



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

Patrick Towler, Chair
Jamie O'Connell, Vice Chair
Leo Martin, Member
Rachel Danford, Member
Maria Rose, Member
Marilyn Salvas, Member
Joshua Coefer, Member

MINUTES

Meeting Date: Wednesday, February 4, 2026, 7:01 PM, Remote Meeting on Zoom

Conservation Commission Members Present: Maria Rose, Jamie O'Connell, Patrick Towler, Marilyn Salvas, Josh Coefer, and Leo Martin.

Absent: Rachel Danford

Also Present: Thomas Brady (City of Watertown), Elodia Thomas (Resident), Libby Shaw (Trees for Watertown), and Michelle Waldman (Trees for Watertown).

Staff Present: Katie Swan, Conservation Agent, and Susan Jenness, Administrative Specialist

Towler chaired the meeting and took roll call.

1. Regular Business

A. Arsenal Park Amphitheater (MassDEP filing #: 321-0181), follow up on proposed minor changes at base of amphitheater

For background, in December, Steve Magoon appeared for an update regarding the former Arsenal Park Amphitheater. At that time the commissioners asked if the updates are consistent with the conditions that were approved in the Notice of Intent. Magoon said he would confirm the area of gravel and the degraded area at the base of the amphitheater for the next meeting for the Commission to consider in making their decision to allow the change in material.

Thomas Brady, City's DPW Director, addressed the Commission regarding conditions at the former Arsenal Park amphitheater area.

Brady explained that during Phase B renovations of the park, planned improvements to the amphitheater were removed from the project scope during value engineering. During construction, excess clean ¾-inch stone was inadvertently spread within the amphitheater area. This altered the surface and resulted in non-compliance with ADA accessibility standards due to the instability of the gravel surface.

He stated that:

- The amphitheater base area is approximately 180.5 feet from the Mean Annual High Water Line and located within the Riverfront Area;
- The work is within previously disturbed riverfront;
- The proposed corrective work qualifies as maintenance of a preexisting structure owned by a political entity and may be considered an exempt or minor activity under the Wetlands Protection Act.

Brady outlined three potential approaches:

- Lower existing gravel and install compacted stone dust over most of the area, leaving a six-foot gravel strip for infiltration;
- Install a concrete surface;
- Remove the amphitheater feature entirely.

Comments and questions from members of the Commission:

O’Connell requested clarification regarding:

- Whether the gravel was placed in an area previously approved for disturbance under the Notice of Intent (NOI).
- Whether the area was considered degraded or undegraded prior to placement of the gravel.
- Whether additional degradation may have occurred beyond what was permitted.
- The total percentage of degraded Riverfront Area on the parcel.

Martin requested clarification of the originally approved plans for the amphitheater area, including what surface treatment was intended following demolition of the concrete stage.

Rose referenced prior plan sets showing a gravel walk and removal of the concrete amphitheater stage, and displayed portions of the approved plans during the meeting.

The Commission reviewed prior approved plans, including demolition and landscaping sheets. It was confirmed that:

- The semicircular amphitheater stage was concrete and has been removed.
- The amphitheater walls and vegetated steps remain.
- Landscaping improvements to the amphitheater area were deleted from scope during value engineering.
- Slopes and vegetated seating areas were not disturbed.
- Some native plantings were installed in the steps using surplus materials.

Commission discussion focused on Riverfront Area redevelopment standards, specifically:

- The 10% degradation limitation within the Riverfront Area.
- Whether the area between the former stage and seating contained soil or other non-degraded surface prior to gravel placement.
- Whether the gravel placement increased degraded area beyond permitted limits.
- Whether the corrective work qualifies as maintenance or constitutes new work requiring formal review.

O’Connell emphasized that if additional degradation occurred and the parcel is already above 10% degraded, mitigation or restoration would be required.

Brady stated that the work is minor and consistent with maintenance provisions but agreed to review the Commission’s concerns.

