

CONSERVATION COMMISSION

The primary function of the Conservation Commission is to ensure local-level compliance with the Massachusetts Wetlands Protection Act, the Lancaster Wetlands Protection Bylaw, and issue decisions relating thereto for all development projects in Lancaster.

The two types of applications most often reviewed by the Commission for development projects are Requests for Determination of Applicability (RDA) and Notices of Intent (NOI). The Commission also performs other regulatory functions, per the Wetlands Protection Act, such as reviewing Resource Area Delineation (RAD) applications and Certificates of Compliance (COC) for completed projects, and issuing Enforcement Orders (EO) for those who are in violation of the Wetlands Protection Act or Bylaw.

During the course of 2014, the Commission reviewed the following projects:

Filing	Applicant	Location	Action	Date
NOI	Candy Shiveley	220 Fort Pond Road	Approved	3/04/14
COC	Sarah Dulong	2518 North Main Street	Approved	3/04/14
COC	STULF Corporation	640 Sterling Street	Approved	3/18/14
NOI	MA Department of Fish & Game	Ponakin Road Bridge	Approved	4/15/14
RDA	Town of Lancaster	Community Center	Approved	4/15/14
COC	Borrego Solar Systems	267 Brockelman Road	Approved	4/15/14
NOI	Brooke Blew	100 South Meadow Road	Approved	5/06/14
NOI	Shirley Water District	Off Chisholm Trail	Approved	6/03/14
RDA	Michael Rivard	456 Langen Road	Approved	6/03/14
COC	Gina Fanelli	26 & 28 Perry Road	Approved	6/03/14
COC	Robert St. Jean	195 White Pond Road	Approved	7/08/14
RDA	Christopher Cannon	5 Oetman Way	Approved	8/26/14
RDA	Robert Marshall	186 Fort Pond Inn Road	Approved	9/09/14
NOI	Timothy Wortley	192 Fort Pond Inn Road	Approved	9/23/14
COC	Linda & Charles Patti	1 Fire Road #5	Approved	9/23/14
RDA	Mark Rajotte	88 Devonshire Way	Approved	10/21/14
RDA	Mark Riendeau	31 Runaway Brook Road	Approved	10/21/14
NOI	Keith Rockel	Ballard Hill Main Street	Approved	10/21/14
RDA	VCA Lancaster	456 High Street Extension	Approved	11/18/14
NOI #1	Clean Energy Collective	582 George Hill Road	Approved	12/09/14

Filing	Applicant	Location	Action	Date
NOI #2	Clean Energy Collective	582 George Hill Road	Approved	12/09/14
RDA	Linda Carlson	138 Fire Road #12	Approved	12/09/14
RDA	Nicholas Kraszyk	71 Brian Road	Approved	12/09/14
RDA	Poras & Wienerwald II Realty Trusts	122 Hilltop Road	Approved	12/09/14
COC	William O'Neil	106 Sterling Street	Approved	12/09/14

Conservation Areas

The Commission is looking to the future of several of its conservation areas by developing master plans for each of these areas. A small team has been assigned to create the plan for each of the following areas in 2015:

- Eagle Ridge Conservation Area – off of Mary Catherine Drive
- Runaway Brook Conservation Area – off of Runaway Brook Road
- Devonshire Estates Conservation Area – off of Devonshire Way
- Cook Conservation Area – off of Lunenburg Road
- Robert J. Frommer Conservation Area at Bartlett Pond – off of Rt. 117 (North Main Street)
- Pellechia Conservation Area and Canoe Launch – off of Lunenburg Road
- Winsor Heights Conservation Area – off of Winsor Road

The master plans will determine the best conservation and recreational use for each site, along with an implementation plan for bringing these uses to fruition.

Land Acquisition

In 2014, the Conservation Commission worked with the Open Space Committee and Town Forest Committee to assess the conservation value of all privately and publicly owned properties in the Town of Lancaster that are not currently protected from development under the provisions of Article 97 of the Massachusetts State Constitution. Public land is protected under Article 97 if it is under the care and control of the Conservation Commission or a land conservation agency of the Commonwealth of Massachusetts, such as the Department of Conservation and Recreation (DCR) or Department of Fish & Game (DFG). Privately owned land receives Article 97 protection when it is placed under a Conservation Restriction held by the Conservation Commission, a State agency such as DCR or DFG, or a non-profit land trust.

The collaboration by the Conservation Commission, Open Space Committee, and Town Forest Committee to assess the conservation value for all currently unprotected privately and publicly owned properties resulted in the creation of a comprehensive Parcel Protection List to use as a guide in prioritizing land protection efforts. In particular, very high importance has been given to the expansion of the existing conservation areas in the Town, most notably the Cook Conservation Area and the Lancaster Town Forest.

Voters at the 2014 Annual Town Meeting approved the expenditure of \$60,000 to partner with the Lancaster Land Trust (LLT) to expand the Lancaster Town Forest through the protection of 17.85 acres of adjacent land. LLT will buy the land from the current owners using the proceeds from a Commonwealth of Massachusetts Conservation Partnership Grant, which will reimburse LLT 50% of the land acquisition cost. The funding approved by Town Meeting will go toward the purchase of a Conservation Restriction from LLT, to be held by the Conservation Commission, for the amount not covered by the Conservation Partnership Grant. As part of this project, Annual Town Meeting also approved the transfer to the Conservation Commission's care and control, with the Town Forest Committee's active management, 51.6 acres of existing Town-owned land adjacent to the Lancaster Town Forest. Hopefully, the future will hold many more successful land protection projects accomplished through such public-private partnerships.

