



TOWN OF STRATHAM

Incorporated 1716

10 Bunker Hill Avenue · Stratham, NH 03885

Town Clerk/Tax Collector 603-772-4741

Select Board's Office/Administration/Assessing 603-772-7391

Code Enforcement/Building Inspections/Planning 603-772-7391

Conservation Commission Meeting Minutes October 23 2025, 7:00 p.m.

Members present: Bob Keating, Allison Knab, Dan McAuliffe, Bruce Cote, Brad Jones, Ryan Olsen

Members absent: Chris West, Tim Copeland (alternate)

Non-members present: Vanessa Price, Director of Planning and Building

The meeting was called to order at 7:00 p.m., by Allison Knab, acting as Chair.

Minutes:

Mr. Olsen motioned, and Mr. Keating seconded a motion to approve the September 24, 2025, meeting minutes as written. The motion passed unanimously.

Town and Other Business:

Brendan Sheehan (Applicant and Owner) request for a Design Review of a proposed residential development at 210 Portsmouth Avenue (Tax Map 21, Lot 81) in the Route 33 Legacy Highway Heritage District and the Wetland Conservation Overlay. The project includes the construction of nine duplexes, each with two-bedroom units, and a community building under condominium ownership while retaining the existing duplex and barn. Application submitted by Beals Associates, 70 Portsmouth Avenue, Stratham NH 03885.

Ms. Price gave an overview of the application for the Commission. The application is scheduled to be heard at the November 5, 2025, Planning Board meeting. The Applicant is providing an overview of their project for a design review. She noted that when a formal application is filed, the project will return to the Conservation Commission and the Route 33 Heritage District Advisory Committee for comments.

Mr. Sheehan presented the Conservation Commission with a new plan set. He explained his project proposal to build nine duplexes with two bedrooms, two bathrooms, and a full basement. The property has direct access to Stratham Hill Park at three different locations. There is an existing barn, which is used for onsite storage, recreational use, a fitness center, and a co-working area in the community center as well. Mr. Sheehan believes this project aligns very well with the Town of Stratham's Master Plan, being that it will be a low-maintenance facility for living and very condensed housing in contrast with much of the community, which is a lot of single-family houses on multiple-acre lots. He stated the existing house on the property has already been restored and is currently rented as two units today. He plans to preserve and relocate the existing barn onto a new foundation. The homes will have the character of New England-style colonial houses, to match the character of what's on the property. There will be more modern finishes and fixtures

inside. Regarding Stratham Hill Park trail access, there are three locations that he pointed out to the Conservation Commission. He added that Stratham Hill Park users will still be able to walk as they have been through the property without any impact.

Mr. Keating asked if the Barker's Farm trail runs through this property.

Mr. Sheehan replied yes and also described the location of the Crockett Farm entrances to the park, also in relation to his property.

Ms. Knab asked if people using the trail on this property will be walking through people's backyards.

Mr. Sheehan replied, potentially, and there would be a gravel road to pass over.

Mr. Olsen asked if that would be a right-of-way written into the deed.

Mr. Sheehan replied no, but it will be accessible as it is today.

Mr. Olsen expressed concern about new owners having issues with public access.

Mr. Sheehan replied that they will be rentals with a condominium association. He added that the Barker's Farm trail was recently closed by the Barkers.

Mr. Sheehan described the location and current condition of wetlands on the property as more like grass, not like reeds and standing water. He explained that they have pushed the road into the side setback to minimize wetland disturbance.

John Lorden with Beals and Associates spoke on behalf of the Applicant and described the wetland impacts, which are limited to road or driveway crossings to access further into the lot.

Mr. Keating asked what the impacts of the road in square feet are.

Mr. Lorden replied that he has the impact of the project as a whole as 1,914 square feet of direct wetland impact, which is considered expedited minimum impact. In the no-disturbance buffer, there is about 7,400 square feet of impact, and in the 50-foot setback beyond the no-disturbance buffer, there is a little over 28,000 square feet. He added that all of these calculations are a rough estimate.

Mr. Jones commented that the project is dense for five acres, especially with the wetlands.

Ms. Knab asked if there is any way to build this project without wetland impacts. Mr. Sheehan replied no.

Mr. Jones asked how long the road is. Mr. Lorden replied 1,200 feet. Mr. Jones asked if the road is allowed to be a dead-end. Mr. Lorden replied that they updated the plan to include two fire apparatus turnarounds.

Ms. Knab asked if the 20-foot-wide road requires a variance.

Mr. Lorden replied that it is a driveway.

Ms. Knab asked if they had thought about mitigation for wetland impacts.

Mr. Lorden replied no because the project is well below the 10,000 square foot threshold.

Ms. Knab understands that, but added that applicants will typically think about stormwater mitigation efforts if they have wetland impacts.

Mr. Cote commented that sight lines on Portsmouth Avenue could be an issue.

Mr. Lorden replied that the project will be reviewed by NHDOT.

Ms. Knab added that the new development across the street will compound the issue here.

Mr. McAuliffe asked if the stand of trees between this property and the Barkers will remain.

Mr. Sheehan replied Yes.

Mr. Cote doesn't think a fire pond is a sustainable source of water.

Mr. Olsen asked if the fire pond was denied, where would they install a cistern.

Mr. Lorden pointed out a location near one of the turnarounds.

Mr. Sheehan added that another consideration would be adding fire sprinkler systems in the buildings.

Mr. McAuliffe asked where the drinking water wells are located.

Mr. Lorden replied that there is one public water supply well proposed.

Ms. Knab asked if the well location is too close to the wetlands.

Mr. Lorden replied that it must be 50 feet, and the location is preliminary.

Ms. Price will summarize the Commission's comments from tonight in her staff memo.