The Commission requested the following information:

- A plan identifying the precise location and extent of gravel placement.
- Clarification of the originally approved surface conditions for the amphitheater area.
- Confirmation of whether gravel extended beyond previously degraded areas.
- Calculation of total degraded Riverfront Area on the parcel, including the affected amphitheater area.

Brady indicated he would review the matter further and consult staff before determining next steps. The item may return to the Commission at a future meeting.

B. Whitney Hill Park

Brady reported that the three Norway Maple trees adjacent to the DPW building were removed to allow for a \$1.8 million roof replacement project that is planned in the spring. The largest tree (26-inch diameter) had grown into the building; the other two were smaller. DPW’s review of assessor maps, GIS data, and Registry of Deeds records indicated that the trees were on DPW property and not under Conservation Commission jurisdiction.

Comments and questions from members of the Commission:

Commissioners asked why the Commission was not consulted, given Whitney Hill Park’s conservation status. Brady explained that he was not aware of the 2013 resolution that granted the Conservation Commission the “care” of the Park and acknowledged that the GIS data was outdated.

- Salvas asked why a tree hearing was not held; Brady explained that the hearings apply only to public street trees.
- Towler and others raised mitigation concerns.

- Brady noted that the Norway Maples are invasive and suppress other species, and stated replacement trees would be carefully selected and properly sited.

Next steps:

- Swan will work with the Assessor and the Registry of Deeds to update property records and record the subdivision and resolution granting CC authority, as necessary.
- Brady will explore funding and staffing options for replacement tree planting and report back.

2. 2025 Annual Whitney Hill Report

A. Discussion of draft report

Swan presented the revised draft Annual Whitney Hill Report, noting:

- Integration of Commissioner feedback,
- Community collaboration, and
- Historical data provided by former Commissioner Patrick Fairbairn.
- Swan requested a vote so the report could be transmitted to the City Manager.
- Swan will finalize and submit the report to the City Manager for City Council consideration.

Motion: Rose made a motion to accept the draft Whitney Hill Annual Report for 2025. O’Connell seconded the motion.

Roll Call: All members present voted by roll call, 6-0.

3. Updates

A. Chair updates:

Towler turned the floor over to Vice Chair O’Connell. O’Connell shared that she was stepping down from the Conservation Commission and is still on the Community Preservation Committee (CPC) as the Conservation Commission liaison. She would like to stay on CPC as a liaison to the Commission but as an Associate Member (non-voting member) if she can do that. If she can’t do that, then she will step down from CPC as well.

Towler reminded Commissioners that Rose would be stepping down after 18 years. He thanked Rose for her 18 years of service. He also commended O’Connell for her contributions to both the Conservation Commission and CPC.

Swan will reach out to the City Manager's office to confirm if O'Connell can continue as an Associate Member of the Conservation Commission and its representative for the CPC.

B. CPC Updates: There were no CPC updates

C. Agent Report:

A. Swan reminded members of the upcoming MACC Conference in Worcester on Saturday February 28, 2026, from 8 to 4:30 pm. Swan informed members who attend the MACC Conference that they are eligible for reimbursement so can submit invoices to Swan if they attend.

3. Acceptance of Minutes

A. November 5, 2025 minutes, were approved with minor amendments.

Motion: Salvas made a motion to accept the minutes with minor amendments. O'Connell seconded the motion.

Roll Call: All members present voted by roll call, 6-0 to approve.

B. December 3, 2025 minutes, were approved with no changes.

Motion: Rose made a motion to accept the minutes. Salvas seconded the motion.

Roll Call: All members present voted by roll call, 6-0 to approve.

C. January 7, 2026 minutes, were approved with no changes.

Motion: Martin made a motion to accept the minutes. Salvas seconded the motion.

Roll Call: All members present voted by roll call, 6-0 to approve.

4. Meeting Adjournment

Motion: Rose made a motion to adjourn the meeting at 9:00 pm. Martin seconded the motion.

Roll Call: All members present voted by roll call, 6-0 to adjourn.