



City of Watertown
Conservation Commission
Administration Building
149 Main St.
Watertown, MA 02472

Patrick Towler, Chair
Leo Martin, Member
Maria Rose, Member
Rachel Danford, Member
Marilyn Salvas, Member
Josh Coefer, Member

MINUTES

Meeting Date: Wednesday, March 4, 2026, 7:00 PM, Remote Meeting on Zoom

Conservation Commission Members Present: Patrick Towler, Maria Rose, Leo Martin, Marilyn Salvas, Rachel Danford

Absent: Josh Coefer

Also Present: Elodia Thomas (Resident), Libby Shaw (Trees for Watertown), Susan Falkoff (Resident), Vincent Piccirilli (City Council Vice President), Patrick Fairbairn (Resident), Marilynne Roach (Resident), Dan Grossman (Resident), Katie Patterson (Resident), and Ann Cox (Resident)

Staff Present: Katie Swan, Conservation Agent; Susan Jenness, Assistant

Towler chaired the meeting and took roll call.

1. Whitney Hill Park, (WHP), Annual Abutters Meeting- Towler turned the floor to Swan to review the Annual Whitney Hill Report which Swan delivered to the City Manager on February 10, 2026. Swan shared contents of the report with attendees .

General Activities in 2025

Preparation- Request for Proposal, (RFP) for Urban Wild Management Plan which was drafted by the sub-committee of Watertown CC members and went out in May but did not receive any bids possibly due to timing and proposed costs of creating the plan.

Installation and Maintenance- New trash barrels were installed at Oliver St. and Marshall St. entrances at the park, by the Department of Public Works, (DPW).

Outreach to Animal Control Officer- Regarding correct protocol for enforcement of unleashed dogs at WHP- The Animal Control Officer cannot take any action on alleged incidents, unless they are present and see the offense take place. If anyone sees unleashed dogs at WHP they are urged to contact the Animal Control Officer while the violation is occurring.

Stewardship Activities in 2025

Routine Maintenance- For the 32 sample plots which is part of the long-term ecological monitoring of the parks forest growth and collaboration with Watertown High School.

Collaboration- In June and August Fairbairn worked with Minerva Action Group, (MAG), a non-profit group on estimating carbon storage in trees in the park.

Coordination- Fairbairn continued coordination with the Watertown High School City and volunteers in joint ecological studies of WHP.

Goals for WHP in 2026

Investigate funding sources (CPA or state) to support the preparation of an Urban Wild Management Plan, and to

Commence Development for Urban Wild Management Plan once funding is secured.

Commissioner Comments on the report

Rose suggested that the name of the RFP be updated to something that is less nuanced than an Urban Wild Management Plan which may have sounded overly detailed to potential applicants.

Public Comments on the report and activities at WHP

Marilynne Roach suggested moving the barrels at Marshall St., and Oliver St. closer to the road so that the truck does not have to back into the woods bumping into trees and causing issues with erosion while maintaining the new barrels.

Dan Grossman asked if they could consider designating a time when dogs could go off leash at WHP. Fairbairn explained that CC are charged with stewarding the wildlife in the park and that dogs off leash are disturbing and intimidating to the wildlife trying to make a home in the park.

Libby Shaw suggested Animal Control could drop in regularly to WHP to observe the dog activity to further monitor the situation with dogs visiting the park. She also stated that dead trees are very valuable to the habitat providing shelter and home for members of the ecosystem.

Fairbairn mentioned it was good news to hear that a Bard Owl was spotted at Whitney Hill an indication the population of animals is increasing. Ann Cox asked if it would be a good idea for the students at Watertown High School to make owl boxes to install around WHP. Rachel Danford suggested Ann Cox speak with Patrick Fairbairn about other ways students could use their resources to help at WHP. Rose asked if Bat Boxes were a good idea, and explained bats eat thousands of mosquitos per night. Fairbairn said that it would be a good source of housing on a resident's own personal property if they have a large enough space around their homes.

