



TOWN OF STRATHAM

Incorporated 1716

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Conservation Commission Meeting Minutes July 1, 2026, 7:00 p.m.

Members Present: Bruce Cote, Bob Keating, Dan McAuliffe, Chris West, Allison Knabb, Brad Jones, Ryan Olsen, Tim Copeland (Alternate)

Non-Members Present: Vanessa Price, Director of Planning and Building

The meeting was called to order at 6:59 pm by Chairperson Cote.

Review of previous meeting minutes

7:03 pm: Ms. Knab made a motion to approve the June 8th meeting minutes as written. Mr. McAuliffe seconded the motion. Motion passed unanimously.

7:07 pm Review of 210 Portsmouth Ave. Development Plan Revisions

- Mr. Brendan Sheehan (Red Barn Property, LCC) and Mr. John Lorden (Beale Associates) presented the revised plans of the proposed 210 Portsmouth Ave. development project. Due to comments made by the Planning Board regarding the Wetland disturbance of this project, Mr. Sheehan had been advised to re-address the Conservation Commission to receive approval of their revised plans.
 - Applicant described the changes made to the previous plans, including the removal of Duplex #1 from the Wetland Buffer Zone, a slight change in the driveway position to fully remove it from the 25' abutting property setback, change to the relocation site of the historic barn structure, and revision to the fire lane turnaround to mostly remove it from the Wetland Setback.
 - Mr. Lorden asked that the Conservation Commission only consider the Conditional Use Permit that pertains to the wetland impacts from the shared driveway, as the shared driveway is the key to making productive use of the property for development.
 - Mr. Sheehan described justifications for the Conservation Commission to approve a Conditional Use Permit, such as the development fitting into the Town's Master Plan for housing.
 - Mr. McAuliffe made general comments on the plans and appreciation for the work put into the revisions; however, he raised concerns about the relocation of the barn, which is now fully within the Wetland Buffer setback. Mr. McAuliffe also raised concerns about allowing significant structures within the wetland setback to set a precedent for future expansion, which would impact other wetland areas of this property, as well as precedent being set for other property owners or developers using this development as an example to petition for large structures to be allowed within Wetland Setback zones.
 - Mr. McAuliffe asked questions about future plans Mr. Sheehan had for expanding development on this property. Mr. Lorden responded that due to regulations on the

number of occupants for a single Lot, it would restrict future development and responded to Mr. Olsen's follow-up question on subdivision that a lack of frontage would limit subdivisions on this lot to get around the single-lot occupant restrictions.

- Ms. West asked for clarification on the drainage areas that are proposed within the Wetland Setback areas.
- Mr. Keating made comments on his concerns about the barn being moved into the wetland buffer in exchange for Duplex #1 being removed from the setback. Mr. Keating stated that this change resulted in no positive benefit of reducing wetland impacts by exchanging one structure for another.
- Mr. Olsen commented that while there were positive changes made to the plans from previous revisions, a key concern is the direct wetland impacts of the shared driveway. His comments reflected Mr. McAuliffe's, stating the shared driveway would set a strong precedent for future developments to be allowed direct wetland impacts to access upland areas of lots that should otherwise be deemed undevelopable.
- Mr. Sheehan and Mr. Lorden reviewed the defined conditions that needed to be met for a Conditional Use Permit to be granted, highlighting specifically that the plans did not constitute a case of "economic convenience", whereby a developer intentionally overlooked ecological impacts to provide an economic benefit of the development.
 - Ms. Knab commented that Economic Convenience is not realistically within the purview of the Conservation Commission's charter and that ecological impacts are the main focus of this committee. Mr. Olsen reinforced this statement.
- Chairperson Cote made statements that it's well understood by all Conservation Commission members the work and effort that the applicants have put into trying to reduce environmental impacts, and that while sustainable development and affordable housing is a cornerstone of the Town's Master Plan, the direct and indirect impact to wetlands and wetland buffers on this Lot and abutting Lots is excessive.

7:45 pm: Ms. Knab made a motion to allow public comment to be heard. Ms. West seconded the motion. The motion passed unanimously

- Forrest Barker (abutter) made comments regarding the potential impacts of this development on their farm operations, including: direct impacts to their irrigation ponds, which sit in close proximity to the proposed shared driveway, from winter sand/salt applications, potential driveway runoff, and impacts to the wetland buffer areas on their abutting property. Forrest also brought attention to the fact that the site walkthrough held on May 28th happened during a historic drought period that did not fully allow Conservation Commission and Planning Board members to see site conditions during non-drought conditions.

