- Addressing climate change and sea level rise
- Increasing connectivity and access for wildlife

Speaking to other goals he would like the Commission to consider, Vice-Chair Slepian proposed they draft a mission statement. He also proposed pursuing trail connectivity with surrounding towns and said maybe a subcommittee could be formed to explore the idea.

Mr. Nachilly said he's talked with Ellen Snyder (Newmarket Conservation Chair) and the Newmarket Town Planner about connectivity. There are connectivity corridors and Durham is already connected to Madbury.

Offering another potential goal from the Town's Master Plan, Vice-Chair Slepian said it would be good to "raise public awareness about the importance of protecting water bodies." He also raised the idea of exploring alternate funding sources in addition to the Land Use Tax, which is sporadic.

Mr. Cragg expressed enthusiasm for the idea of creating a mission statement and proposed identifying four or five pillars. There was brief discussion about the proposal, with Mr. Behrendt reading the existing pillars in the Natural Resources Master Plan.

Suggesting another goal, Ms. Lightbody said it would be helpful to invite the Director of Public Works to a meeting to discuss shared topics such as drinking water, stormwater, and wetlands protection. The Commission could also invite local watershed associations and the Lamprey River Advisory Commission to meet with them.

Chair Trueblood said he would like to see more cross-referencing during the year between Town Council's goals and the Commission's goals. Regarding funding, he said they would need to have a specific project in mind in order to pursue outside sources.

Vice-Chair Slepian asked if it would make sense to do a Go-Fund-Me page for conservation projects and Mr. Nachilly replied something similar was done in the past for Oyster River trails and a bridge. There was a group called Friends of the Conservation Commission that raised significant funds. Ms. Lightbody pointed out private fundraising was also used for the Kenny Rottner Bridge.

There was discussion about how a fundraising group would be structured.

218 Mr. Nachilly mentioned the trail behind the Evangelical Church that could eventually  
219 connect to Wagon Hill via a class-six right-of-way. He said \$500K in DOT funding was  
220 secured and Madbury approved the plan two decades ago, but Durham rejected it due  
221 to an abutter's objections. He sees it as a potential anchor project with significant  
222 regional value.

223 Mr. Behrendt noted the original abutter has passed away, and the property is now held  
224 by family. While it's unclear if they would support the trail, Commission members  
225 agreed it might be worth revisiting.

226 Wrapping up the goals discussion, Chair Trueblood noted there were good ideas put on  
227 the table. He proposed the Commission discuss prioritizing and how best to implement  
228 specific goals at their July meeting. He said they should be aware of the time involved  
229 outside of meetings and cautioned against taking on too many projects at once.

#### 230 **XI. Discussion about preparing articles for Friday Updates on Conservation Issues.**

231 Chair Trueblood said he talked about improving outreach from the Commission to town  
232 residents when he met with Town Council recently. He proposed developing short  
233 articles for *Friday Updates* that would be useful for homeowners.

234 Mr. Cragg said he's happy to take the lead to help edit and shape articles, calling on  
235 subject matter experts on the Commission to provide content.

236 Mr. Behrendt proposed they create a backlog of 8-10 articles before launching the  
237 initiative. There was discussion about how to link additional information within articles  
238 and how to create an archive. It was agreed that pieces can be re-used year-to-year.

239 After lengthy discussion about topics and how best to present the information, Chair  
240 Trueblood asked Mr. Cragg to coordinate the project and he agreed to do so. He will  
241 reach out to the Education Subcommittee as well.

#### 242 **XII. Review of Minutes: May 27, 2025**

243 ***Mr. Lanzer MOVED to approve the minutes of the May 27, 2025 Conservation***  
244 ***Commission meeting as submitted; SECONDED by Ms. Lightbody; APPROVED 5-0-1,***  
245 ***with Mr. Cragg abstaining because he wasn't present.***

#### 246 **XIII. Other Business**

247 Mr. Cragg asked for clarification about the Right- to-Know request currently before the  
248 Commission. It was clarified they do not have to forward any emails that originated  
249 from Town Planner Michael Behrendt since they've already been forwarded. The Chair



250 noted there was a Freedom of Information request made on behalf of 361 Durham Point  
251 Road.

252 **XIV. Roundtable.**

253 Town Councilor Darrell Ford noted Chair Trueblood gave an annual report to the Council  
254 last month and there was nothing further to report.

255 Chair Trueblood asked Mr. Behrendt when the Planning Board might start review of the  
256 Conservation Ordinances and he replied it shouldn't be long, maybe in August.

257 Vice-Chair Slepian said he, Ben and Dwight had a meeting to check the links in the  
258 appendix for the ordinance, to ensure they were working and had the most up-to-date  
259 information. He then put together a PowerPoint draft for Town Council, which he's  
260 happy to share in advance with any Commission members for input.

261 He attended Discover Durham Trail Days on the shoreline restoration project, presented  
262 by Tom Ballestero from UNH and found it very informative. He learned climate change  
263 doesn't affect sea level rise in a straight line over time, but is expected to ramp up again  
264 over the next 10 years.

265 XVI. Adjournment.

266 ***Mr. Ford MOVED to adjourn the meeting at 9:02 p.m.; SECONDED by Mr. Cragg;***  
267 ***APPROVED unanimously, 6-0, Motion carries.***

268

269 Respectfully submitted,

270 Lucie Bryar, Minutes Taker

271 Town of Durham Conservation Commission