

Durham Conservation Commission

Regular Meeting Minutes - Revised

Dec. 9, 2025; 7:00 pm

Durham Town Hall, 22nd Floor Meeting Room

1. Temporary Chair LaFlamme called the meeting to order at 7.
Members present: Augur, Paskiewicz, Cordes, DeVito, Lawlor, LaFlamme, Dudko, Miller, Meigs.
2. Election of officers: Augur nominated for chair by Dudko, Meigs seconded. No other nominations. Dudko nominated for vice chair by Meigs, Augur seconded. No other nominations. LaFlamme nominated for secretary by Augur, Meigs seconded. No other nominations. All officers installed.
3. Approval of agenda: LaFlamme moved, Miller seconded. All ayes.
4. Public comment: Stevan Akerely read email he'd remitted containing observations he collated related to Whites Farm. [See appendix.]
5. New business:
 - A. Sarah Atwell, chair of America 250 Committee for White Farm application. Having an encampment in 2026, looking to use some space from Whites Farms near the fairgrounds for limited parking. LaFlamme motioned to approve use of Whites Farm on Oct. 16, 17, 18 per application, Dudko seconded. All ayes.
 - B. Goats vs Invasives. Augur had goats to clear parts of his private property and thought it might be something the Commission would like to consider for areas where the pilot spraying program had been tried. Augur said an example location might be on the side of Howd Road. Meigs noted that there is research that some goats will like knotweed and some won't. Augur stated that the outfit he worked with had a variety goat breeds and the taste may vary by breed. Miller and Dudko expressed some skepticism. But consensus was there is enough interest to discuss further at a future meeting, with the farmers in attendance to answer questions.
 - C. Augur explained this agenda item was added as Dec. 19 is the due date for the Commission's proposed budget, to feed into the Board of Finance's process. Efforts were made to access the new

system the Town is using, but not enough clarity was available, so a special meeting will be called to focus on the Budget with access to the system on a shared screen for all to see.

- D. LaFlamme moved the 2026 meeting dates to be approved as presented, Dudko seconded. All ayes.
 - The Commission moved to agenda item 7e so the members of the public in attendance for that topic did not have to wait. Dudko commented on the "telephone game" where the Commission's summer recommendations did not wind up fully/clearly relayed to the parties responsible for restoration. Augur thanked the members of the public for showing up so that clarity could be achieved. The remaining actions:
 - 13 hickory stumps still need cages around them so that when they resprout, deer will not be able to browse the new growths. Cordes explained that eventually the sprouts will be tall enough to be out of reach of deer and selective pruning can achieve hickory repopulation in the damaged area. The Commission will be the ones to take the fencing down when the trees are deemed tall enough. 6 foot studded T post on the Tractor Supply Website were shown so everyone was clear on the specifications. 6' long, driven in 12 to 18 inches, leaving 4.5 to 5 feet exposed to support 5' tall fencing (chicken wire style) in a circle around each stump, the circle three times the diameter of the stump.
 - Remaining debris (plywood, bottles, etc.) to be removed (shows up easier now that foliage is off the vegetation).
 - The limbs on the larger downed trees to be loped off those trees and piled, which creates animal habitat.
 - Miller motioned for the commission to contribute up to \$250 for the fencing, Dudko seconded. All ayes. Augur said he would donate old fence posts of this style to the initiative.
6. Communications: Town of Durham applied and was approved for by Inland Wetlands and Planning and Zoning for road widening 12 feet for seven parking spots on Birch Mill. Dudko says it should be noted that the town should've spoken to the Conservation before, given the provisions of the the town charter.
- Augur shared that he had followed up with Inland Wetlands regarding CACIWIC that Cordes had asked about at a prior

meeting. Cordes said it should be considered spending budget money on this. Item therefore tabled for the Special Meeting.

7. Old business:

- A. Bimblers Bluff: They sent a thank you and around \$250 to the Friends of Durham Conservation account. Augur will send a follow up noting that some rocks still have blue paint on them, as reported by Meigs.
- B. Durham Library sent a thank you and stated they had a successful star gazing
- C. The RFP for haying at Howd Road is up on the town website with responses due early Feb and will be discussed at Feb. Conservation meeting. RFP posting was shared with Ag Commission, as well as Deerfield, Triangle A, and Russell Robinson, the most recent haying operations who've worked with the Town.
- D. John Jenkins had reached out to Augur to review the plans and they were on the same page regarding implementation. Regarding White's Miller made a motion that up to \$1,000 be spent brush hogging at White's, seconded by DeVito. Discussion ensued. With uncertainty around budget and scope of work it was agreed the topic should be tackled at Special Meeting when greater clarity on budget is achieved, so Miller withdrew his motion.
- F. Meigs saw some truck tracks and a log that had been across the trail had been moved. Thinks it was likely the town crew. Augur will send an email to ask if it was the towns doing just to confirm it was authorized access.

8. Approval of minutes: October 14, 2025 meeting minutes garnered no corrections nor comments and thus are approved as presented.

9. Lawlor moved for adjournment, Cordes seconded, all ayes at 8:15.

Appendix Public Comment from Stevan Akerley:

Observations of Whites Farm Open Spaces Area

The following observations are from many conversations with Town of Durham, CT, Citizens, and others that use the Whites Farm Open Spaces Area, for recreational purposes.

