

Received 7/16/26
9:02 AM Jodi Moore, ATC

Town of Durham Conservation Commission

Regular Meeting Minutes

July 14, 2026

- 1) Augur called the meeting to order at 7 PM. Members present: Augur, Cordes, Devito, Dudko, LaFlamme, Lawlor, Meigs, Paskiewicz.
- 2) Approval of agenda: LaFlamme moved, Lawlor seconded. Meigs requested "Mount Pisgah" be added as C under Old Business and "Public Trust" be added as E under New business. Motioners agreed. All ayes to approve amended agenda.
- 3) Public comment – Augur noted before Public Comment began that the Commission's September meeting will be focused on White Farm and held at that location. He also late reminded folks who were less familiar with these meetings that Public Comment is an opportunity for people to share their comments, but not for a back-and-forth discussion with the Commission.

Sue White, Durham:

White Farm was a working farm and she recalls when representatives of the town shook her father's hand and told him it would be maintained to farming best practices. But now haying is forced to be delayed til mid-July when the crop has lost value. Why are we "worshipping" the bobolink, a bird that is not endangered. Nor is it the only bird on the parcel: hawks, bald eagles, and kestrels – birds of prey – hunt in the area, including following after tractors/mowers. Swallows also follow mowers feeding on insects kicked up by the activity. Mowing benefits the masses. Repeal the July 15th mowing date. Joe Greenbacker did a great job mowing until he was stopped.

J. Dalo, Durham:

Love the new sign at the corner of David and Parmelee Hill. Regarding the David Road field, there is section that used to be mowed is no longer being mowed. He wishes this area would be mowed.

Sharan Delinger:

Am a member of the Mattebeseck Audobon group and will read Michael Good's letter (see appendix).

Chris Grice, Middlefield:

Will read Bill McNee's letter (see appendix).

Annyta Vizard, Durham:

Bobolinks are not the only ground nesting birds on site. Been into birding 9 years now. Birds are adaptable to the mowing. Fledgings and chicks then are likely the only things that were killed. Mother always bought from local farmers—if it's good enough for their family, good enough for ours. Discussed Strickland Farm [Middlefield parcel, not Durham]. Read Ona McLaughlin's letter (see appendix).

Jeff Kohan, Wallingford:

I am Vice Chair of planning and zoning in Wallingford. I've previously asked farmer to pause mowing on Wallingford open space to adjust timing for bobolinks. They are hopeful this area will become a bobolink sanctuary. [*"Field #3" on Tamarack Swamp Road in Wallingford's Tyler Mill parcel.*] Photographed male bobolink in White Farm area north of the laneway, and returned after mowing and saw males with food searching for nests. Far west side has never seen bobolinks there. Cornell, one of the biggest bird advocacy groups, lists bobolinks at orange tipping point, so it is threatened. Thanks Commission for taking care of the main area south of the lane.

Tom Kelly, Guilford:

Retired from Regional Water Authority. This [*gesturing to the Curtis Woodlands surroundings*] is where it all happens. Member of the Conn. Butterfly Association, want to highlight two Fritillary butterfly species that are on Conn. Wildlife's Species of Greatest Conservation Need list. If you drive around are you having to clean your windshield? No, insects are less plentiful. Knock on effect up the food chain. Ospreys are starving in their nests. Thinks the definition of Conservation is not being followed. Monadnock Audobon would pay farmers to delay mowing—let's face it, that is what it's all about. [*Did not read, but asked Faith Novella's letter be entered into the record (see appendix).*]

Susan Lundgren, Durham:

Am at White Farm 3 times per week. Addressing premature mowing at whites farm. Short sighted decision jeopardizes previous Durham planning. Disregard for the environment, asks for 1) act of binding protection, 2) decouple from budgeting concerns, 3) mandate oversight for the parcel.

Ken Judson, Durham:

Am a dog walker at White Farm, there was a reason that the farm isn't meant to be mowed before July 15th. Farmer at Guida's parcel *[Middletown]* have gotten the message. *[Did not read, but asked Steven Booker's letter be entered into the record (see appendix).]*

Jane Eddleston, Durham:

Moved to Durham recently, but bobolinks here were learned of while still living in an area of Pennsylvania that also enjoys bobolink visits. Durham has resisted development, hope to see it continue. Had sent an email. *(See appendix)*

Steve Akerley, Durham:

Resident for 42 years. Member of the model air plane club, which has flown at White Farm 35 years. We coexist with the birds and butterflies and stay out of the birds fields. Recently there's been suggestions that the club changes locations, which isn't viable. White Farm was obtained for public recreation. Commission considered mowing in October 2025, that would have been a better time, in the fall.

