

These minutes were approved at the August 25, 2025 meeting.

DURHAM CONSERVATION COMMISSION
Monday, July 28, 2025
DURHAM TOWN HALL, COUNCIL CHAMBERS
7:00 p.m.

MEMBERS PRESENT: Dwight Trueblood (Chair); Darrell Ford (Town Council Representative); Jacob Cragg; Alternates: Steve Moyer, John Nachilly and Ben Phelps

MEMBERS ABSENT: Neil Slepian (Vice Chair); Nick Lanzer and Anne Lightbody

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 7:00 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 and Chair Trueblood seated all three alternates this evening: Steve Moyer, John Nachilly, and Ben Phelps.

IV. Approval of Agenda

Mr. Nachilly MOVED to accept the agenda as presented; SECONDED by Mr. Cragg; APPROVED unanimously by a show of hands, 6-0, Motion carries.

V. Public Comments: None.

VI. Land Stewardship Update

Veronique Ludington said the Land Stewardship Subcommittee is continuing to work on allowed uses for properties so that signage can be updated. There was a suggestion to partner with UNH graphic design students for updating signs. Ms. Lightbody has a

contact with a professor and will follow up. Ms. Ludington reported on activities in the field:

- Work continues at Longmarsh to replace boards on the main bog bridge.
- She found firepits near Moat Island at Doe Farm again; They will fill holes and remove all grilling equipment. She has notified the Police Department and temporary signs may be put up again.
- Oyster River Forest: Almost all the plastic trail markers have been removed [by vandals]. She talked to the PD and there's only one trail camera working. They might have to blaze the trees again with paint. It's the only property having issues with trail markers.
- Oyster River Forest: They are in the last phase of DES permitting to upgrade the bridge. Once paperwork is complete, they will partner with DPW to have structure raised.
- Oyster River Forest Invasives: She only found eight wild parsnip plants; Will re-check in August.
- She and Rachel from Parks & Rec did a presentation at the Library that went well; 21 attendees. She'll present again at River Woods on Sept. 3rd and also to the Active Retirement Association.
- Ms. Ludington connected with a UNH student association called ECO-Reps, which does campus clean-ups. They would like to help the town but many students lack transportation. Nature Groupie has offered a van for a trial workday at Longmarsh in October.
- She and Neil Slepian will meet next week with Greg DeSantos Associates to explore building a viewing platform at Spruce Hole Bog. She'll get estimates and apply for a partnership grant in the fall.
- Erin Hardie Hale approached her about writing a proposal for the UNH Sustainability Capstone Project. The town would receive support from two to four students for about 25 hours total per week to organize the Bio Blitz.

- She participated in a climate resilience forest management tour at the Green Hill Preserve in North Conway. She'll scan materials and share with the Commission.

Ms. Ludington was asked if Enoch [Glidden] had completed his accessibility assessments and she replied yes, he'll present results by mid-August.

Chair Trueblood asked if broken boards at Longmarsh are due to age and she replied the water level by the beaver dam has risen and most of the boards are submerged. Eventually they will have to come up with a better long-term solution, but for now the trail is still usable.

Chair Trueblood asked if they were planning to put up more trail cameras at Longmarsh and Ms. Ludington said whoever is removing the markers is stacking them near trail intersections, so cameras could be placed there. She'll talk again with the PD.

VII. Outdoor Illumination. Discussion with James Bubar and John Gianforte, representing small local group examining issues related to outdoor illumination.

Chair Trueblood said Mr. Bubar and Mr. Gianforte are here to ask for a recommendation to the town for \$500 for LED yellow tint light bulbs that would be given away at Durham Day to interested homeowners.

Mr. Bubar, of 4 Old Piscataqua Road, introduced himself as a former Planning Board rep on the Conservation Commission and current member of two other town organizations. With him is John Gianforte, director of UNH Observatory, Astronomer and Associate Professor of Space Science Education/Youth & Family State Specialist.

Mr. Bubar said they are members of an unofficial small group who would like to do something about outdoor lighting for a variety of reasons. In addition to him and John, the group consists of Emily Friedrichs, Diane Carroll, and Michael Carr (unclear?).

They are here tonight to ask the Commission to pass a motion requesting the town release \$500 in unrestricted funds for the purchase of insect-friendly lighting. The group plans to give the light bulbs away at Durham Day on August 7th and at Farm Day on August 16th. They are also asking for permission to use the Conservation Commission's name on flyers.

Mr. Gianforte outlined several reasons to address outdoor illumination, referred to as ALAN (Artificial Lighting at Night): Safety; Economics; Maintaining views of the night sky; and Allowing insect preservation. He said yellow 2500K lightbulbs (K = Kelvin) benefit not only humans but other life forms. Dark night skies are an important natural resource that are slipping away.

Mr. Nachilly asked if Durham is looking to formally apply to the Dark Sky Program, a national initiative. Mr. Bubar noted the small group has no plans to pursue this right now, but may work with a sponsoring organization to do so in the future.

