

DURHAM CONSERVATION COMMISSION
Monday, August 25, 2025
DURHAM TOWN HALL, COUNCIL CHAMBERS

7:00 p.m.

MEMBERS PRESENT: Dwight Trueblood (Chair); Darrell Ford (Town Council Representative); Jacob Cragg; Neil Slepian (Vice Chair); Rob Sullivan (Planning Board Representative); Anne Lightbody, Alternates: Ben Phelps and Steve Moyer

MEMBERS ABSENT: Nick Lanzer; Alternate: John Nachilly; Michael Behrendt (Durham Town Planner)

ALSO PRESENT: Veronique Ludington (Land Stewardship Coordinator)

1 I. Call to Order

2 Chair Dwight Trueblood called the meeting to order at 7:03 p.m.

3 II. Land Acknowledgement Statement

4 The Chair read the Land Acknowledgement Statement.

5 III. Roll Call and Seating of Alternates

6 Roll call attendance was taken and Chair Trueblood seated on alternate this evening:
7 Steve Moyer.

8 IV. Approval of Agenda

9 The Chair MOVED to accept the agenda as presented; SECONDED by Mr. Ford;
10 Approved unanimously by a show of hands, 7-0, Motion carries.

11 V. Public Comments: None.

12 **VI. Land Stewardship Update**

13 Veronique Ludington gave an overview of stewardship activities for the last month
14 which included:

- 15 • It was a good month for Town outreach because there was good traffic by the
16 Conservation Commission booth at Durham Farm Day. Approximately 50-60
17 people stopped at the booth. There seemed to be a keen interest in invasive
18 species.
- 19 • Bio Blitz planning continues apace. There will be a public presentation of the Bio
20 Blitz program in December on why this is an important program.
- 21 • The Stoleworthy property survey contract is now in place.
- 22 • Easement monitoring training is being explored to increase the volunteer pool to
23 help with this activity.

24 **VII. Riverwoods Conditional Use for Phase II**

25 The Riverwoods contractor, Altus Engineering, gave an overview of its proposed
26 phase 2 expansion plans for the continuing care retirement community. The contractor
27 described where the new building and parking lots would be located as well as how
28 Stone Quarry Drive would be modified to accommodate the new facilities. It was noted
29 that the facilities are all located outside of the core wetland and vernal pool areas on
30 the property and that all stormwater would be collected and routed away from the
31 wetlands. The landscape designer then described the proposed plantings, primarily
32 using all native vegetation along the borders of the wetland areas, with a few non-naïve
33 plantings along the front of some of the buildings (roses and hydrangeas). The applicant
34 noted that two endangered species had been seen in the general area, but not on the
35 property being developed: in 1966 an endangered species of turtle was seen in the Mill
36 Pond area, and more recently, a dead New England cotton tail rabbit was found on Rt.
37 108. Neither citing was considered to be significant for the proposed work.

38 Commissioners asked a few questions about where the stormwater would be captured
39 and how it would drain away from the wetlands. The civil engineer explained that the
40 stormwater would be routed across the road into an existing stream bed that drains the
41 area.

42 The Commission then went through the four conditional use criteria, voting on whether
43 the applicant had addressed each criterion adequately.

1. There is no alternative design and location on the parcel for the proposed project that would:

- Have less adverse impact on the WCOD and overall ecological values;
- Be workable; and
- Be reasonable to expect the applicant to utilize.

The Commissioners voted unanimously, 7-0, that the applicant addressed this criterion adequately.

2. The design, construction, maintenance and operation of the proposed structures and activities within the wetland and buffer will minimize soil disturbance and adverse impacts to water quality to the extent workable.

The Commissioners voted unanimously, 7-0, that the applicant addressed this criterion adequately.

3. Mitigation and restoration activities of the area being disturbed will allow for the site to perform the functions of the wetland and buffer to the extent workable. Planting of native or naturalized vegetation shall be included as appropriate.

The Commissioners voted unanimously, 7-0, that the applicant addressed this criterion adequately.

4. The proposed project will not have substantial adverse impacts to known rare species, rare habitats, water quality, aquatic connectivity, or wildlife corridors. Applicants are not required to provide supporting documentation for this criterion unless the Planning Board has good reason to believe this criterion applies.

The Commissioners voted unanimously, 7-0, that the applicant addressed this criterion adequately.

The Chair indicated that he would notify the Planning Board on Tuesday, August 26, 2025 of the Commission's findings.