8:00 pm: Ms. Knab made a motion to close public comment; Mr. Olsen seconded the motion. Motion passed unanimously.

- Conservation Commission members discussed next steps to close discussion and determined a vote would be taken on the revised plans.

8:05 pm: Mr. Olsen made a motion to deny Conditional Use permit #1 (Section 11.5 & 11.6 of Stratham Zoning Ordinance for the construction of a shared driveway in the 50-foot Wetlands Setback and 25' No-disturbance Area).

- Mr. Cote read the full motion and results from the previous results that stated the area in question as “high-quality wetland”. Mr. Lorden opposed the statement and asked for clarification to be made that the soil scientist Mr. Sergio Bonilla, had previously categorized the area as “low-quality, emergent wetlands”.
- Clarification was confirmed that Mr. Bonilla had in fact previously stated the wetlands being directly impacted by the shared driveway were “low-quality, emergent wetlands”.

8:30 pm: Mr. Olsen restated his motion to deny Conditional Use permit #1 (Section 11.5 & 11.6 of Stratham Zoning Ordinance for the construction of a shared driveway in the 50-foot Wetlands Setback and 25' No-disturbance Area). Ms. West seconded the motion.

- Vote was held. Finding 6 members (Mr. Cote, Mr. Olsen, Mr. McAuliffe, Ms. West, Mr. Keating, Mr. Jones) in favor of denying the Conditional use permit and 1 member (Ms. Knab) in favor of approving.

8:32 pm Request for preliminary request for Conditional Use Permit for a proposed fence at 4 Tilton Drive (Tax Map 6, Lot 215)

- Mr. Steven Houle described the nature of the project and need for fencing along the frontage of their property to provide privacy and to discourage passersby from driving along a section of their yard that was previously a dirt driveway before their lot was constructed.
- Mr. Houle described that common GPS services direct drivers down an abandoned dirt road that now constitutes a portion of their lawn. The fence would be used for privacy and to deter motor vehicles from driving on their property.
- The fence was described as an 8' tall fence to stretch across the frontage of their property. The conditional use permit would be required in order to place fence posts within the Wetland Setback area.
- Mr. Houle described that a fence would in fact create less wetland disturbance than planting large trees, which require significantly larger holes and disturbance to the Wetlands Buffer areas.
- Conservation Commission members agreed this was a reasonable application for a Conditional Use Permit and provided general support so long as the 25' no-disturb area was not impacted by the fence construction.

8:46 pm: Mr. McAuliffe made a motion to recommend preliminarily approve application; Mr. Keating seconded the motion. Motion passed unanimously.

8:50 pm: Presentation by Lynn Vaccarro of Great Bay National Estuarine Research Reserve on Stratham/Newfields Marsh Projects

- Ms. Vaccarro and Ms. Lauren White (Stewardship Coordinator) gave a joint presentation describing upcoming project initiatives for improving the salt marshes that surround Chapman's Landing area.
- Ms. Vaccarro gave a general overview of GBNERR and previous projects as well as the general scope of upcoming work to be done at the Chapman's Landing area.
- Ms. White described the history of Salt Marsh use from Colonial through present times and ecological disruptions caused by previous farming and hay harvesting techniques.
- General overview of current salt marsh conditions and technical team reviews were provided, including insights into man-made ditches, current hydrology, and impacts of mega pools that are forming.
- Ms. Vaccarro and Ms. White describe current monitoring work that is being done as well as future plans for mitigation work that will help improve the overall health of the salt marsh area surrounding Chapman's Landing.
- This was a general informational presentation and GBNERR will continue to inform the Conservation Commission of upcoming work to be done to the Chapman's Landing area and any input or approvals needed from the Town as site mitigation funding becomes available.

9:10 pm Other Topics:

- Ms. Price described upcoming Fish & Wildlife rain barrel painting event to be held
- Ms. Price informed the Conservation Commission Members that the PREPA Grant described in the June 8th meeting minutes was formally approved by PREPA and the Town of Stratham now has \$25,000 at its disposal to be used for research and planning for the improvement of the Town Landing on River Rd.

Adjournment

9:16pm Ms. Knab made a motion to adjourn the meeting. Mr. Olsen seconded the motion. Motion passed; meeting adjourned.

Meeting minutes respectfully submitted by Ryan Olsen