Mr. Nachilly said he does astrophotography and the biggest glow comes from the fields at UNH. Mr. Gianforte said the view to the East [from the UNH Observatory] is much brighter than any other direction, making it difficult to see faint celestial objects. The first UNH Observatory, erected in 1985, eventually became unusable due to light pollution from athletic fields.

Mr. Nachilly said UNH brands itself as a green university but hasn't taken on any dark sky initiatives. Mr. Behrendt said while UNH's lighting policies are very good, athletic lighting remains a big challenge.

There was discussion between Mr. Behrendt and Mr. Gianforte regarding how many kelvins the town should consider if they were to enact lighting regulations. Mr. Behrendt asked if 2500K is optimal for different uses and Mr. Gianforte said some purposes require spectrally hotter lights. While Dark Sky International recommends 3,000 Kelvins, a range would be better, in his opinion.

Mr. Moyer proposed getting feedback from people who would accept free lightbulbs. Ms. Ludington suggested they include a scannable QR code on the flyer, linking to a webpage with more information and a survey. Mr. Behrendt offered to host the information on the Conservation Commission webpage.

There was discussion about the cost of the bulbs and Mr. Bubar said the group has another \$400 to purchase bulbs. Anything they don't distribute will go to the Swap Shop.

Mr. Trueblood MOVED that the Conservation Commission requests the town of Durham provide \$500 for the purchase of 2500-Kelvin LED bulbs for distribution at Durham Day, Durham Farm Day and the Swap Shop to Durham residents – to support night sky preservation and a healthy insect population in the town of Durham. Also

that the Conservation Commission wants to be recognized on the flyer to support the initiative; SECONDED by Mr. Sullivan, APPROVED unanimously by a show of hands, 6-0, Motion carries.

VIII. Discussion about Workshop Series. Discussion with Annie Cox, Watershed Resilience Manager, and Abigail Lyon, Community Engagement Program Manager of the Piscataqua Regional Estuaries Partnership (PREP) about a new workshop series planned to support the work of conservation commissions and other municipal boards.

Chair Trueblood said Annie Cox and Abigail Lyon from PREP are here this evening seeking feedback on potential workshops their organization would provide.

Ms. Cox said PREP partners with a number of groups including Great Bay National Estuarine Research Reserve; NH Association of Conservation Commissions; and the Seabrook-Hampton Estuary Alliance.

All of the above organizations participate in the following programs:

- Coastal Conservation Commission Roundtable
- The PREPA grant (up to \$25K to support water quality)
- Adapting Together (offers climate impact grants up to \$25K)
- Seven Rivers to the Coast.org (new website highlighting environmental work)

Ms. Cox noted the Board Empowerment Workshops, first started in 2016, were designed to support knowledge sharing among Conservation Commissions. Typically, workshops took two hours in the evenings and drew about 25 attendees.

The Series was paused due to staffing changes and the pandemic. Before bringing it back, they'd like feedback about content and delivery – e.g., whether sessions should be held on zoom or in-person.

Ms. Cox presented potential workshop ideas to get feedback and stimulate discussion:

- Putting land use plans into action;
- Site plan review in a digital world
- Planning for climate resilience
- Stormwater management and low impact development
- Wetland protection 101
- Buffer management and landscaping for water quality
- Land protection tools and public engagement

Mr. Sullivan said “Buffer management and landscaping for water quality” is a hot topic in Durham right now since there’s a proposal for buffer changes before the Planning Board. Mr. Nachilly added in the near future the town will probably get site plan reviews that will make the Commission think very carefully about its water supply.

Commission members suggested the following topics:

- Public engagement and advocacy (Mr. Cragg and Mr. Behrendt)
- Forest types and forest management (Mr. Behrendt)
- Wildlife Habitats (Mr. Behrendt)
- Watershed issues (Chair Trueblood)
- Erosion Sediment Control

There was discussion about a group of homeowners on Little Bay who reached out to the town recently seeking help with erosion issues. Chair Trueblood asked if a PREPA grant might be an option and Ms. Lyons said PREPA grants are available for planning within a community; they aren’t eligible for “shovel in the ground” projects.

Discussion then turned to format and delivery preferences for the workshops. In general, members agreed that shorter sessions of about one hour are preferable. Mr. Cragg recommended both asynchronous and synchronous training. Self-guided online delivery would work for easy topics.

Wrapping up the discussion, Ms. Cox said she’ll send an email with links and another survey, based on feedback they’ve received thus far.

Ms. Lyons said the trainings would be limited to the 42 NH communities in the Piscataqua Regions Estuaries Partnership, but the NH Association of Conservation Commissions might choose to offer some of the trainings statewide. The Workshop Series is scheduled to launch in 2026.

IX. Priorities for the Conservation Commission for the coming year. Continued discussion.

Chair Trueblood recapped some ideas shared last month:

- Develop Durham specific Conservation Commission mission statement;
- Better trail connectivity – particularly connecting Durham to Newmarket trails. There was also mention of connecting to a Newington trail, with the Chair noting a property owner nixed one project about 15 years ago but the Commission

might want to revisit it. He asked Mr. Behrendt to research if minutes are available on the project.

