

**Town of Durham Conservation Commission**  
**Regular Meeting Minutes**

Sept. 9, 2025

1. Chair Augur called the meeting to order at 7 PM. Members present: Augur, Dudko, Miller, Paskiewicz, Cordes, DeVito.
2. Approval of agenda: Dudko moved the agenda as presented; Cordes seconded, all ayes.
3. Public comment:
  - a) Steven Akerley highlighted discussion topics from a meeting he'd had with the First Selectman and others (the summary doc he supplied via email is attached at end).
  - b) David Kehoss of Northford commented his town uses a gate and they have more problems with ATVs than Durham (open space parcel off Rt. 22 near Firelite manufacturing / Northford Ice Pavilion). Therefore, he believes the gate won't do much with automobile issues.
4. New Business
  - a) White Farm Use Application - Durham Public Library: Cordes moved approval of the application as presented, DeVito seconded, all ayes.
  - b) Otte Meadow Sign: Miller suggested adding "managed by conservation commission". The sign will be put behind the existing poles that delineate the parking area on 4x4 posts. Discussion of adding a QR code which will link to Conservation's web page. Suggestion made to have font and color harmonious with existing signage at Curtis Woodlands.
  - c) Durham's Plan of Conservation and Development:

Augur reminded Commission of the process – that this is a doc all towns maintain, and must update each decade, and that the state has a PoCD as well. The Commission will attend a joint meeting with P&Z upcoming, and the goal tonight is to seek areas of agreement on priorities for the doc.

Dudko had provided written feedback, so Augur asked him to step through his comments.

Dudko's first bullet was about Durham's water rating - last updated in 2016 and it's unknown if water rating has been updated, Dudko asks if this information been changed or assessed since 2016.

Next bullet is about Washington trail - Augur says how he believes they should edit Washington trail spots to make them pop, describing signage he saw in western Pennsylvania that was far more prominent—not all the markers, just a couple along Rt. 17 (triangle at intersection with 79, and further north).

Next bullet is data about state grant program - Durhams data is now 30 years old, open space savings and other information, unknown if the data has been updated. Dudko says if it has not been done, it should be considered updating and presenting this information in the PoCD meeting.

Augur noted he'd requested information from the assessor's office to look at the acreage of various categories, and he will share a summary of that info with the Commission. Augur shared that in reviewing North Branford's PoCD as compared to Durham he feels the town is in good shape in terms of land that is either town open space, Connecticut state forest, or has had the development rights sold, most notably being the Greenbacker and Wimler Farms, which help establish the agricultural feel of the town as you head toward Main Street along Rt 77 from Guilford or coming in Rt. 68 from Wallingford.

Durham has a balance of \$11,800 in the account that was established for open space acquisition, and no funds have been added to that account since 2020, previous goal was to establish that account and add money annually, but this has not been continued when budgets were tight.

The discussion coalesced around a couple points:

- The Commission believes if a developer pays the fee-in-lieu, rather than the Conservation Easement set aside, that money should go directly into the Open Space Acquisition account.
- The Commission would like to be specific about priority parcels for potential acquisition or other conservation options, being parcels that are contiguous to the Town's larger existing open space parcels, as well as those sizeable parcels highlighted in the Private Recreation table.

It was also noted that the Maiden Lane American Farm Land Trust parcel should be noted on the table which is on page 75/76 of the current PoCD.

## 5. Communications

- a) Ryan McLean, Chair of Durham's Agriculture Commission, submitted a letter which was read into the record (attached)
- b) Augur reported that a resident was directed to him after they reached out to Town Hall enquiring about horseback riding on open space trails. Augur shared the Open Space regulations with them, noted it is not a prohibited activity, so they could go for it.
- c) Pam Hogarth remitted a note about White Farm maintenance (attached).
- d) Thanks from Mac Parsons to the Commission for working on encroachment

## 6. Old Business

- a) Side Hill: Augur reported he and the Chair of P&Z had consulted with the town attorney regarding a possible structural encroachment onto Town open space land. The attorney sent a letter to the owner asking they document that the item in question is not on town land. The attorney received a response that rather than have the piece surveyed etc., they would instead deconstruct the item. Augur drove by and deconstruction is well underway, but not complete, a dumpster and equipment were on site. When it is wrapped up, he believes it would be good to put sign on where open space land is so any new residents in that parcel cannot claim ignorance and try to use town land as their own.
- b) Otte Meadow trespass: Internet posts were made about this issue. Augur asks if they should speak on it or leave it be. Dudko and Miller state how not all factors are being considered, but that it can be a losing battle to sway opinions,

so to leave it alone. Dudko will send a follow up to the first Selectman to see what has progressed relative to the commission's restoration recommendations. Also, Dudko reported that two boulders were placed to the side of the gate on Side Mill to prevent ATVs trespassing on the property.

