East Haddam
CONSERVATION
COMMISSION

Conservation Commission Meeting Minutes
Date: Tuesday, February 3, 2026
Time: 7:00 PM
Location: Municipal Office Building, Room #1

1. **Call to Order**
   The meeting was called to order at 7:00 PM by Chair Joe Sina.

2. **Roll Call and Alternate Appointments**

Members Present: Joe Sina, Bernie Gillis, Barry Bernard, Alan Ponanski, John Olin, Cameron Beard (on Zoom), Pat Capel, David Walls
Members Absent: Susan Pagnano
Guests: Jim Ventres
Alternate Appointments: None needed.

3. **Approval of Agenda**

Motion to approve the agenda.
Capel/Gillis: Passed Unanimously.

4. **Approval of Conservation Commission Minutes from January 6, 2026**

Motion to approve the minutes as presented.
Gillis/Capel – Passed with one Abstention

5. **Presentation from Public**

- Q & A with Jim Ventres on Open Space planning for the future.

The future of the golf course property on Banner Road was discussed at length. Jim Ventres passed out maps of the property and said that the parcel is 155 acres in various pieces and has a conservation easement on it, which stays with the land no matter who owns it. There is a sensitive archeological site on the property, so trails should be kept away from that area. If the town buys the property it would most likely be maintained as open space. If it is used as a golf course, the greens would need to be kept up in order for the project to be a success, and water is a problem up there. Currently the price of the parcel has not been finalized.

6. Chair's Updates

- Mr. Sina mentioned the upcoming Connecticut Land Conservation Council conference (CLCC). Mr. Gillis and Mr. Ponanski are interested in attending. Registration is available on the website and is due by February 23. Membership for a municipality costs $250 a year. Commission members agreed that East Haddam should become a member and support the work of the Council.
- Mr. Sina submitted the Commission's budget request and reduced it from $16,200 last year to $15,000 this year because the commission did not spend its entire budget. He needs to include some of the year's accomplishments the budget requests. The members suggested: maintaining the trails, publicizing hunting season information and reminding hikers to wear orange during that time, maintaining trail maps, adding QR codes to the trail kiosks. Mr. Gillis will provide a list of the trail bridges that were installed. Mr. Sina said that a recording secretary has been hired to prepare the minutes.
- There will be an article in Events Magazine about Resources for the Outdoor Enthusiast. The East Haddam News published an article in January about Birds of Prey and will soon publish an article on Beavers.
- CT Trails Day in June was discussed. Mr. Ponanaski is willing to lead a hike.

7. Old Business

Subcommittee Updates

Stewardship and Forestry Updates – Mr. Gillis

- Harris Trail - removed some downed trees
- Urbanik - red and blue trails, removed some trees
- Lena trail – brought in an ox to bring lumber for a bog bridge
- Hatch - removed some trees that were identified by Rochelle Davis and Nick Griffin
- Gelston easement - 4 trees on the red and blue trails removed
- Attended the East Haddam Fish & Game Wetlands meeting about digging out fish pools in the Eight Mile River with an excavator. No decision was made. Mr. Gillis will attend the next meeting.

Outreach and Promotion – Mr. Sina

- See Chair's Updates

Climate Resilience– Mr. Olin

- He is applying for a grant from the Long Island Sound Partnership to fund a natural resources inventory of the area where the CT River flood plain intersects with Succor Brook.
- If the application criteria are met and the final review is passed, we would enter into a planning support program which would provide experts from UConn and/or Cornell who would do the natural

resources inventory and make recommendations for what we could do to control the more severe impacts of sea level rise.

- Estimates of water level rise by midcentury are 20 inches over the current high-water mark, not counting a storm surge. Depending on what happens with the Arctic ice shelf, it could be as much as 15 feet in 50 years.
- Mr. Olin is looking for nature-based solutions like rain gardens, riparian buffers, and a board walk to make the area along the river more accessible and to help solve some flooding problems. He is working with the Redevelopment Agency on a master plan for the area.
- The Goodspeed is searching for a new rehearsal hall location. The former Williams Chevrolet site is too expensive to renovate. The town is applying for a DEEP grant to fund the removal of the old rehearsal hall next to Succor Brook.

IWWC Updates – Mr. Walls

- Mr. Walls spoke about the proposed excavation of fish pools in the Eight Mile River and said that the excavations would be in the middle of the stream. The material would be pushed to the side and would not disturb the stream banks. The area is located to the north of Haywardville Road near Early Road and is about ¾ of a mile long.

P & Z Updates – Mr. Gillis

- The application for reconstructing the former Cumberland Farms store in Moodus into a convenience store with a drive-through window is pending.

Open Space Updates – Mr. Sina

- No meeting, but the Land Use lawyer is working on Sprecher swap and Urban Farms details

Eight Mile River Updates – Mr. Beard

- Nothing to report.

Sustainability Committee– Mr. Ponanski

- A report on a regional waste initiative - RiverCOG has hired consultants to explore the regionalization of waste disposal, trying to do more with the same amount of money.
- Regional cooperation on adding pollinator pathways to maps used by land trusts, etc., also led by RiverCOG. This could be used as a tool to support insect and bird populations.
- A workshop on winter planting of native species will be held on February 15, from noon to 3 pm at First Church. Native species

seeds need to be planted outside now, in the cold, in order to germinate in the spring. The workshop will also provide information on eradicating invasive species. It will be led by Susan Kinsman, Advanced Master Gardener, board member of Wild Ones Mt. Laurel chapter, and member of the Invasive Plant Working Group.

- New business – wellness and community safety, chimney fire prevention, tree protection guidelines, and discussion about establishing a teen center in town.

Planting, existing garden updates– Mr. Sina

- No new work because of the season

Reserve Monitor Discussion– Mr. Sina

- Nothing to report

8. **New Business**
   a. **New Bills**
      The following bill was submitted and approved:
      $129.14 from Shagbark for pressure treated lumber for a bog bridge.
      Motion to approve the bill
      Gillis/Capel – Passed Unanimously.
   b. **Discussion from Commission members**
      Mr. Gillis reported that the Land Trust is considering hiring a firm from Lebanon to bring in goats to the Ayers property on Hopyard Road to eat invasives.
      Mr. Capel said that he has applied to join the Agriculture Commission, which has a lot of interests in common with the Conservation Commission. He spoke about the possibility of growing hay on some Open Space land instead of having to mow it to keep it open. The land could be leased to a farmer who would grow and harvest the hay. There is land in the Harris Preserve that could be used. A discussion ensued. Mr. Sina asked Mr. Capel to write a paragraph about it and distribute it for the next meeting.
9. **Public Comment** (can be submitted via email to ccchair@easthaddam.org)
   None.
10. **Next Meeting:** Tuesday, 3 March 2026, 7:00 pm, Meeting Room #1
11. **Adjournment**
    Motion to adjourn at 9:02 PM
    Ponanski/Gillis – Passed Unanimously.

Respectfully Submitted,
Martha Hansen

Recording Secretary