



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

Patrick Towler, Chair
Leo Martin, Member
Rachel Danford, Member
Marilyn Salvas, Member
Marie-Sophie Rohwaeder, Member

MINUTES

Meeting Date: Wednesday June 3, 2026, at 7:01 PM, Remote Meeting on Zoom

Conservation Commission Members Present: Patrick Towler, Leo Martin, Marilyn Salvas, and Marie-Sophie Rohwaeder

Absent: Rachel Danford

Also Present: Taylor Donovan (VHB), Jack Wilson (National Development), Bob West (Minerva Action Group), Ronald Whitfield (Minerva Action Group), Bob Leverett (Minerva Action Group), Libby Shaw (Trees for Watertown), Gil Rodgers (resident), Janet Rothrock (resident), Kati (resident), and Patrick Fairbairn (resident)

Staff Present: Katie Swan, Conservation Agent, and Susan Jenness, Administrative Specialist
Towler chaired the meeting and took roll call.

1. General business

- A. 99 Coolidge Avenue/DCR Bike Path (MassDEP filing #: 321-0187): Certificate of Compliance Request to close out Order of Conditions. Representative: National Development and VHB

Taylor Donovan (VHB) and Jack Wilson (National Development) discussed the request to close out the Order of Conditions with a Certificate of Compliance for 99 Coolidge Avenue/DCR Bike Path. The project site includes a 1,075 square foot linear 10 foot wide non-motorized multiuse path from the existing terminus on the abutting 99 Coolidge Avenue property to the existing DCR vehicular path located near Arsenal Street that was completed during summer of 2024. The area of soil stabilization required a two year growing season.

Swan met with Donovan, National Development, and ARE for a site walk on May 5, 2026 and approved the removal of the erosion controls as the bank on the path was stabilized. Swan was satisfied with the conditions and recommended to the Commission to issue the Certificate of Compliance.

Questions/Comments from the Commission:

- Martin explained that this was a simple path installed to create connectivity from the site at 99 Coolidge Avenue to the DCR site.
- There were no additional questions/comments.

Motion: Martin made a motion to issue the Certificate of Compliance. Salvas seconded the motion.

Roll Call: All members present voted by roll call, 4-0 to approve.

B. 99 Coolidge Avenue (MassDEP filing #: 321-0175): Japanese Knotweed Management Plan. Representative: National Development

Taylor Donovan (VHB) discussed the proposed Japanese Knotweed management plan (management plan) for the remediation area and portion of the stream bank at 99 Coolidge Avenue.

Donovan explained that this proposed management plan would be a minor modification to the Order of Conditions and seeking permission from the Commission to use an herbicide to treat the Japanese Knotweed (knotweed). The management plan is to address the issue that the purpose of the remediation area as part of the Order of Conditions was to remove the existing knotweed in 2024 and plant with native plant species (Witch Hazel). The next growing season in 2025, the knotweed grew back and Swan flagged that if they want the remediation area to be successful, they would need to put together a management plan.

The management plan would include two methods of removal: mechanical and chemical. The mechanical removal would occur two times during the summer and fall and the targeted chemical treatment (EPA approved herbicide applied by a licensed herbicide applicator) would be applied in the fall. The method of removal would occur over a 3-5 year growing season.

Questions/Comments from the Commission:

- Salvas asked if the application of herbicide had been successful for other projects in the past.
 - Donovan explained that she could not speak specifically for a project she has overseen with herbicide but got guidance the VHB landscaping team. She further explained that the purpose of the two cuttings is to allow the vegetation to send its carbohydrate storage from the winter back up to the plant and grow into the summer, cut it once during the growing season, and cut it again during the fall.
- Rohwaeder asked if there is a difference in EPA regulations versus MassDEP regulations for the use herbicide.
 - Donovan explained that the licensed applicator for chemical treatment would know the different as part of their licensure.

- Rohwader asked about the application of the chemical treatment for clarification.
 - Donovan clarified that that method is a cut and dab method that is directly applied to the stem after it is cut.
- Martin asked that the materials would be submitted to the Conservation Office before any application of chemicals.
 - Donovan clarified that she would do that and will notify the Agent at least 48 hours in advance of the application of the herbicide and the Conservation Office will notify the Commission.