7. Approval of minutes

- a) July 8, 2025 meeting minutes garnered no corrections nor comments and thus are approved as presented
  - b) July 14, 2025 special meeting minutes amendment: clarify the size of trees by stating they were averaging 50 feet in height. Approved with added addition
8. Cordes moved adjournment at 7:59, Miller seconded, all ayes.

## **ATTACHMENTS**

Stevan Akerly doc:

Meeting with Brendan Rea, at Durham Town Hall, on August 22, 2025, at 10:30 to 11:00 AM.

**Subject: Proposed Closure of East West Access Road at Whites Farm Open Area**

**Attendees:**

Brendan Rea	Stevan Akerley	David Kehoss
Jane Greebel	Sue White	

**Outline of Subjects Covered:**

Primary purpose of meeting to Discuss the Proposed Closure of the East West Access Road at Whites Farm Open Area

**Brief Historical Review of Whites Farm Area**

110 acres procured by grants; Federal (\$16,500), State (\$19,250), Town (\$19,250).

To be used for Public Recreation "Open Space Land".

"... to be easily and readily accessible for public access".

Who's Using the Road for access to the "Open Area".

Hunters, Walkers, Out of Town Visitors, Model Airplane Clubs, CATO Rocket Club, Bird Watchers, and many others.

The road has been primary access to the center of the Whites Farm Open Area for decades.

Model airplane enthusiasts have been using the field since 1966 (Flying Aces Pinkham Field)

Gating of the road would eliminate free access to all visitors, and access by combination lock on a gate would require more than a hundred people to have the combination. Not practical or secure. In addition this would violate ***"easily and readily accessible for public access"***.

Review and Discussion of the ***"Plan of Conservation and Development, Town of Durham"***. Specifically;

7.11. Municipal Recreational Land

7.11.1. The White Farm The town purchased the 110-acre White Farm in 1965. This parcel augments the existing state-owned wetland area of Durham Meadows, and provides the town with an extremely valuable recreational site. ***The site is used for model airplane flying, dog obedience events, hunting, fishing and several other uses. The steep slope off of Maple Avenue is used for novice hang-gliding, tobogganing and sledding. A portion of this parcel is used for temporary parking during fair events***

The "Deed Agreement" set forth in Durham land records Book 71 Page 387 which requires the property be used as defined in Conn. General Statute 7-131d. Such Deed Agreement shall require the property be made available to the general public for appropriate recreational purposes the maintenance of which recreational access shall be the responsibility of the Grantee.

Review and Discussion of the DEEP Grant activities for Open Spaces and Green ways. One of the towns planning and zoning employees is familiar with the states grant process for open spaces and should be consulted .

Vandalism and damage to the natural environment by off road vehicles, is a recognized problem. It was noted that the Conservation Commission is choosing to take an expensive, inconvenient, restrictive, and ineffective approach to limiting vandalism of the fields by off road vehicles. The Commission is



considering fencing or using telephone poles to line the edges of the fields and gate the access road, thus restricting access by the citizens.

A less expensive solution would be to use trail Cams to monitor the wild life, which would also serve to document vandalism. All the Commission would need to do is to monitor the trail cam videos and confront the perpetrators. It is recognized that the town has failed in the past, for various reasons, to confront the perpetrators, even when license plates were known. It is time to do the right thing, even if it is difficult, to protect the open spaces, instead of restricting legitimate use of these open spaces by the tax paying citizens.