Russell Robinson III, Durham:

The town crest is not a bird, it is a cow. Agriculture is deeply rooted in Durham. My family operated a large dairy farm in town. When hay fields are not regularly harvested you get trash *[gestured to the field at Curtis]*, with weeks. Good hay fields would be mowed for free by a farmer taking the hay, or perhaps even pay to harvest. Poor fields you have to pay to mow which is expensive. Many farmers are cutting first cutting in May and can get their second cutting off by mid-July.

4) Old Business

a) PoCD:

Augur had circulated two parcel samples, Meigs recently provided a third. Commissioners acknowledged they seem to be the right length and quality. Dudko will draft Otte and Curtis. Meigs will draft Gulielmetti. Augur will draft White Farm.

The GIS layer is the other topic the Commission wanted to send to P&Z for the PoCD and will hold a Special Meeting to review the map online. Augur will work to get that scheduled, hoping the resource from Tyche may be able to join so the feedback is given directly. Meigs asked a link to the GIS be sent so some previewing may be done.

b) Curtis Woodlands – Invasives / State RFP

Augur noted here at this parcel the Commission had looked into handling invasives via goats but found it to costly. Cordes had followed up on state information that they were going to be putting out a Request for Proposal (RFP), and that Forest Management Plans (FMP) were prerequisite. Curtis woodlands was the only parcel with a FMP so that was sent it and found acceptable. The RFP process has now opened with submission deadline of end of August.

Invasives treatments on their own cannot be accepted; however, invasives control as a secondary activity to a primary forestry practice can. Cordes highlighted the crop tree release of hickory in Stand 6 and the thinning in Stand 1, which used to be predominately cedar as a couple forestry practices that could be worth pursuing. The state program is not a matching funds endeavor, they will reimburse the full costs. For the application we will need some quotes.

The writing part for the RFP should not be too intense and Meigs noted she has some grant writing experience. Augur will also see if the resources helping with the PoCD may be able to assist with this. Getting quotes will be the more involved aspect, and since Durham would have to pay upfront, the town's purchasing policy applies. Augur believes they should act quickly, the Commission has demonstrated how they can keep the the field is in better shape now that they've arranged annual rotary mowing at no costs, so if we do some small forestry practice pilots we can demonstrate to folks our stewardship. Augur will circulate the FMP to the Commission to review and be able to weigh in.

[Walk into Stand 1 was tabled for after the Commission's other business, but by the time all other business was completed remaining daylight was too scarce—a Special Meeting will be held.]

c) Mount Pisgah

Meigs noted there is new beaver dam activity so the road is entirely flooded. Also, it is clear the Beaver Deceiver in the other area was not built as presented, for it lacks the 90 degree elbows and vertical pieces that keep water from going too low. Also seems that the trails are not being trimmed back as much as they had been, possibly due to a lack of bikers.

5) New Business

a) 2026 Fall/Winter Hunting Lottery

The Commission drew the lottery and awarded slots based on applicants' preferences. Winners will be posted on the town website.

b) Bimble's Bluff Race use request for 10/18/2026

Russ Hammond has addressed the Commission multiple times in the past so Augur put this on tonight, but if Commissioners feel his attendance is required we can schedule for September. LaFlamme motioned approval of the request, Cordes seconded. Meigs asked for caveat of not using the same marking material, motioners agreed. All ayes.

c) CLCC membership: Augur thought he forwarded a scan of a letter to commissioners, but none recall seeing. Topic is tabled till September meeting.

d) Payment of Bills: Lawlor motioned for payment of the Sue White (\$2,600) and Greenbacker Farm (\$2,850) mowing bills; DeVito seconded. All ayes.

e) Trust for Public Land: Meigs shared they are in the process of obtaining a parcel west of Rt. 17, south of raccoon club, and a representative would like to come talk to the Commission. Augur said we can put her on the agenda with the GIS Special Meeting

6) Communications:

Augur shared that in addition to a number of people who reiterated their points during Public Comment tonight, other notes were received:

Pam Hogarth, Durham, thanking Commission for tackling areas at White Farm that were heading turning into forest. Requesting leave air strip alone.

