

Received 7/9/2025

10:28 AM Jodi Moore, ATC

Town of Durham Conservation Commission Regular Meeting Minutes

July 8, 2025

- 1) Chair Augur called the meeting to order at 7. Members present: Augur, Cordes, DeVito, Dudko, LaFlamme, Meigs, Miller, Paskiewicz
- 2) Approval of agenda: LaFlamme moved for the agenda as presented, Cordes seconded; all ayes.

3) Public comment

Steve Akerley reiterated concerns addressed in a letter he had previously remitted about access road possibly closing. He asked for the pits/potholes on the road running to the flying field to be repaired. Akerley expressed interest in understanding what could be done to fix this situation, as the flying clubs felt 'threatened' by last meeting's letter regarding bobolinks. He noted also that they too have suffered from vandalism over the years, and have put time and energy into the maintenance of the area.

Chuck Imbergamo spoke in agreement with Akerley's comments about closing the road.

Robert Horn seconds what Akerley said about field access, noting that members of public drive down to watch the planes as a form of recreation, on Sunday mornings especially, and he believes that people would not come down if the road is closed.

It was noted for the record that four of the five signers of the letter were present in person (Vance Gilbert not present).

4) Old Business

a) White Farm field protection project

Public Works' indicated timing was late autumn, so Augur noted that getting clarity from them regarding the potential project for the September meeting should allow time to seek alternatives if necessary.

LaFlamme asked if repairs should be made to the road in the interim. Augur noted he saw little sense in investing money in an access road that the fencing plan discussed and agreed previously would cut off, and that if some

vehicular traffic is transgressing into the field alongside the roadway, the marginal additional damage is small relative to all the existing damage that needs to be repaired but that won't be repaired until we are confident the field is protected from additional damage.

b) Otte Meadow trespass

Augur shared a communication from the Resident State Trooper that the tools/equipment/shelter have been removed, and asked if the Commission wanted to pursue fines, community service, etc. Dudko noted the First Selectman had suggested leveraging the Juvenile Review Board (JRB). General consensus that the JRB method was agreeable. Devito said he was okay with the JRB route, provided that the transgressor plant new trees because of him cutting down semi-mature trees. Cordes noted a plan for rehabilitating the area, not just planting, but how to deal with invasives, etc., should be our recommendation to the JRB. Agreement was reached that a Special meeting be held on site to see the damage first hand and reach final conclusion on the recommendation to the First Selectman. Dudko also noted there is an additional incursion from another parcel, including a sign posted that he believe is on the town parcel. This will be looked at at the Special Meeting as well. Augur will poll the members to find the best meeting time for the most Commissioners.

Dudko shared he had gone to the studio in Westbrook where the First Selectman records update videos for the citizens, to discuss the volunteer initiatives that have improved the trails at Otte, as well as the unfortunate subsequent spate of trespassing that has occurred. The air date of that video is unclear.

c) Conservation table at Bobolink Festival

Augur noted he has secured a volunteer to man a table at the Bobolink Festival at the Durham Community Center that Annyta Vizard previously spoke to the Commission about. Dudko noted he still has some printed materials from another similar setting he has attended. Meigs noted she will be in attendance for another organization, so that if any questions arise that need additional expertise, the volunteer can direct the public to her.

5) New Business

a) Hunting Lottery Program review, next lottery planning

Augur noted he had shared materials related to the lottery with commissioners and asked if there were any modifications. Cordes asked if there was clarity around repercussions of not adhering to the terms & conditions and Augur said there was a line about failure to adhere may impact future eligibility. No other comments, the application process will be opened and run until July 23rd, with the drawing to be held before the end of the month.

b) Durham's Plan of Conservation and Development (PoCD)

Augur commented that he had sent a link to the current PoCD to Commissioners, as he had first heard of the intent to invite Conservation to a joint meeting with the Planning & Zoning Commission at the most recent P&Z meeting. Augur asked that members review the current doc and come to the next Conservation meeting ready to discuss ideas. To facilitate the discussion, Augur asked that each member send their ideas directly to him, which will be collated and shared prior to the next meeting, so that the Commission may most effectively prepare to provide input in a cohesive and organized fashion at the joint meeting. Commissioners shared verbally some ideas, for example, open space acquisitions, including a map of target parcels.

6) Communications

A letter from Stevan Akerley, Robert Horn, Paul Stott, Vance Gilbert, and Chuck Imbergamo was circulated to Commissioners and is attached as an appendix to these minutes for the public record.

Marilyn Keurajian sent in an email suggesting toxic run off from a pile of old utility poles at White Farm is detrimental and that they are not the best plan for preventing vehicular access.

Jackie Sicilian sent in an email noting the Japanese knotweed problem on the David Road parcel has grown significantly and that something has to be done or it's going to get worse and worse.

7) June 10, 2025 Meeting minutes garnered no corrections nor comments and thus are approved as presented.

8) Cordes moved adjournment, Meigs seconded, all ayes at 7:40

Appendix:

Chairman Durham Conservation Commission

July 1, 2025

Dear Mr. Philip Augur:

As members of The Blacksheep Squadron and Flying Aces model airplane clubs, who have your permission to fly at the designated Flying Field Area, we would like to have this letter placed on the July 8th Conservation Committee Meeting Agenda for discussion.

We understand the Commission received a letter of concern regarding the Bobolink birds nesting in the White Farm Open Spaces recreational area. We are aware of the Boblinks and do our best not to disturb the birds. The fact that the Bobolinks have returned to nest in the field for decades is a testament to our awareness and concern for the birds, together with the July 15th mowing restriction placed by the Commission several years ago.

We also understand that there is discussion regarding the potential closing of the access road which runs east and west. Any such closure would significantly impact our club activities, which we have been practicing by permit for decades. We feel our activities have been consistent with the intended open space public use of the area since it was turned over to the Town. In addition, many Durham residents also use the subject road, and they would be adversely impacted by its closure.

We would like to participate in any discussions regarding the road closure so we can come up with a solution acceptable to all concerned. That said, we would like to ask that the Commission temporarily table the issue of any road closure until we can understand the issues and come to a mutually beneficial solution.

The members of the Blacksheep Squadron and Flying Aces clubs have consistently been good stewards of the area, and we are open to discussions on these topics and any suggestions the Conservation Commission may have.

Sincerely,

Stevan Akerley, Blacksheep Squadron, Durham, CT
Robert Horn, Blacksheep Squadron, Durham, CT

Paul Stott, Flying Aces Club, Shelton, CT
Vance Gilbert, Flying Aces Club, Andover, MA
Chuck Imbergamo, Flying Aces Club, Madison, CT

cc: First Selectman – Brendan Rea
Public Works Director – John Jenkins