VIII. Appointment of Representative to the Land Stewardship Committee.

Chair Trueblood told the Commissioner's that Ann Welsh, Chair of the Land Stewardship Committee, was stepping down and that Mr. Slepian had agreed to step into that roll. However, to do so he needed to be a voting member of the Land Stewardship

Committee, and that currently Mr. Nachilly was the voting member. Mr. Nachilly has agreed to stop being a voting member on the subcommittee, so Chair Trueblood MOVED that Mr. Slepian be elected as a voting member of the Land Stewardship Committee, this was SECONDED, and the Commissioner's voted 7-0 to approve the Mr. Slepian as a voting member of the Land Stewardship Committee.

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

Vice-Chair Slepian said, with the exception of grant-funded projects, priorities requiring funds should drop to the bottom of the list, given that they won't be budgeted for this year. There was back-and-forth discussion between the Chair and Vice-Chair, with Chair Trueblood expressing a somewhat different viewpoint. He noted a number of projects might require feasibility studies, which could become priorities in themselves.

Ms. Ludington advocated for trail connectivity as a priority, given other developments in Durham and surrounding towns. Parks & Rec had a study done about trail connectivity (she hasn't seen results yet) and she's been invited to serve on a subcommittee about it.

She learned today that Ellen Snyder [Newmarket Conservation] is applying for a Moose Plate grant for the Rosa [Follett's Brook] project which is acquiring a conservation easement on 16 acres in Newmarket and 24 acres in Durham. Ms. Snyder is hoping the two towns can work closely together in the coming year.

Mr. Sullivan agreed that trail connectivity would be a great priority, given that Durham has made a lot of progress in the last 10 years.

Chair Trueblood invited discussion about other priorities. Mr. Cragg said building public awareness about conservation issues will take place through articles in *Friday Updates*. Ms. Lightbody noted education and public awareness would be her choice for their number one priority.

Mr. Ford said exploring alternate funding sources for land conservation and maintenance would be a priority for him.

Ms. Ludington said the Forest Society has been proactive in putting signs at trailheads asking people to donate to help maintain trails; she thinks they should do this in Durham. It encourages a sense of ownership and stewardship among those who use trails regularly. For specific projects – e.g., the platform at Spruce Hole Bog – she's reached out to companies like Timberland for support. She'll also reach out to NH Trail Bureau if the platform is ADA accessible.

107 Mr. Ford said residents might object to contributing since they already pay taxes, but
108 the Commission needs to be cognizant of people outside Durham who use the trails.
109 Wagon Hill, which draws visitors from a wider area, is a prime example.

110 The Chair then recapped priorities, as discussed and agreed upon:

111 1. Educational Outreach, specifically through *Friday Update* articles to start.

112 2. Trail Connectivity

113 3. Alternative Funding Sources

114 Vice-Chair Slepian said a Conservation Commission mission statement should be
115 undertaken this year as well. He believes it would help to focus all their efforts. There
116 was brief discussion about creating a mission statement.

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

118 Continued discussion.

119 Mr. Cragg said last month there was agreement to use the six pillars in the Master Plan
120 as a guide for topics. The pillars are: Drinking Water Supplies; Surface and Estuarine
121 Resources; Wetland Protection; Forest Land and Open Space; Wildlife and Wildlife
122 Habitat; and Climate Change and Sea Level Rise

123 He shared an outline of proposed article topics by month, from October 2025 through
124 September 2026, and asked members for feedback. There was consensus the list was
125 good, with brief discussion about seasonal topics. For the first introductory article, Ms.
126 Ludington suggested using a photo of the Commission with the banner.

127 Mr. Cragg recommended using Weeks 1 and 2 articles to define the concept; Week 3 to
128 talk about best management practices and Week 4 to highlight a specific trail or species.

129 It was agreed articles should be short, with some of them linking to longer articles on
130 the website. A repository of articles will be available online.

131 Commissioners thanked Mr. Cragg for all his work organizing the project.

132 **XI. 2026 Conservation Commission Budget.**

133 Chair Trueblood said he believes the budget is based on the calendar year. There's a
134 budget process between the Commission, Town Manager and Town Council -- with the
135 Council making the final decision.

136 Last year, \$33,200 was budgeted for the Land Stewardship Coordinator's salary; there
137 are no benefits for the position, which is 20 hours per week. Chair Trueblood said he
138 and the Vice-Chair discussed at length budgeting more for the position and bringing it to
139 35 hours per week, with the potential for benefits.