Laurie Shaw and Christina Nieves covering same points as many raised in Public Comment. Leslie Bulion as well, but Augur believes she will be attending in September and likely share her comments directly.

7) Approval of minutes: June 9, 2026 meeting minutes garnered no corrections nor comments and thus are approved as presented.

8) Adjournment. Commissioners were intending to head into Stand 1 to review the forestry practice and that quorum would have motioned adjournment after that portion. After a few minutes consideration it was deemed there was too little light available once into a forested area to be worthwhile. So the meeting adjourned around 8:35.

Hunting Lottery Winners

Town of Durham Conservation Commission
Lottery for Permission to Hunt Town-Owned Parcels
54 Slots Across 4 Parcels
July 14, 2026

	M2 Curtis Woodlands Dunn Hill Road (c. 139 acres)	M3 Pent Road (c. 200 acres)	M4 Otte Meadow Saw Mill Road (c. 104 acres)	M5 Howd Road (c. 158 acres)
Archery	Michael Hoppes	Eric Muir	Arnold Ozols	Daniel Carey
Deer/Turkey	Tara Hoppes	Joseph Fraulo III	Eugene J. Segaline, Jr.	Jack Yeomans
Fall/Winter	Bart Amendola	Joseph Fraulo IV	David R. Segaline	James O'Brien
	Michael Rubin	Keith Gagner	Ted Berry	David Trunko
26 Slots across	Paul Nuzzo	Bertin Ducas	Marc Michalak	Jason Dattilo
4 Parcels	John Rakowski	George Bernklau		Stephen Ferriola
	Edward Rakowski	Benjamin Bernklau		Mark Ferriola
Shotgun	Gerald Bruckner	Timothy A. Smith, Jr.	Michael Szilvasy	
Deer/Turkey	James Kranich	Timothy A. Smith	Paul McCarthy	
Fall/Winter	Christian Gonzales	Matthew Roy	Gerald Sorensen	
15 Slots across	Nathan Tobias	Colton Gray	Kenneth Seitlinger	
3 Parcels	David Tobias	Paul Gray		
		Sean McMaster		
Muzzleloader	Christopher Waiksnoris	Tim Lein	Vernon Stoup	
Deer	Thomas Waiksnoris	Wayne Disharoon	Joseph Cassella	
Winter	Thomas Hinman, Sr.	Jonathan Perrotti		
13 Slots across	Seth Harris	Roland Labrie		
3 Parcels	Nicholas Bengston	John Fryer IV		
		John Fryer III		

Appendix

Dear First Selectman Rae and Chairman Augur,

I am writing regarding concerns about the management of town owned grasslands at White's Farm, a topic that I hope the Mattabeseck Audubon can be helpful in resolving. I am a long time Durham resident and sit on the Mattabeseck Audubon chapter's Board of Directors. I am also the chairman of the grassland bird conservation subcommittee. Recently there was extensive mowing at White's Farm before the end of June, a time frame that would have negatively affected nesting grassland birds such as Bobolinks, Red-Winged Blackbirds and Meadowlarks. This has caused considerable concern throughout the Connecticut birding community.

I'd like to give you a little background about why grassland birds are of particular concern and the significance of White's Farm both as a premier Connecticut birding destination and a key open space vital to the preservation of bird diversity.

In recent years major ornithological organizations such as the Cornell Lab of Ornithology and the National Audubon Society have been raising the alarm about the steep decline in North American bird populations. Overall, in the past 50 years bird populations have declined by 25%, a loss of over 3 billion birds. Grassland birds in particular have been declining at a terrifying rate; 53% have disappeared since 1970. Bobolinks and Meadowlarks, two local grassland species have been hit even harder. Bobolinks have declined by 63% nationwide while Meadowlarks have declined by 80%. Here in Connecticut Meadowlarks have declined by 95%. These declines are primarily due to loss of habitat across the country and interestingly here in New England due to loss of grassland as family farms fail and grasslands revert to forest. Another significant factor has been the result of changes in haying practices as farmers hay more aggressively (earlier) than in the past. Both these factors are a reason that grassland management at White's Farm is so vital to grassland conservation in our state.