The Suggestion to use access off of Route 68 was discussed briefly, but found to be unsatisfactory, for the following reasons;

1. The area is all overgrown with brush.
2. It is a wetlands area and would be more difficult to maintain than the current access road.
3. The road would be longer than the current access road, and would disturb more land area.
4. It is gated and would limit citizens access for the same reasons gating the current access road would be undesirable.
5. The access to the gate would be dangerous as it would cause cars to stop on a busy high traffic route prior to turning onto the approach. This could pose a high risk for high speed traffic accidents.

#### **Reference Information:**

##### **1. Moultrie Edge Trail Cams**

<https://www.moultrie.com/>

See Moultrie Edge Trail Camera >

Product Name	Price	Availability
Moultrie Mobile Edge 3 Cellular...	\$149.98	In store
Moultrie Mobile Edge 3 Cellular...	\$99.99	In store
Moultrie Edge Solar Panel...	\$149.99	In store
Moultrie Edge 2 Trail Camera - 2...	\$79.99	In store
Moultrie Mobile Edge 3 Cellular...	\$99.99	In store
Moultrie Mobile Edge 3 Cellular...	\$149.98	In store
Moultrie Mobile Edge Cellular Tra...	\$103.97	In store

Cabela's  
<https://www.cabelas.com>

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2. <https://www.basspro.com/l/moultrie-shop>
3. **Multiple States are now using cameras** to apprehend speeders, red light runners, and for tolls.
4. **DEEP OSWA Grant Application, pages 3-4, Public Access Compliance.....**
5. **Whites Farm in 1974 photo** - The picture below is White's Farm in the background. This is what the property looked like and this is what the Town fathers promised to maintain it as.





I grew up in Middlefield/Durham



Jim Rossi · Feb 16 ·

Main Street, 1974. Merrium Manufacturing at the bottom.



#### Future Discussion Topics

1. **Harvesting Hay** off of the fields has not worked well For several reasons;
  - a. First harvest date allowed by the Conservation Commission is too late for good hay.
  - b. Fields are badly rutted and cause problems for the harvest equipment.
  - c. Some of the Fields have been allowed to go wild and are no longer viable for hay.
  - d. The fields need to be brush hogged and allowed to revert back to "Emergent Grasslands" suitable for haying and recreational use.
2. **Trash Barrels** should be positioned in the appropriate locations so that trash can be properly collected several times per week. Presently responsible citizens are having to cart out other peoples trash, which is not only inconvenient, but also UNSANITARY ! The Covid Pandemic was used as the excuse to remove the barrels, but the pandemic is long over, lets get on with regular sanitary practices.

Randy McLean letter:

August 20, 2025

Durham Conservation Commission

Dear Members of the Conservation Commission,

The Durham Agriculture Commission is writing to you in strong support of continuing the haying of White Farm as a priority management practice.

Durham prides itself on its agricultural heritage, highlighted by the hosting of the largest agricultural fair in the state and its dedication to maintaining farmland. Haying is not only part of this history, but it remains essential to the stewardship of the land. Regular haying helps to maintain healthy grasslands, suppress invasive species, and prevent the encroachment of woody growth. These practices protect the ecological value of the fields while also sustaining their agricultural character.

For these reasons, we recommend that haying at White Farm continue to be treated as a management priority to preserve the land's agricultural function and ecological integrity.

Thank you for your careful consideration of this matter.

Respectfully,  
Randy McLean  
Chair, Durham Agriculture Commission

Hogarth email:

Dear Phil and Selectmen,

With the dry weather I was able to walk the perimeter of Whites Farm this morning having not done so for months. I was alarmed that the giant ragweed, purple loosestrife, other large weeds and many sapling trees are rapidly taking over the large west field. It has gotten much more overgrown since last year and shows no sign of slowing. Please move developing and implementing a plan for reclaiming and then maintaining the meadows to the top of the Conservation Commission's priority list. Addressing the vandalism that plagues Whites is important, but not more important than taking care of the land itself.

Whites Farm is loved and used on a daily basis by many community members. It needs a plan that embraces its multiple year-round uses, from playing in the stream in summer, hunting in the fall, and snowshoeing in the winter to birders, model airplane enthusiasts, rocketeers and walkers in all seasons. Please ensure that this town treasure continues to be a viable space for the bobolinks and all the people who value it.

Sincerely,  
Pam Hogarth