- Raise public awareness for protecting watersheds and water bodies
- Explore alternate funding sources for land conservation and maintenance
- Be more proactive as a Commission.
- Create better relationships with DPW, particularly since both work on invasive species control.
- Explore setting up a Go Fund me page for Durham conservation fund.
- Use Master Plan pillars to organize education communications.

Chair Trueblood advocated for the Commission to go through a prioritization exercise at their next meeting, possibly focusing on three priorities. He cautioned against taking on too much – in light of the fact they just spent a few years on the ordinance re-write. He invited additional ideas from members.

Mr. Nachilly proposed creating a water trail that connects some of the key access points along the Bay for people who kayak, paddle board, etc. He recommends adding conservation points (signs) to highlight the importance of the Bay.

Ms. Ludington said Parks & Rec has a new subcommittee tied to trail connectivity and added she's considering producing a series of trail videos using a Go Pro camera.

Mr. Moyer raised the idea of including the dam removal project in their priorities. The Chair said he got a call from a resident living on Mill Pond questioning the future of the beaver dam. Mr. Trueblood is not sure how properties on the banks will be affected by dying and decaying materials, i.e., are there plans to remove the vegetation after the water level is down. There was consensus this is an educational opportunity to let the community know how dam removal is environmentally beneficial.

Mr. Behrendt said he'll find out the timeline for dam removal. Possibly the VHB consultant could meet with the Commission in coming months.

X. Planning for preparation of conservation-related articles for Friday Updates.

Continued discussion.

Mr. Cragg said there are six pillars in the Master Plan; he's calling them outcome groups: Drinking Water Supplies; Surface and Estuarine Resources; Wetland Protection; Forest Land and Open Space; Wildlife and Wildlife Habitat; and Climate Change and Sea Level Rise.

He developed a few article topics, with input from Ms. Lightbody and Mr. Behrendt. He invited others to submit topics to him that fit into the pillars.

He recommended the title “Conservation Corner” for *Friday Updates*. Mr. Behrendt suggested every Commission member write some blurbs and he and Jacob can refine them. Every other week publication would be good to start.

Mr. Cragg said if they collect enough articles they could focus on one pillar per month, instead of taking a scattershot approach. He recommends they re-run pillars every six months with new articles, if warranted.

Mr. Cragg described his concept for the articles: Weeks one and two: Define concepts – what is a watershed or what is an estuary? Week three would be to apply the information. Week four could be a spotlight of a group the Commission is working with.

It was agreed *Friday Update* articles could be posted on the Commission’s webpage under six pillars (categories).

Ms. Ludington asked if there are plans to update the website and Mr. Behrendt said the town website has a lot of great information, but it can always be improved. Members are welcome to submit improvements to him.

The goal is to launch Conservation Corner around October 1. In the interim, members are encouraged to submit any topic ideas to Mr. Cragg.

XI. Review of Minutes: June 23, 2025.

Mr. Phelps MOVED to approve the minutes as presented; SECONDED by Mr. Cragg; APPROVED, 5-0-1, with one abstention, Motion carries.

XII. Other Business

Mr. Cragg asked if there are any plans for the Conservation Commission to participate in Durham Day and Farm Day. Ms. Ludington said she plans to be there; she’ll be in touch with him since he’s interested in volunteering.

Presentation to the Planning Board on Proposed Ordinance Changes:

Chair Trueblood said the presentation is scheduled for August 13th. On August 11th from 2:00 to 3:00 p.m., the Chair and Vice-Chair will do a courtesy presentation to Paul [Rasmussen]. Members are welcome to attend.

Mr. Sullivan said the CC should be prepared to strongly advocate for the changes; there will be members of the Planning Board who need to be convinced. Later in discussion, he advocated for the Commission to include specific examples in their presentation.

Mr. Behrendt said they should be getting feedback from the town attorney very soon on the ordinance changes, hopefully before they go to the Planning Board.

Mr. Nachilly said adoption of the ordinance might be critical due to big projects coming in. Technology Drive is at the head of the water supply (Oyster River); other pending big projects are The Edge and River Woods. Mr. Behrendt commented the current buffer on Technology Drive is 75 feet and the proposed new buffer would be 100-feet.

Turning to the Edge project, Chair Trueblood said there's an EA [Environmental Assessment?] from NOAA out. Commissioners can send their individual comments directly to NOAA or coordinate responses through Mr. Behrendt.

XIII. Roundtable

Chair Trueblood said he met a SELT rep at Doe Farm for a site walk; SELT will provide the Commission with a report. [It was later clarified he meant to say the Pike Property.]

At Conservation Commission Roundtable last week, Mr. Trueblood mentioned Durham's CC had drafted revisions to the WCOD and others were interested in the proposal as well as the process. He'll give an update at the Roundtable in November.

XIV. Adjournment

With no further business, Chair Trueblood adjourned the meeting at 9:28 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,
Lucie Bryar, Minutes Taker
Town of Durham Conservation Commission