

Received 7/30/2026
9:00 AM Jodi Moore, ATC

Town of Durham Conservation Commission Special Meeting Minutes

July 29, 2026 at Curtis Woodlands Parcel

- 1) Augur called the meeting to order at 5:30. Members present: Augur, Cordes, Dudko, LaFlamme, Lawlor. Miller joined at 5:31; Meigs joined at 5:33.
- 2) LaFlamme moved approval of the agenda as presented, seconded by Lawlor, all ayes.
- 3) There was no Public comment
- 4) Honor Lawler, Senior Project Manager for the Trust for Public Land addressed the Commission. Lawler shared that TPL is a national organization, with work in almost all 50 states. They work "Main Street to mountain top", working with federal, state, local, and private organizations to protect natural resources. They do not wind up with an interest in land that they work on, but focus their expertise on helping secure willingness from sellers, and helping the appropriate parties secure funds to execute a deal. They have around ten projects in Connecticut at this time, including the one she came to discuss. The Conn. Forest & Park Association reached out to TPL regarding the New England Trail and a parcel that could improve that. TPL has done a lot of work on trails. They tend to avoid federal funds for trails as the experiences with the Appalachian Trail, which included some eminent domain actions, left "heartburn".

The New England Trail is somewhat of a "forgotten stepchild" of a trail, with sections of it not protected in perpetuity. Parts of the NET are protected in Guilford, run through protected Wallingford land, pass through Connecticut's Tri-Mountain State Forest, and are protected further north in Talcott, etc. But

the Durham stretch does not have the same protections, and additional, has a lengthy stretch that runs along New Haven Road (State Route 17).

TPL worked with the landowners of two-related parcels (four owners on ~ 57 acres, one of the four owning another piece of ~ 20 acres) on agreements, and has a letter of intent on the smaller parcel and a purchase-sale agreement on the larger. These parcels would allow for a rerouting of the trail to simply cross Rt. 17, rather than run along it, as well as protect the trail in perpetuity.

The appraisals support the agreed price of \$1.5M for both parcels combined.

TPL has been awarded just under \$1M toward this purchase by the state (which has a 65% max allocation for non-distressed towns, such as Durham). TPL has had positive conversations with a private organization that helps on such projects. This organization likes to be the last money in, after other avenues are exhausted. TPL tries to get municipalities to pitch in as there are benefits to the community, and Lawler cited other recent examples of this. Durham would not hold an interest in the parcel—it would be owned by the Middlesex Land Trust, with the State of Connecticut owning a conservation easement over it. Commissioners asked additional questions of Lawler to ensure full understanding.

LaFlamme made a motion that Conservation send a letter to the Board of Selectmen encouraging them to devise a plan for the Town of Durham to contribute \$150,000, being 10% of the purchase price, alongside the pledges of the State of Connecticut and private donors to the Trust for Public Land for the purchase of around 57 acres west of New Haven Road and around 20 acres east of New Haven Road, map blocks 123 01 and 133 09. Cordes seconded the motion. After some additional discussion, the motion passed unanimously.

[Lawler had provided a write up on the portion of the NET in this area, which is attached as an appendix to these minutes.]

5) The Commission walked stands 5, 1, 3, and 2, at Curtis Woodlands as defined in the Forest Management Plan previously commissioned from Ferrucci & Walicki, to determine what recommendations made of forestry practices seemed most worthy of placing into a grant application to the state of Connecticut. There was discussion on the difference between the specific type of thinning practice referred to as Crop Tree Release versus other thinning practices. General consensus coalesced around pursuing crop tree release of the oaks in stand 1, thinning of black birch with canker in stand 2 to promote the healthier black birch, and invasive treatment in conjunction with these practices so that openings in the canopy do not lead to invasive growths before native regeneration has a chance.

Augur will make an initial draft of the grant application write up. Quotes will be needed for the work. Other commissioners will review and provide suggestions for the application. Town Planner Robin Newton will provide a final review given her familiarity with grant applications more broadly.

6) Dudko moved adjournment at 6:19, Laflamme seconded, all ayes.

Appendix



COST, SIZE

Estimated Cost: \$1,490,000

80 acres

FUTURE STEWARD

Middlesex Land Trust and
Connecticut Forest and Park
Association

FUNDING PLAN

Open Space and Watershed Land
Acquisition Grant Program
(OSWA)
Other Public Funding Sources
Private donations

COMMUNITY VALUES

Protected trail access, hiker and
trail-user safety, scenic value

NATURAL VALUES

Wetland, critical habitat, open
space connectivity, forest
protection, drinking water
protection

COMMUNITY PARTNERS

Middlesex Land Trust
National Park Service
Connecticut Forest & Park
Association

STATE & REGIONAL SIGNIFICANCE

Protection of the New England
National Scenic Trail corridor

LEGISLATIVE DISTRICT

3rd Congressional District

PARTNERS:

New England National Scenic Trail – Pistapaug Mountain Durham, Connecticut



Photo: Rebekah Butler

Trail Protection and Habitat Connectivity

Trails are the gateway to the outdoors for millions of people in America. Spanning over 200 miles, the New England National Scenic Trail (NET) connects 41 communities across Connecticut and Massachusetts to nature. Often overlooked, the NET encompasses some of New England's most picturesque landscapes, and winds within 10 miles of over 2 million people. This impressive trail system traverses a patchwork of public and private land, largely relying on individual landowner agreements to maintain public trail access. Historically, handshakes and temporary trail agreements have allowed the trail to cross these private lands, but as lands are sold and developed, public access and ecological connectivity are becoming increasingly uncertain. In response, NET managers are seeking permanent solutions through acquisition of land and trail easements.