1. Reference - email from Pam Hogarth (Citizen), August 17, 2025, in Minutes of Conservation Commission 9/9/2025. Title; ***“Whites Farm Maintenance”***.
2. Reference - email from Randy Mclean (Chair Durham Agriculture Commission), August 20, in Minutes of Conservation Commission 9/9/2025. Subject; ***“... management priority to preserve the land’s agricultural function and ecological integrity.”***.
3. Multiple Field Walkers (reference casual conversations with Durham Citizens and others) are actively maintaining trails around the perimeter of the fields, using their own (Donations) money to maintain walking trails, that the Conservation Commission should be maintaining. Letting the fields go wild is not conservation.
4. Multiple Birders (reference Connecticut Bobolink and Wildlife Festival in Durham, July 12, 2025). Have observed Bobolinks only in the field south of the Access Road, and in areas where there is “Emergent Grass Land”.
5. Blue Birds, and Swallows have been observed catching flying insects in the air space above the grasslands and mowed fields. Butterflies have been observed in the Southern areas of the grassland fields. The wildlife need grass lands and fields.
6. Multiple conversations with people with farming experience have observed that 2 of the larger fields (West and North) have been allowed to go wild, and are no longer useful as fields for harvesting hay. They need to be brush hogged so that they can revert back to “Emergent Grass Land” that pasture birds like. (Bobolinks, Meadow Larks, etc.). Given the current condition of the fields this may actually take several years.
7. In order for Hay to be of value it must be harvested at the right time period, when it is at its peak nutritional value, usually in May to June time period. The arbitrary time period of after July 15, is way too late and the harvested “Hay” is of little value, except to use as STRAW / MULCH. Not as much demand/value.
8. The past practice of trying to use haying to maintain the fields as grass land has not worked for several years in a row. Thus the fields have gone wild into scrub brush land, and are no longer suitable for haying.
9. Successful haying was apparently done at Howd Road/Johnson for an income of \$500. The date and location of this haying activity is not clear, yet, but may have been in Fiscal Year 2022-23. Haying (Straw ?) harvest activity has been observed at the fields adjacent to Deerfield Farm at the intersection of Pent Road, Tri Mountain Road, Parmelee Hill Rd. in the late Summer of 2025.(Durham Open Spaces, Curtis Woodlands, and Pent Road).
10. The information in the following 2 items (11-12) comes from a Freedom Of Information (FOI) Request for cost and income for the Conservation Committee, in order to understand the actual costs and income from activities.
11. The Budget Reports for the Deerfield Farm Lease shows an income as follows;
 - a. FY23/24 \$ 6,213.48
 - b. FY 24/25 \$ 6338.88
 - c. FY 25/26 \$1,600.56 (as of 10/17)
 - d. **But, All These Funds are reserved for maintenance and repair of the barn.**

12. The Budget for the Conservation Commission Shows that there is a surplus of funds each year that could have been used for Whites Farm Open Spaces Area Maintenance, as follows;
- FY 2022/23 Original Approp. \$ 21,550.00, Available \$ 13,830.15
 - FY 2023/24 Original Approp. \$10,825.00, Available \$ 3,601.48.
 - FY 2024/25 Original Approp. \$ 10,825.00, Spent \$ 4,747.56, Returned remainder (\$6K)
 - FY 2025/26 Original Approp. \$ 10,800.00, Available \$ 9,710.71 (October, 2025).
13. It would seem that ***IF*** the Conservation Commission really cared about the “Endangered Grass Land Birds” (mentioned 4&5 above), they should brush hog the West and North fields this Fall, so they can become Emergent Grass Lands next Spring. Thus expanding and fostering the habitat for the endangered birds that they claim to care so much about. Also see Pam Hogarth’s, and Randy McLean email letters in the CC minutes for Sept. (9/9/25).
14. Recommend The Conservation Commission Create an ***Action Plan immediately***, to include;
- Brush hogging of the West and North fields this fall (2025), so they can revert to “Emergent Grass Lands” next spring (2026), in support of the observations of Pam Hogarth, and recommendation by Randy Mclean (in 1 and 2 above). Also, in support of the “Birders”, and the annual Bobolink Festival.
 - Any field that has not been hayed (harvested), should be brush hogged in the fall, every year, to quote; “...***preserve the land’s agricultural function and ecological integrity.***”. (See 2 above).
 - It is observed that the Field South of the Access Road has been brush hogged by the Durham Fair Association, and has not been hayed, this has been done for several years, and should continue.
 - The “Walking Paths” of Whites Farm should be named and maintained by the Conservation Commission as a part of their regular duties of maintenance. These paths should be identified in Open Spaces Maps as a regular part of the Conservation Commission duties.
 - An Annual Accounting of the Conservation Commission Budget (\$10,800 this year) should be detailed and reported on at the first meeting of the Conservation Commission in the following fiscal year (May/June), with courtesy copy to the Board of Selectmen, Commission Members and Interested citizens, without having to request via FOI.
 - Make a motion, second, discuss, vote ***Required*** to show that Conservation Commission really cares about Maintaining Whites Farm Open Spaces Area.
 - The wild uncut brush in the North Field also poses a fire hazard and is a potential liability for the town and citizen safety.

In support of 14a, 14b, 14f, above, I have received verbal quotes that suggest the Field North of the East - West Access Road can be brush-hogged for \$500, or less. Make a Motion and VOTE to do the right th