

Report of the Conservation Commission

The Commission administered the Massachusetts Wetlands Protection Act, the Town Wetland Protection Bylaw and the Town Stormwater Bylaw. Regular public meetings were generally conducted bi-weekly and numerous site inspections were held during the year. Due to the pandemic, most meetings were held remotely. Many sites were reviewed and approved for building permit application sign-offs by the Conservation Commission Agent. The Intermunicipal Agreement with Northbridge to share the agent's position was revised and finalized at the beginning of the fiscal year. Major projects that were reviewed and permitted included the Preserve at Dean Pond Subdivision and Phase 2 of the Hartford Avenue North/High Street/Hopkinton Road Transportation Improvement Project. Projects under construction monitored by the Commission in 2020 included: the Upton Ridge Over 55 development, the Preserve at Dean Pond subdivision, Phase 1 of the High Street/Hopkinton Road Transportation Improvement Project and the Fowler Street Bridge Replacement Project. Four (4) new single-family homes were also reviewed and permitted. The Commission resolved several violations of the Wetland Protection Act and/or the Town Wetland Bylaw. No enforcement orders were required and no fines were levied.

The Commission extends its gracious appreciation to Denise Smith who has become Assistant Town Clerk after serving as our extraordinarily capable Administrative Assistant since 2010.

The Commission, the Open Space Committee, and the Recreation Commission updated the town's 2011 Open Space and Recreation Plan. The updated plan was approved by the Division of Conservation Services and expires on October, 2026. The Commission along with the Department of Conservation and Recreation was granted a Conservation Restriction for the Robertson property along Warren Brook. The town was also gifted a small easement off Chestnut Street and two small parcels at the Crosswinds subdivision which will provide improved access to Center Brook. CRs held by the Commission at Fiveforks Farm (formerly known as Sweetwilliam Farm), Rockwood Meadows, and on West River Road were monitored.

The Commission and Town Manager prepared/submitted an application for a Planning Grant under the Municipal Vulnerability Preparedness (MVP) Program administered by the Massachusetts Executive Office of Energy and Environmental Affairs. The Town was awarded a grant and the first steps of preparing a MVP Plan are underway.

Applications/Requests received:

- Notice of Intent (NOI) = 9
- Requests for Determination (RDA) = 9
- Abbreviated Notice of Resource Area Delineation (ANRAD) = 2
- Request for Certificate of Compliance (COC) = 9
- Order of Conditions (OOC) Extensions = 2
- Emergency Permit Request = 3

- Stormwater Management Permit Application = 1
- Erosion Control Permit Application = 2

Decisions/Actions issued by the Commission:

- Order of Conditions (OOC) issued = 9 (no denials)
- Determinations = 9
- Order of Resource Area Delineation (ORAD) = 2
- Certificate of Compliance = 8 (including 2 partial)
- Order of Conditions Extension = 2
- Enforcement Orders = 1
- Emergency Certifications = 2
- Erosion Control Permits = 2
- Stormwater Management Permits = 1

The Commission administered town funds allocated for beaver control. Funds were expended to maintain existing pond levelers and culvert fencing to regulate the water levels at several locations.

The Commission has been monitoring Pratt Pond Ice-Out as an indicator of climate change since 2010. Pratt Pond Ice out is defined as the first day of the year when no ice is visible in the pond from a vantage point near the intersection of School Street and North Main Street. In 2020, the pond was initially ice free on January 12 and was ice free for the season on March 2. Ice-In, defined as the first day in fall or winter when Pratt Pond is entirely ice covered from a vantage point near the intersection of School Street and North Main Street, occurred on December 11. Volunteers also monitored stream temperature in Warren Brook and Mill River tributaries at Peppercorn Hill.

Respectfully Submitted,
Conservation Commission

Christine Scott, Chairperson
Mike Penko, Vice-Chairperson
Sandra Lajoie, Treasurer
Scott Heim, Member
Thomas Jango, Member
Alan Miano, Member
Marcella Stasa, Member
Mary Overholt, Associate member
David Pickart, Conservation Agent
Denise Smith, Administrative Assistant