

**CITY OF PORTSMOUTH, NEW HAMPSHIRE
CONSERVATION COMMISSION**



**MEETING MINUTES
WEDNESDAY, SEPTEMBER 9, 2026, 4 pm
City Hall Council Chambers, 1 Junkins Ave., Portsmouth**

For the Zoom recording:

<https://www.youtube.com/live/ddxmW9LxfsA?si=xWM3Wom-d5WXkdn4>

[Timestamp 8:20] Meeting called to order at 4:00 pm. Roll Call:

MEMBERS PRESENT: Chair Samantha Collins; Vice Chair Barbara McMillan, Talia Sperduto (zoom), Lynn Vaccaro, Stewart Sheppard, Alice Carey, Jessica Blasko.

MEMBERS ABSENT:, Brian Gibb, Oliver Chag

STAFF PRESENT: Kate Homet; Environmental Planner

I. APPROVAL OF MINUTES

1. August 12, 2026

On a motion by Blasko, seconded by Sheppard, the Commission voted 6-0 with one member abstaining to approve the August meeting minutes with the following corrections:

- a. *At minute 33, the word 'sufficient' should be changed to 'insufficient'.*
- b. *Under Other Business, the last two sentences in the second paragraph should be reversed as Member Vaccaro spoke first to a CIP idea and then Member Blasko spoke second.*

II. WETLAND CONDITIONAL USE PERMIT APPLICATIONS (NEW BUSINESS)

1. **[11:52] 400A Little Harbor Road
Assessor's Map 203 Lot 8
Society for the Protection of New Hampshire Forests, Owner
LU-26-68**

Kyle Murphy, representing SPNHF spoke to the application to replace the stairs on the south side of the buildings with stairs that comply with the building codes. The work takes place 72 ft from the wetlands. The plan is to place a 12x60" concrete pad on the already-disturbed land that is currently grass. There will be ¾" crushed stone under the stairs and the decking will include ¼" gaps for rain runoff.

The applicant requested waivers on the four stipulations in the Commission's memo because:

1. The work disturbs no natural vegetation; but the applicant plans to plant blueberry bushes.
2. The plan amends the 2020 stamped plan for the bathrooms at Creek Farm so does not need another signed/stamped plan.
3. Erosion control – silk fencing will be placed 10 ft. from the project.
4. Placement of placards interferes with the conserved, natural site as was the case with the trail work.

[16:40] Commission questions and comments addressing the waiver requests:

1. Macmillan asked where the blueberry bushes will be planted. Applicant said next to the existing ones. Applicant was asked to show the locations on the plan.
2. [19:44] Homet asked the applicant to note the signature and date of the work for the previous bathrooms project on the plan.
3. Applicant was also asked to show the erosion control silk fence on the plan.
4. [22:47] Blasko suggested that instead of placards along the wetlands boundary where they might not be seen, some kind of signage near the parking area or bathrooms would help remind visitors that they are in a protected area on the edge of prime wetlands. Applicant agreed to place educational information like what is included the kiosk at the trailhead.

[26:16] On a motion by Blasko, seconded by Carey, the Commission voted 7-0 to recommend approval of this application to the Planning Board with the following stipulations:

1. Applicant shall update the site plan prior to submission to the Planning Board to delineate approximate area of silt fencing, the location of the proposed four blueberry bushes, include a note on the plan with the information on who delineated the wetland on site, their NH CWS # and when it was delineated, and the approximate location for an educational sign in lieu of wetland placards.

2. Applicant shall include an educational sign as part of this project that includes educational wetland content and information on the sensitivity of the wetland and surround area.

2. **[29:14] 50 Whidden Street
Assessor's Map 102 Lot 66
Christopher Daniell, Owner
LU-26-15**

Colby Gamester representing applicant Daniell and Scott Boudreau spoke to the application to place limited (12x12') infill on the southeast corner of the garden area and to construct a 48 sf. cantilevered deck suspended 8-10' above ground, looking toward the pond. The applicant noted that the c. 1780 house is on a non-conforming lot that sits completely within the 100 foot buffer for South Mill Pond.

The plan was approved by the HDC on March 4, 2026. The house and brick gardens have existed for decades, the living shoreline is thriving and no changes are anticipated unless Conservation Commission recommends.

- The deck will be constructed so as to let water pass through,
- There is no demolition planned and no need to fill any excavation.
- There will be no alteration to the shoreline.
- The activity is limited to the existing building and patio.
- Best management practices will be applied to site cleanup and the silt sock around the patio perimeter.

[36:08] The applicant addressed elements of 1017.22-26:

.22 does not apply as there is no impact over 250 sf

.23 does not apply as there is no demolition

.24 does not apply as there is no impervious surface increase: the 48 sf deck is elevated and designed for water to pass through

.25 does not apply as the wetland buffer is enhanced

.26 does not apply as there is no shoreline impact so a shoreline plan is not included for the existing condition.

[37:59] The applicant addressed the six conditions:

1. The plan is suited to the use. The entire non-conforming, pre-existing property is within the 100 ft. buffer and therefore the plan limits the infill and ensures low impact.
2. There is no alternative site as the entire property is within the 100 ft. buffer
3. There is no adverse wetland impact – the existing drainage is unchanged and the brick patio and garden currently manage stormwater drainage effectively
4. There is no alteration to the natural vegetation, temporarily or permanently
5. The plan is for the least adverse impact. Design choices were made recognizing the property is within the buffer.
6. There will be no need to return the property to the natural vegetative state – that requirement is satisfied by avoidance.

[41:50] Blasko asked about the gravel shown in photos. Applicant replied that this is a result of 2024 DPW stormwater drainage work. A pipeline was placed to improve street flows to a catch basin and outfall pipe beyond the shoreline.