Trust for Public Land has an opportunity to protect two forested parcels totaling 80 acres in Durham, Connecticut, along about a mile of the Mattabessett Section of the NET. The NET has been a hallmark of southern New England for over 75 years. These properties are vital to the trail's continuity, ecological integrity, and long-term accessibility. The proposed conservation acquisition would protect almost a mile of the NET in one of its most vulnerable sections.

Connecting everyone to the outdoors™

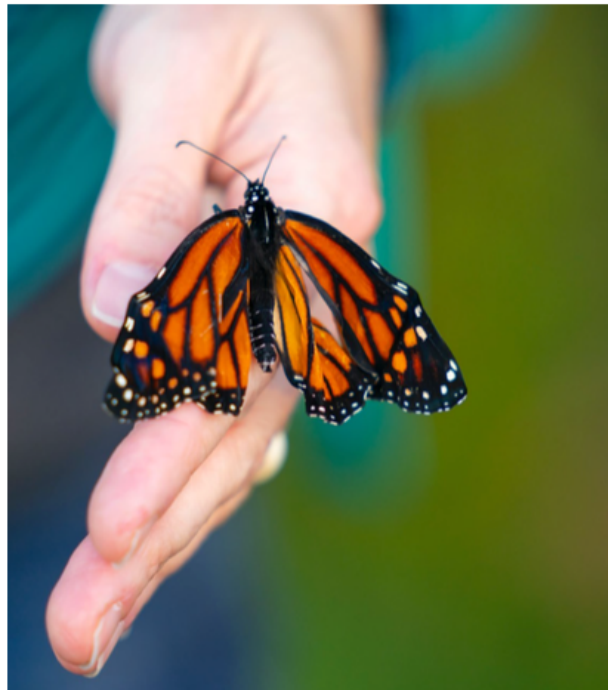
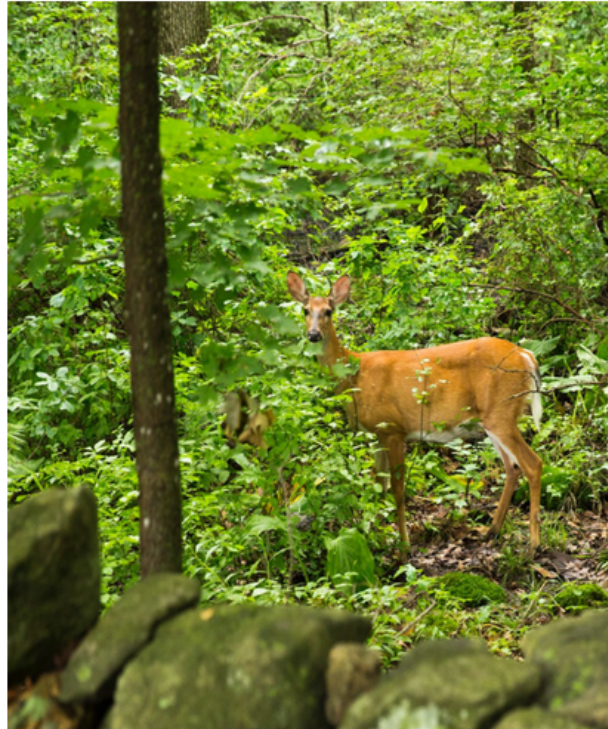
Nestled in the Parmalee Brook valley, at the base of Pistapaug Mountain, the trail skirts through rocky terrain and hardwood forest. The properties are home to a diversity of plant and animal communities as well as rare and endangered micro-climates.

Wildlife Corridor: The NET plays a role shaping a vital wildlife corridor connecting conservation lands from Long Island Sound to larger public land units in New Hampshire, enabling species to move north-south and adapt to a changing climate. The Pistapaug Mountain properties are an ecological gem, encompassing a freshwater wetland complex that provides critical habitat for threatened birds and amphibians like the American Woodcock and the spotted salamander. The northern contains State-designated critical habitat and borders forestland managed for public water supply, safeguarding access to clean drinking water and ensuring habitat connectivity across the region. Just down the trail, the densely forested southern property borders the James Valley Preserve in Guilford – creating another linkage in protected open space.

Creating a safer trail experience:

In this location, the current NET route includes nearly a half mile of road walk, where hikers must traverse a busy paved road containing no shoulder or sidewalk. The Pistapaug Mountain acquisition will enable a reroute of the trail to a quiet wooded location avoiding the most heavily trafficked section of the road, thereby protecting hiker safety and improving the recreation experience.

Your Support: Trust for Public Land has a signed agreement to purchase these properties, but we must act quickly. We are working to secure public grants for the purchase, but private donations are needed to leverage these public funds. Your support is critical as we assemble a coalition of community supporters, local land trusts, federal agencies and trail enthusiasts to protect this vulnerable section of the New England National Scenic Trail.



Photos: Top – Lucy Schaeffer, Bottom - Richard Freeda



The Trust for Public Land (TPL) is a national nonprofit that works to connect everyone to the benefits and joys of the outdoors.

FOR MORE INFORMATION:

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