Turning to White's Farm, I cannot emphasize what a treasure this piece of open land is to birds, birders and for ecotourism here in our town. White's Farm is the only place in Middlesex County that breeding Bobolinks can be found in significant numbers. Birders from around the region come to Durham in order to view this increasingly endangered bird along with the impressive diversity of birds ranging from raptors to sparrows to flycatchers seen in this open space. This past May I lead an Audubon bird walk at White's Farm for a large group of birders from around the state, we were able to view and hear 42 species of birds, including 15 male Bobolinks which had just arrived following their long 6000 mile journey from their wintering

grounds in Argentina. An equal number of females would arrive soon thereafter. You may not be aware of just how popular a birding destination White's Farm is, but Cornell Ornithology's eBird database shows that in recent years 313 birders have visited White's Farm 2217 times and spotted 190 different species of birds. This represents just a fraction of the birders who have come to town specifically to bird as only a minority of birders report to the eBird database. These numbers point to the significant ecotourism economic engine that White's Farm represents as these birders will frequently visit gas stations, restaurants and bird related businesses like Brenda's Feed on Main Street.

While the recent early mowing did not destroy the main Bobolink breeding field just east of the model airplane landing strip, it did extensively disrupt the fields to the north and west of the airstrip, places where Bobolinks have been seen and where large numbers of other species either nest or feed. It is my understanding that there currently is a clause in the hay land lease that prohibits the lessee from mowing Bobolink sensitive areas before July 15th but there is not an overall grassland management plan for the farm. Given the importance of White's Farm for conservation, recreation and ecotourism I would urge the town to develop a formal management plan for this property. The Mattabeseck Audubon would be very willing to assist in the development of such a plan and I personally would be happy to be involved as well.

I understand that there will be a meeting of the Conservation Commission on July 14th but unfortunately I will be out of town. I am hoping this letter will demonstrate that my absence is not due to lack of interest!

Best Regards,

Michael Good MD

375 Haddam Quarter Road

Durham CT 06422

July 14, 2026

Conservation Commission
Durham Town Hall
30 Townhouse Road
Durham, Connecticut 06422

To Whom It May Concern:

On June 13, 2026, I visited the Durham Meadows – Frederick White Farm, to participate in a birdwalk organized by Hartford Audubon. Specifically, I came to bear witness to the remarkable long-distance journey of the Bobolink, that are known to nest there, given the open meadow and grassland fields that are maintained by the Town of Durham as wildlife habitats. While I ended up not joining up with the large group, I did my own birding that morning and captured (and subsequently published) some shots of male Bobolinks in the fields (see attached). I have also attached a survey of the birds that I saw that day as recorded in my eBird account.

As a point of background, my wife and I only recently moved back to Connecticut, after ten years in Northeast Florida. Prior to that, we lived in CT for more than 25 years. I am an active wildlife photographer, and since retirement have been leading bird walks for various organizations – including some Audubon chapters – for more than 6 years. Until recently, with the move, I was the lead organizer / compiler for Audubon's annual Christmas Bird Count (CBC) in St. Augustine, FL, the oldest citizen science project. I hope to get involved in a similar capacity in CT.

The story of the Bobolink's Spring migration from central South America (Argentina, Bolivia, Paraguay) to grassland habitats in the Midwest and Northeast is truly remarkable. They typically arrive in CT to breed in mid-to-late May. Within a few weeks, their young begin to hatch (mid-June), just as all of the wildflowers / pollinators are blooming (thus providing fantastic high-energy insect food sources). Given this timing, and when I visited Durham, it is not surprising that I only saw male Bobolinks, as the females would have been on their nests.

Unfortunately for the Bobolink, they face the dual threat of 1) significant loss of grassland habitat throughout the Midwest and Northeast, plus where appropriate habitat remains, 2) the hatching occurs just when many farmers begin to harvest their first cut of hay, which then results in significant nest failures. Delaying the mowing of these grasses by only a few additional weeks (until **at least July 15**, with **August 1** being the most ideal date to allow late-season broods to safely leave the nest and learn to fly), can be incredibly impactful for the species.

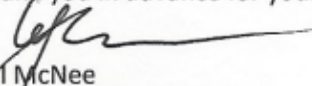
According to Birds & Blooms, "baby bobolinks leave the nest in just 10 to 11 days, before they're ready to fly. They linger in the long grasses nearby while their flight feathers come in. Within about a month after hatching, juvenile bobolinks learn to fly and feed themselves."