Also, in October 2014, Special Town Meeting approved the transfer of two parcels of Town-owned land, 37.6 acres total, to the care and control of the Conservation Commission. The two parcels consist of a portion of the former Durling property on Route 117, and a nearby parcel. The Conservation Commission gratefully accepted a generous donation of .20 acres of land off of Winsor Road from the Kilbourn family. This parcel is the location of the historically significant Rowlandson Rock, named after Mary Rowlandson, who was held there the first night after being captured by Native Americans in February, 1676 during what is now known as King Phillip's War.

BARTLETT POND DAM REMOVAL

The Bartlett Pond dam on Wekepeke Brook was removed in 2014, the culmination of several years of planning, permitting, and fundraising for the project. The Massachusetts Department of Dam Safety (DDS) had determined several years ago that the Bartlett Pond dam was in critical need of repair or removal by the Town of Lancaster, which, as the owner of the property, was responsible for the dam. After a thorough cost analysis of repair vs. removal options by the Town's lead consultant PARE Engineering, it was agreed that removal would be much less expensive because the sediments that had accumulated behind the dam were generally free of toxins that would require removal and disposal. Also, the restoration of a free flowing brook would be of great ecological benefit.

Funded by a 20-year, interest-free loan in the amount of \$116,000 from the Commonwealth of Massachusetts, work on removal of the dam began in early May and proceeded quickly. A representative from PARE was on site every day to monitor the progress of general contractor KBC, submit regular reports, and keep the Town informed in "real-time" as needed. On-site meetings were held weekly to review the current project status, answer questions, and address any issues of concern that had arisen.

The positive impact of the dam's removal on wildlife habitat was apparent almost immediately. It was already known that Wekepeke Brook supported a breeding population of native brook trout upstream of the late dam and pond, but the latter two presented an insurmountable obstacle to the species' expanding its range downstream. In June, barely five weeks after the start of work to remove the dam, a survey of the downstream stretch of Wekepeke, between its confluence with the Nashua River and the road crossing on Route 117, yielded 18 Brook Trout ranging in size from 57mm-231mm. Another 13 trout ranging in size from 47mm-176mm were found in the newly formed stream channel where the pond had previously existed. In the words of Richard Hartley, Fisheries Biologist for the Massachusetts Department of Fish and Game, these results are "a real feather in the cap of all those involved in the removal of the dam."

A final review and site inspection of the work remains, to be done in the spring of 2015, before the Conservation Commission signs-off that all aspects of the project have been properly completed. Beyond that, the Commission will be looking at ways to create trail access to the 18+ acres of adjacent land the Commission controls to the south of the late dam.

Other Business

In 2014, voters at Annual Town Meeting approved the establishment of a Conservation Trust Fund for use by the Conservation Commission. The Commission may expend from the Trust Fund for any conservation-related purpose such as land acquisition and associated due diligence, trail creation and maintenance, and wildlife studies. Town Meeting may authorize a direct appropriation to the Trust Fund, which can also accept proceeds from timber harvesting and gifts from individuals and organizations, among other sources of funding.

In July 2014, the Commission regretfully said goodbye to Administrative Assistant, Jeanette Galliardt, who resigned to take a position with another town. The Commission is grateful for the many years of fine administrative support Jeanette provided and wishes her well in her new position and all her future endeavors.

In September 2014, it is with great pleasure that the Commission welcomed our new Administrative Assistant, Heather Hampson. Heather brings a wealth of municipal administrative experience to the Town. She has recently worked as an Administrative Assistant in the towns of Maynard, Shirley and Littleton supporting the Conservation Commission, Board of Appeals, Board of Health and Building department.

What's New for 2015

Some of the Commission's upcoming activities in 2015 will include the continued conservation of open space properties, maintaining the conservation land throughout the town to provide a rural environment for the residents to enjoy, working with potential developers in seeking permanent conservation easements for path systems, and similar ideas for a variety of other conservation-oriented projects.

The Lancaster Conservation Commission is a seven-member appointed board, with associate members. The Commission meets on the second and fourth Tuesdays of each month at 7:00 PM at the Lancaster Community Center. Everyone is welcome to join the Commission for these meetings and public involvement is always encouraged.

The Community Development and Planning Office coordinates all meeting schedules and is open Monday through Thursday, 9:00 AM to 4:00 PM. As always, we welcome citizen's questions, comments or suggestions. Please feel free to contact us at 978-365-3326 (David Koonce x1054 or Heather Hampson x1310), dkoonce@lancasterma.net or hhampson@lancasterma.net. For more information on conservation issues in Lancaster, please visit us on the town's web site: www.ci.lancaster.ma.us.

Respectfully submitted,

Ken Rapoza, *Chair*

Tom Christopher, *Vice-Chair*

Peter Farmer

Ted Manning

Ruth Anderson

Nathan Stevens

James Lavallee

Tom Early, *Associate Member*