140 Vice-Chair Slepian said based on the current job description, it's unrealistic to think it
141 can be accomplished in 20 hours per week. He noted Durham owns 18 conservation
142 properties totaling 5,500 acres and 20 miles of trails. He added Ms. Ludington often
143 works additional hours without compensation.

144 He then discussed specific items in the budget where savings could be realized to make
145 up some of the difference for the \$41,500 increase. The Chair said Ms. Ludington
146 recommended reducing \$27K for contracted services to \$15K. An additional \$1500 could
147 be saved in field mowing, which was previously budgeted at \$4500, but can be done for
148 \$3,000.

149 The Chair asked if Commissioners agree that this is an appropriate request. They've
150 been told there's a shortfall again in tax revenue, so it might be an uphill battle.

151 Mr. Ford (Town Council Rep) expressed support for the request and asked if he could
152 get detailed information about the proposal in advance so he can advocate to the
153 Council on behalf of the Commission. He noted when the Land Stewardship position was
154 originally created, a primary responsibility was grant writing. The consensus was that
155 Ms. Ludington is knowledgeable about grants and capable of writing them but lacks
156 time to do so.

157 Mr. Ford said if more outside funding was obtained, it would free up town funds to
158 cover some of her increased salary.

159 Vice-Chair Slepian has prepared a six-page justification for the request, which will be
160 shared initially with the Business Manager and Town Manager. He said the town is
161 proud of its public conservation lands and needs to put additional resources behind
162 them.

163 Ms. Lightbody encouraged the Commission to think more broadly about the role of Land
164 Stewardship in collaborating with Parks & Rec. She advocated for thinking about and
165 highlighting to the Town Manager a more deliberate partnership between the two,
166 since many of their efforts are adjacent. Chair Trueblood said they are already exploring
167 this idea with DPW, e.g., which also takes care of invasives.

Mr. Moyer said it might take a year or two to get their request funded, but he supports starting the discussion now.

Chair Trueblood said everything else in the budget would remain the same as last year. He and Vice-Chair Slepian will meet with the Town Manager next week to discuss the budget and make the case for an increase.

Chair Trueblood MOVED that the Commission approve the proposed 2026 Conservation and Land Stewardship budget as presented; including amendments by Vice-Chair Slepian; SECONDED by Mr. Cragg, APPROVED unanimously, 6-0, Motion carries.

Mr. Ford asked if this refers to the Conservation Fund or the General Budget and it was clarified this is for the General Budget. The total budgeted request is \$109, 650.

XII. Review of Minutes: July 28, 2025.

Mr. Ford requested a number of corrections:

Add Rob Sullivan to the list of attendees.

Line 51, Change Spruce Hill Bog to Spruce Hole Bog.

Line 68 (and beyond) – He believes the cameras referenced are at Oyster River Forest, not Longmarsh.

Chair Trueblood asked for Line 268 to be changed to say “Pike Property” instead of “Doe Farm.”

Mr. Moyer MOVED to approve the minutes of July 28, 2025 as amended; SECONDED by Mr. Cragg, APPROVED 5-0-1, with Ms. Lightbody abstaining because she wasn’t present.

XIII. Other Business

Vice-Chair Slepian said he and the Chair will present the proposed Wetland Ordinance to the Planning Board this Wednesday and invited members to attend in support.

Mr. Sullivan questioned a paragraph in the proposed WSOD ordinance regarding challenges to wetlands designations. While he supports the language, he noted it doesn’t require construction to stop during a challenge. He noted this was a problem for the Planning Board on a past project. He suggested adding that approval should be

197 suspended if the basis is challenged, effectively placing responsibility on the applicant.
198 He advocated revoking permits until re-approval, though he was unsure of the legalities.

199 Chair Trueblood said the Commission can't make a change to the draft ordinance now,
200 but Mr. Sullivan should raise it during Planning Board review. He's not sure of the
201 legality of what he's proposing but thinks it's a valid point.

202 **XIV. Roundtable.** Updates from Conservation Commission members.

203 Chair Trueblood said he won't be in attendance at the September meeting and asked
204 Vice-Chair Slepian to chair the meeting, to which he agreed.

205 **XV. Adjournment**

206
207 ***With no further business, Mr. Ford MOVED to adjourn the meeting at 9:28 p.m.;***
208 ***SECONDED by Ms. Lightbody; APPROVED unanimously, 6-0, Motion carries.***

209

210 Respectfully submitted,
211 Dwight Trueblood, Chair and
212 Lucie Bryar, Minutes Taker
213 Town of Durham Conservation Commission

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