Vice President Piccirilli reported he found two communications online that went to the 311-system reporting 3 trees had been cut down at WHP. One communication was directed to the Recreation Department, and one went to the Tree Warden. He was upset that the matters were not forwarded to the Conservation Agent on behalf of the CC. Grossman suggested a letter be sent out to all abutters around WHP, warning trees not to be cut down. Piccirilli asked Swan to be sure to reach out to the 311 System Staff to alert them Conservation Commission oversees WHP to avoid miscommunication such as this in the future.

Katie Patterson reported she saw a group of young kids cutting down a tree last year and she stopped them and informed them why what they were doing was wrong.

Susan Falkoff suggested there should be signage made. Margo stated she thought the signage should post about the laws and be educational for residents using words such as preservation and enjoyment.

Katie Patterson reported signage at the park that had broken glass.

2. Regular Business

A. Filling of open positions

i. Vice Chair- Commissioners discussed voting in a new vice chair. Martin explained historically there never was a vice chair until recently and when the chair was going to be unavailable for a meeting, they would delegate another commissioner to cover. Commissioners agreed to continue with Towler as the Chair and not elect a vice chair now but they could revisit later if they needed to.

ii. Community Preservation Committee (CPC) Representative- Marilyn Salvas expressed interest in filling the vacancy for a Conservation Commissioner on the CPC. Members held a vote for the new CPC appointee.

Motion- Martin made a motion to appoint Salvas as the new CPC appointee. Rose seconded it.

Poll- All members agreed with the motion made by Martin and Salvas was appointed the new Conservation Commission appointee.

B. Meeting Format

i. Discussion of meeting format: in-person, hybrid, or remote- Towler explained he had discussed the meeting format with the city manager and learned that it was strongly suggested all Commissions come back to meeting in person. He explained Council President and the City Manager say it is easier to negotiate conflict when people are meeting in person. The group had differing opinions about the meeting format. Vice President Picirilli was present and commented when the extension for remote meetings expires in June of 2027, it will become mandatory to return to all meetings in person and Commissioners who report remotely would not be allowed to vote. Commissioners will discuss this item further and decide as a group how to move forward with the meeting format.

C. Whitney Hill Park trees- Swan went on a site visit to Whitney Hill Park on 3/3/26 and took photos of the three trees that were cut down. The photos were shared and it was clear an ax had been used to execute the cuts. Katie Patterson shared she saw young teens cutting down a tree last year and she stopped and had a long conversation with them about why they should not do that. Susan Falkoff, Margo, and Patterson all suggested posting signage posting the laws about cutting down trees and adding some educational information encouraging the saving of trees as well.

5. Updates

A. Chair Updates- Towler reported he had attended the MACC conference last month and had seen Swan and Salvas present. Towler enjoyed the sessions he attended and found them balanced with the right amount of educational content and the right the amount of time as well. Towler also recommended the Conservation fundamentals training by MACC for training.

B. Agent's Report- Swan reported her follow-up with Brady on the Amphitheater. He determined the site was previously disturbed, it was outside the buffer zone, and replacing the gravel with pea stone is considered routine maintenance. Salvas clarified the pea stone would allow for water to flow more efficiently back into the ground and would improve the surface for wheelchair accessibility. Martin prompted Swan to find the measured area of the surface so they could be sure the area complied with the WPA regulations. Swan screen shared the measured area and Rose said that was exactly what they needed. Rose asked Swan to let the Commissioners know when work is completed at the Amphitheater.

6. Minutes to be approved- February 4, 2026, meeting.

The minutes were discussed and members who had reviewed the minutes had no updates or amendments. It was determined they did not have a quorum to vote on the minutes so they were tabled to the April meeting.

Motion- Martin made a motion to adjourn the meeting. Rose seconded the motion.

Poll- All members eligible to vote on the minutes agreed with the motion made by Martin.