Bobolinks begin their reverse migration in mid-August, with most moving through the Southeastern US and Caribbean by September before heading to South America where they return to winter in the grasslands of central South America. While living in Florida, I witnessed this migration several times at a favorite birding destination of mine on the gulf coast, Fort DeSoto State Park, just south of Tampa / St. Pete.

The extraordinary 12,000-mile roundtrip journey is one of the longest migrations of any songbird. Given this, Bobolinks is among my favorite bird species, alongside another threatened species the Red Knot – which fly more than 9,000 miles each way between their High Arctic breeding grounds and Tierra del Fuego in South America.

Given the fantastic work that the Town of Durham is well known for in preserving and investing in the Frederick White Farm, I would encourage it to find ways of adapting its budgeting model and mowing cycle so that it can continue to maintain it as a designated nesting area for these impressive (yet threatened) migratory birds.

Thank you in advance for your consideration. Please feel free to reach out if I can be of any further assistance.


Bill McNee
95 Intervale Rd Unit 40
Stamford, CT 06905

7/14/26

The loss of the bobolinks and other nesting grassland birds was an avoidable tragedy. Less visible, but no less significant, was the loss of the fauna that sustains them- butterflies and moths. And with them, the valuable network of host plants and flora that support this important ecosystem.

Anyone familiar with Frederick White Farm knows that its meadows support an extraordinary diversity of butterflies, including several species that have become increasingly rare in Connecticut. Two of them (the meadow fritillary and the silver-bordered fritillary) are designated State Assessment Priority Species in Connecticut's 2025 Wildlife Action Plan because of their dramatic statewide declines. The meadow fritillary population documented at Frederick White Farm is, in fact, the only recorded population in the eastern half of the state on iNaturalist.

Butterfly species such as these are strong indicators of habitat quality- proof that past conservation management at the site has been effective.

Durham is fortunate to be home to an exceptional concentration of rare grassland birds and butterfly species, wildlife that is clearly beloved by the community. With that privilege comes responsibility that cannot be taken lightly. On behalf of the Connecticut Butterfly Association, I hope this misstep remains the only blemish on Durham's otherwise admirable record of conservation.

Faith Novella

Connecticut Butterfly Association Board Member

Conservation Committee

A letter to the Durham Conservation Commission (July 14, 2026)

My name is Stephen Broker. I live in Cheshire, Connecticut. I am pleased to offer my views of the importance of Frederick White Farm to Durham, to Middlesex County, and to Connecticut.

The Town of Durham is home to some of Connecticut's most significant ecological habitats and richest biological diversity. Durham Meadows is Durham's ecological crown jewel. Durham Meadows comprises three main sections: (1) the northern portion, Durham Meadows/Coginchaug River, Durham; (2) the central portion, Durham Meadows—Frederick White Farm; (3) the southern portion, Durham Meadows Wildlife Management Area, accessed off Route 17. Ecologists recognize the importance of landscape studies, which encompass closely associated habitats such as wetlands, forests, grasslands, edges, agricultural fields, and other human-dominated habitats.

Decades of studies have taught us a great deal about the historical, economic, and ecological importance of Durham Meadows. The many natural history studies and observations made there include the Connecticut Breeding Bird Atlas (1982-86), the Connecticut Bird Atlas (2017-22), the Quinnipiac Valley Christmas Bird Count (1971-present), and the Cornell Lab of Ornithology database of eBird reports for Durham. There also have

Meadows" is entered in a search of eBird hotspots, the three sections of Durham Meadows listed above database are grouped together. The "general area hotspot" of Durham Meadows currently includes 2,221 separate checklist reports by 314 eBirders, who have identified a total of 190 bird species seen. The earliest of these checklists is from 1974, and the most recent is from today.

My own experience with Durham Meadows dates to April 1984. I have been observing and studying the birds of Durham Meadows for the past 43 years. In the northern section, I have made numerous canoe trips to the marshes of the Coginchaug River. At Frederick White Farm, I have explored the trails, fields, and adjacent wetlands. In the southern section of Durham Meadows, I have made multiple trips from Route 17 through the Wildlife Management Area all the way to Route 68. Collectively, I have visited Durham Meadows more than 300 times, including some 255 trips for which I have posted my observations of 131 bird species.