Blasko also asked about the large tree and whether trimming was expected. Property owner Daniell replied that he and his neighbor discussed the Norway maple and overhanging limbs with an arborist and plan to trim the drooping limbs that are a threat from falling and from insects getting onto the new deck below and into the applicant's house.

[46:10] Collins discussed the staff memo recommendations:

1. Asked applicant to delineate the silt sock around the brick edge on the plan.
2. Asked applicant to note on the plan that DPW should inspect the pipeline post-construction to make sure the plastic drainpipe was not damaged.
3. Suggested placing wetlands markers on the shoreline corners of the property.

[49:07] Macmillan complimented the applicant on minimizing the impact of the work on the wetlands buffer. She noted the attractive garden and lawn and reminded the applicant that the use of fertilizers and pesticides is forbidden in wetlands because the runoff to the pond could promote algae blooms.

[50:14] On a motion by Blasko seconded by [?], the Commission voted 7-0 [51:45] to recommend approval of this application to the Planning Board with the following stipulations:

Prior to submission to the Planning Board:

1. *Applicant shall denote on plans where silt sock will be placed prior to the start of construction.*
2. *Include a note on the plan set stating that property owner is responsible for scheduling a post-construction inspection with the Department of Public Works for the adjacent stormwater pipe within City property. If found damaged, applicant will be responsible for repair. Carey commented on the quality and clarity of the plan and the applicant's recognition they are working in a sensitive place. Collins reminded the applicant to limit the use of heavy equipment.*

III. OTHER BUSINESS

1. **[52:11] Capital Improvement Plan – Requests**
 - a) **Conservation Fund**
 - b) **Vernal Pool Inventory Update**
 - c) **Jones Avenue Shoreline Stability Project**
 - d) Vaccaro suggested a 'swap shop' at the Recycling Center might be incorporated in the Zero Waste Plan.

Additional Items:

- **Joint work session with Planning Board**
- **Wetland plantings**

Homet detailed the CIP requests being made by the Sustainability Committee:

- Developing a Zero Waste Plan for the city
- Electrifying a portion of the fleet
- Feasibility study for micro-transit
- Funding solar projects on city properties.

Conservation Fund – The goal is to set aside \$1 million for the purchase of conservation land. The fund was depleted with the purchase of the Cavaretta "100 Acre

Woods” site. The current CIP calls for \$500,000 in FY 29. Commissioners recommended using the current CIP language to retain that request and to make \$500,000 allocations every two years for the next 10 years.

Vernal Pool Study -- Homet commented that she started a list of new locations in April and May and that the Vernal Pool study might be undertaken internally by the new wetland scientist. Placement in the CIP keeps the project top-of-mind for the City Council.

[55:47] Jones Avenue Landfill Shoreline Stability -- Vaccaro asked about zooming out from a baseline design and feasibility shoreline study to look at opportunities and challenges. **[1:05:47-1:15:50] The Commission is concerned about the stability and vulnerability of the shoreline as an urgent public health issue.** A study would provide the basis for funding including grants such as the Climate Impact Grant. Macmillan asked if the water and landfill monitoring by EPA/DES has expressed any concerns. Homet asked what consultant and other costs might be included in the study and Vaccaro noted chemical testing, Tom Balister’s soil erosion test. Homet wondered if EPA/DES might come out to do a no cost quick assessment. Macmillan also wondered whether sea level rise is causing increased erosion and if shoreline reconstruction is needed to prevent a collapse, also any stabilizing of the landfill cap. [1:15:15] Commission suggested a working group to collect available city information and determine what more is needed. Group includes Blasko, Vaccaro. [1:16:51] Vaccaro offered to contact a few DES colleagues for more information.

[57:14] Public Undeveloped Land Assessment (PULA) -- Carey asked about updating the 2010 Public Undeveloped Land Assessment (PULA) and committee members agreed it would be helpful to have the information in one document: addressing recreational ideas from the Recreation Study, municipal building/housing uses, more cemetery land, access to the Rail Trail and noting other paths (Sheppard suggested this as an Eagle Scout project as one of the trails was created as such a project.) Homet commented the updated PULA could collaborate with other departments to detail priorities for open land over the next 10 years and would show wildlife corridors, conservation restrictions. Planning & Sustainability Dept has undertaken weekly checks on conservation lands and open space, noting GPS coordinates for paths/trails on city maps. The Study update would show Conservation Commission engagement in ‘conserving what we want to conserve.

[1:28:57] The Commission discussed ideas for CIP projects for the next fiscal year. After a discussion, on a motion by Blasko, seconded by Macmillan, the Commission voted 6-0 to submit CIP Citizen Requests for a Vernal Pool Inventory Update and continued funding for the Conservation Land Acquisition fund. The Commission will utilize the existing language for these existing CIP items and for the Conservation Fund, the language will be altered to request \$500,000 every two years for the next ten years starting in FY28.

[1:30:39] On a motion by Blasko, seconded by (X?) the Commission voted 6-0 to allow

working groups of the Commission to draft and submit two additional CIP items on the Commission's behalf, an item for an update to the PULA study and funding for a Jones Avenue Shoreline study.

Joint Conservation Commission/Planning Board work session on Article 10.

Homet reported the meeting is postponed from September to October 15 at 6 pm if quorum is available. She will forward the Planning Board's edits to Commission members and send the Commission's edits to the Planning Board in advance of the work session.

Wetland Buffer Plantings – Homet reported that the plantings are doing well and that the City's new wetlands scientist is interested in the project. The Department has budgeted to purchase more plants for planting next year.

IV. ADJOURNMENT

[1:44:44] The meeting adjourned at 5:40 p.m.