Ms. Knab applauded the concept of bringing more housing and a different type of housing to Stratham. And although it is Mr. Sheehan's lot, it is a special spot, being between Barker's and Crockett's farm and in part of the park. She appreciates keeping the back part open for trail usage, but she thinks some changes to the plan could be made.

Mr. Keating asked if Mr. Sheehan would consider putting the remaining property into a Conservation Easement.

Mr. Sheehan replied that he has not put that much thought into it.

Ms. Knab thanked the team for their presentation.

Kelly and Michael Guarascio (Applicant and Owner) request for approval of a Conditional Use Permit to construct a 17-foot by 32-foot swimming pool within the wetlands setback at 4 Tuckers Trail (Tax Map 24, Lot 48) in the Residential/Agricultural Zoning District.

Ms. Price gave an overview of the application for the Commission. The application is scheduled to be heard at the November 19, 2025, Planning Board meeting. She noted that the lot was created before the wetlands ordinance was in effect.

Ms. Knab asked if the applicants wanted to say anything.

Mr. Guarascio replied that he is just trying to understand the process and what is feasible.

Ms. Knab opened the discussion to the Commission for comment.

Mr. Cote understands the owner's dilemma with unknowingly purchasing a property with 80% wetlands, but he is still concerned with the impacts.

Ms. Guarascio replied that the house is built in the buffer zone as well. Mr. Cote stated that he was on Tucker's Lane last year, and there was a fast-moving stream running under the road. Ms. Guarascio replied that it varies throughout the year.

Ms. Guarascio stated that a patio was installed a few years ago with approval from the Town.

The Commission asked questions about the fence.

Ms. Guarascio replied that they are flexible with the fence.

Mr. McAuliffe asked what material the pool would be made of.

Mr. Guarascio replied that it will be Gunite.

Mr. McAuliffe commented that he is concerned with leakage from the pool and backwashing.

Ms. Guarascio asked if they could mitigate that by planting trees or shrubs.

Ms. Knab replied Yes, there is landscaping they can do around the pool to help soak up that water.

Ms. Price advised the Applicants that the Planning Board may ask if there is another location, although she acknowledges it might be the only location available.

Mr. Guarascio replied that they discussed alternatives with the wetland scientist and the pool company.

Mr. Jones asked what the water table level is. The Applicants responded that they don't know.

Mr. McAuliffe explained that high groundwater might adversely affect the pool.

Ms. Knab asked that the Applicants ask the pool company if there are any ideas for mitigation of the discharge of water or risk of leakage.

The Commission thanked the Applicants for attending.

Boulders Realty Corp. (Applicant and Owner), Request for Design Review for a proposed housing development consisting of 20 residential lots with approximately 49 units at 13 and 15 Stoneybrook Drive, Zoned Special Commercial. Application submitted by Jones & Beach Engineers, Inc., P.O. Box 219, Stratham, NH 03885.

Ms. Price gave an overview of the application for the Commission. She explained that the parcel is in the Special Commercial District, and the ZBA granted relief for the use of single-family homes that is still in effect. There is an agreement between the Town and the Developer about the housing types in relation to the litigation settlement. The application is a non-binding design review that will be presented to the Planning Board on November 5, 2025. She noted that the Applicant was unable to make the meeting tonight. Ms. Price explained that regardless, there is value to the Conservation Commission to advise the Planning Board on their thoughts on the project. Ms. Price stated that the design overall does not meet the wetland buffer requirements, and there are questions about the Shoreland Protection setbacks.

The Conservation Commission members expressed concerns with the proposed construction in proximity to wetlands, the Squamscott River, and the brook running through the property, and with lawn chemicals. Additional concerns, not related to wetlands, were expressed regarding odor from the nearby sewage treatment plant, noise from Route 101, and egress off Stoney Brook Road.

New business:

A. E-bikes

Mr. Cote described the difference between the three class levels of e-bikes and that the Town was proposing to allow Class 1 and 2 e-bikes in Stratham Hill Park. The Commission agreed to provide concerns to the Trail Management Advisory Committee with allowing e-bikes at the Park due to user conflict and safety. Additionally, there does not seem to be an overwhelming need for their use at the Park.

Mr. McAuliffe made a motion that the Conservation Commission make a recommendation to TMAC that the Commission opposes the use of any class of e-bikes in Stratham Hill Park and that the Commission would like to prohibit the use of e-bikes in the Town Forest, which is under the jurisdiction of the Conservation Commission. Mr. Cote seconded the motion. The motion passed unanimously.

Ms. Knab will draft a letter to TMAC on behalf of the Conservation Commission.

B. Coastal Conservation Commission Roundtable

Ms. Price attended a virtual roundtable that discussed how to reduce the impact of the use of plastics. It was primarily geared towards town-wide initiatives. One example is encouraging the public to bring their own containers to a food truck festival. Mr. Cote stated that Portsmouth initiated a city-wide ban on Styrofoam. He said that Exeter went through many hearings trying to ban single-use plastics, but the Select Board pushed back. Dover is looking at another material other than astroturf for their athletic fields and created a reusable container project that can be used for leftovers in restaurants.

C. Discussion on November meeting date scheduled for Wednesday, November 26, 2025

The Commission canceled the November meeting date and rescheduled the December meeting to be held on December 4, 2025.

D. Clean up days

Mr. Olsen asked if there would be interest in adding a fall cleanup day in 2026. Ms. Knab suggested changing the spring cleanup to a fall cleanup due to low turnout and commented that the Commission needs to strategize on how they can get more volunteers. The Commission agreed to continue discussions on outreach.

Mailbox – No items discussed.

Mr. Cote motioned, and Mr. McAuliffe seconded the motion to adjourn at 8:19 p.m. The motion passed unanimously.

Respectfully submitted by Susan Connors and Vanessa Price