Motion: Martin made a motion to accept the minor modification to the Order of Conditions for the removal of the knotweed. Rohwaeder seconded the motion.

Roll Call: All members present voted by roll call, 4-0 to approve.

2. Whitney Hill Park

A. Presentation on study of carbon storage in WHP trees by Minerva Action Group, LLC

Bob West, Ronald Whitfield, and Bob Leverett (all from the Minerva Action Group) discussed what they do as a non-profit and their findings of their study of carbon storage in trees at Whitney Hill Park. As a non-profit, they focus on climate change and they work with high school students.

Leverett discussed the background of the study and the findings. He explained that he worked with Patrick Fairbairn on the data that Fairbairn collected in 2015 and 2021 from the sample plots and used that to model the total amount of biomass and total carbon stored in the trees (total number of trees was 519 trees). Estimated biomass and total carbon storage was derived from the US forest service model which broke down where carbon was stored in the biomass (above and below ground). Based on the modeling and data provided, the study estimated that 32,000 pounds of carbon are stored annually, and that between 2015 and today a total estimated 2,414,000 pounds of carbon were stored in the park. To better estimate the actual carbon stored in the park, Leverett explained that they would use LiDAR data to identify individual trees in the park.

Questions/Comments from the Commission:

- Towler asked based on the findings, as the trees get older, does the total amount of carbon stored and total biomass decline over time?
 - Leverett explained that as trees grow larger for a period of decades, they increase the amount of CO2 removed and taper off later on.
- Salvas asked about when a large tree that gets removed, how much benefit are we losing?
 - Leverett explained that if have to take down a tree (if diseased or hazard tree), it takes a long time to replace the carbon storage lost.

- Rohwaeder asked what was the role or involvement of the high schoolers on the project?
 - Fairbairn said that the teachers have agreed they could meet to discuss a plan to involve the students sometime early in the year if there was a project to collaborate on with them.

Public Comments

- Libby Shaw (Trees for Watertown) thanked the Minerva Action Group for their efforts. She pointed out that the Director of the Department of Public Works is a certified Arborist and she felt he would be very interested in this study. Fairbairn urged those present to focus their effort on reaching out to legislators about pursuing a local tree ordinance for private trees.

The Minerva Action Group members agreed they would be interested in discussing how they could coordinate with the high school in the further studies at Whitney Hill.

3. Updates

- A. Chair updates:** Towler asked staff to get an update on potential new candidates to fill the vacancies on the Conservation Commission. Towler also informed everyone that commissioners will need to vote on a chair to replace him after he completes his service at the July meeting as well as a vice chair. Jenness agreed to get a status report from the City Manager's Office about pending appointments for new members.
- B. CPC Updates:** Salvas reported that the last meeting was a presentation of the plans for Walker Pond by Michelle Moon. Moon hopes to have plans drafted and out to bid for a total cost of \$990,000.00 for creation of the park by the end of the year. Some of the members of CPC are interested in more soil testing and expanding the list of potential landscape architects to draft the plans.
- C. Agent Report:** Swan shared that she has done site visits for the month of May and things are coming along. She also shared that she will do a round of site visits in June and Commissioners are welcome to join to see the sites if they are interested.

Martin inquired whether a decision has been made on the appeal of the Williams parcel (MassDEP filing #: 321-0174). Swan reported she has received the briefs but is still waiting for the decision to come out.

Towler inquired whether there was an update on removing the recreation shed at Arsenal Park. Swan shared that there is not one at the moment.

Swan shared that the surveyed property boundary of Whitney Hill Park from 2014 was formally recorded with the Registry of Deeds on May 27, 2026. The recorded plan book and page has been shared with the Department of Public Works and Assessor's Office.

4. Minutes to be approved

A. May 6, 2026, were reviewed and approved.

Motion: Martin made a motion to accept the minutes as amended. Rohwaeder seconded the motion.

Roll Call: All members present voted by roll call, 4-0 to approve the minutes as amended.

5. Meeting Adjournment

Motion: Salvas made a motion to adjourn the meeting at 8:41 pm. Martin seconded the motion.

Roll Call: All members present voted by roll call, 4-0 to adjourn.