Durham Meadows also has national significance. An important article entitled "Decline of the North American Avifauna" was published in 2019 in the journal *Science*. A summary of the article states, "Because birds are conspicuous and easy to identify and count, reliable records of their occurrence have been gathered over many decades in many parts of the world. Drawing on

been ongoing individual species studies, and organized field trips led by Connecticut's natural history organizations and graduate school programs. The bird atlases, annual summaries of Christmas Bird Counts, and individual site visits are published and available online.

Two publications that effectively describe the biological importance of Durham Meadows, for birds, plants, and insect pollinators, are essential reading. They are a book published fifty years ago called "25 Birding Areas in Connecticut" (Proctor, 1976) and a journal article entitled "Birding Frederick White Farm, Durham, Connecticut" (Bulion, 2023), referenced below.

A website developed by the non-profit America's State Parks describes the Durham Meadows WMA as follows: "Durham Meadows Wildlife Management Area protects floodplain meadows along the Coginchaug River in Durham. These open meadows are among the last remaining grassland habitats in Connecticut — supporting declining species like bobolinks, eastern meadowlarks, and savannah sparrows. The meadows are maintained through careful mowing schedules designed to protect nesting birds."

The Cornell Lab of Ornithology has developed a free, subscription database called eBird which provides individual North American and worldwide field observations spanning 1900 to present. When "Durham

such data for North America, Rosenberg *et al.* report wide-spread population declines of birds over the past half-century, resulting in the cumulative loss of billions of breeding individuals across a wide range of species and habitats. They show that declines are not restricted to rare and threatened species—those once considered common and wide-spread are also diminished. These results have major implications for ecosystem integrity, the conservation of wildlife more broadly, and policies associated with the protection of birds and native ecosystems on which they depend."

The Rosenberg study documented the loss of 2.9 billion North American birds over the past 50 years. Greatest losses (74.2%) were among 31 species of grassland birds, with grassland defined as "native grassland, prairie, pasture, and agriculture that supports grassland birds." Grassland birds include Bobolinks, Eastern Meadowlark, Horned Lark, and Savannah Sparrow, each of which is known to breed or occur seasonally at Frederick White Farm.

The United States has made significant progress over the past fifty years in environmental protection - the protection of our land, air, and waters. Our federal environmental regulations currently are under assault and are being weakened or eliminated on a nationwide basis. It has become ever more important for state and regional environmental protections to be in place. The Town of

Durham is in a position to implement good land stewardship and good conservation practices. In the case of Frederick White Farm, this includes adhering to the practice of delaying the annual mowing of hay fields until August 1, and at minimum no earlier than July 15.

Respectfully submitted,

Stephen P. Broker

Cheshire, Connecticut

References:

Proctor, Noble S. 1976. 25 Birding Areas in Connecticut. Chester, Connecticut: The Pequot Press, 121pp+index (see Chapter 13, Durham Meadows);

Bulion, Leslie. 2023. Birding Frederick White Farm, Durham, Connecticut. Bird Observer, Volume 51, Number 4. (August), pages 237-244. The Bulion article includes a detailed itinerary for observing the natural history riches present at the Frederick White Farm.

Rosenberg, Kenneth V., et al. 2019. Decline of the North American Avifauna. *Science*, Volume 366, Issue 6461 (September 19).

Dear Conservation Commission Chair and Conservation Commission Members,

I am a resident of the town of Durham, having moved here in February 2025 with my husband and daughter. Prior to moving to CT, I heard of the town of Durham because of the special nesting sites of the Bobolinks at Frederick White Farm. We previously lived in the south east of PA, which also has a Bobolink nesting site area at Stroud Preserve in Chester County.

I am contacting you to express concern about the recent mowing that took place at the Frederick White Farm area. Yesterday, Saturday June 27th, I was alarmed to read on a Connecticut Birding page that a large portion of a Bobolink ground nesting area had been mowed. This is an area which CT Bird members believe is not to be mowed until later this summer to allow Bobolinks and other ground nesting birds to breed. One of the group members had been at the area 2 days ago (Thursday) and observed a male Bobolink coming back and forth bringing food to a nest in the area. On returning to the site on Saturday morning he was extremely disturbed to find the area freshly mowed and 3 male Bobolinks seemingly looking for their nests. Deborah Evans, who led a Bobolink count walk on June 17th through Frederick White Farm and as such is a reliable source, was astounded on Saturday to find the area mowed. Deborah witnessed a red winged blackbird feeding a flightless chick in the mowed field, observed 3 male Bobolinks and reported that the mowed area was very quiet in comparison to the 17th and to the previous Saturday on a walk led by Peter Piccone. Deborah did not venture into the mowed area for fear there were other flightless chicks in the area.

I did some investigations myself to try to ascertain if the mowed area was included in the parcel of land that is protected from mowing until July 15th as stated by your board. Selectman Brendan Rea confirmed to a contact of mine that mowing was scheduled in an area in the north of the farm considered a brush area, not a grassland area and was outside of the parcel of land which is protected from mowing until later in the summer.

My questions for the commission are:

- 1) Can the commission confirm that the correct parcel of land was mowed or was this an area mowed in error?
- 2) Why did this area need to be mowed before the end of July?
- 3) Was the area to be mowed confirmed to have no Bobolink nesting activity this summer?
- 4) Moving forward, can the commission clarify the process that will take place prior to making decisions on which areas of Frederick White Farm will be mowed before the end of ground bird nesting season?

I feel the Commission should provide an explanation of what happened to the public. The Connecticut birding community is outraged and people believe that the priority was to spend the budget before the end of June. Many are reporting that Durham has destroyed the whole Bobolink nesting area at Frederick White Farm, which I know is not the case. However, very reliable birders have been to the area and are reporting to members that Durham has not kept their agreement to delay mowing until the end of July/ end of Bobolink nesting season. This is unfortunate as the town of Durham preserves land for the Bobolinks and other ground nesting birds, and it is wonderful to have this former farm site preserved for wildlife.

Finally, let me thank all of you on the Commission for the work that you do to protect the natural spaces in the town of Durham. This is not an easy task; your time and dedication are appreciated.

Sincerely

Jane Eddleston

Obs TODCT Con Comm 07 14 2026

Observations for Town of Durham CT, Conservation Commission July 14, 2026

The following are a series of observations about White's Farm Open Spaces for Public Recreation.

I am Stevan Akerley, a resident of Durham since 1984, I have lived here continuously for 42 years, raised children, and I am a member of the Black Sheep Flying Squadron. We fly remote controlled aircraft, that need a flying field to take off and land. We have been flying there for 35 years. We are conservation minded citizens, and we co-exist with the birds and butterflies. In fact they out maneuver our airplanes, and they watch us from their perches.

Whites Farm Creation as "Open Spaces for Public Recreation"

The Whites Farm Open Spaces Property was purchased with **Federal, State, and Town Funds** for "Public Recreation". (Tax Money for Citizens use)

It was not purchased as a "Wild Life Sanctuary", to the exclusion of Public Recreation.

Plan of Conservation and Development – 2016

PLAN OF
CONSERVATION
AND
DEVELOPMENT

Revised: July 21,
2016
2:12 pm
Office of
the Town Clerk



EFFECTIVE DATE: AUGUST 1, 2016

Page 1 of 123

Pages 98-99 Paragraph 7.11

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

7.11.2. Skating Pond During winter months, the town operates a skating pond, which is equipped with a shelter building and area lighting to facilitate its use during evening hours. The idyllic winter scene of skaters at night Page 98 of 123 welcomes visitors and residents alike. The Durham skating pond is

located along the south side of Route 68 (Wallingford Road) on the White Farm open space parcel. The town should consider enhancements and upgrades to the skating pond facility.

I do cross country skiing at Whites Farm in the wintertime. Some of you have seen my pictures.

Brush Hogging of Fields to Maintain Fields as Emergent Grasslands

The argument to "Hay the fields" after July 15, is not viable because at that late date the nutritional value as hay is gone, and it is "Straw". Furthermore, the current field composition is wild and there is no value to it since it has not been mowed for several years and is now gone wild (weeds and invasive plants). In order for the fields to produce hay, several years of brush hogging in the fall will be required to encourage spring grasses. ***"Emergent Grass Lands"***.

Bobolinks Habitat and Range

Bobolinks breed in tall grasslands, meadows, hayfields, overgrown pastures, and prairies across the northern United States and Canada (National Audubon Society+1).

Emails of Appreciation

The Conservation Commission and first selectman Brendan Rea have received emails of appreciation for Brush hogging the fields after several years of being fallow and unsightly (Weeds and Invasive Species). The citizens appreciate and want attractive "Emergent Grass Lands". This is also better for the birds.

Sincerely,

Stevan Akerley, Resident of Town of Durham, CT