

Conservation Commission Meeting Minutes
Date: Tuesday, March 4, 2025
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 Joe Sina.

2. Roll Call and Alternate Appointments

- **Members Present**: Joe Sina, Bernie Gillis, Barry Bernard, David Walls, Cameron Beard, Alan Ponanski, and John Olin.
- **Members Absent**: Gary Wilson and Susan Pagnano.
- **Guests**: Joshua Garlick (Life Forms Inc.), Rob Smith, Pat Young (Eightmile River Coordinating Committee), Superintendent Teresa DeBrito, Shaleen Thody (Middle School Science Teacher), Brad Thody, Amalia Shaltiel, and various members of the public.
- **Alternate Appointments**: Barry Bernard and David Walls were appointed voting members for this meeting.

3. Approval of Agenda
Motion to approve the agenda as presented.
Ponanski/Walls – Passed Unanimously.

4. Approval of Minutes
Motion to approve the Conservation Commission meeting minutes from February 4, 2025.
Beard/Bernard – Passed Unanimously.

5. Presentations from the Public

a. Life Forms Inc. Presentation – Joshua Garlic
Joshua Garlick, President of Life Forms Inc., presented an educational initiative focused on integrating technology with nature study for middle school students. The program aims to enhance environmental education through interactive classroom experiences, hands-on fieldwork, and digital content creation. The initiative will blend historic nature study techniques with modern digital tools, providing an immersive educational experience that engagingly introduces scientific concepts.

Commission members raised questions regarding student engagement, the role of technology, and the Conservation Commission's involvement. Superintendent DeBrito emphasized that the program aligns with existing curriculum goals, enhancing students' scientific literacy and artistic engagement. The Commission discussed the funding mechanism, with the Commission acting as the grant applicant to secure funding from the Eightmile River Watershed Program.

Further discussions included student participation beyond field studies, including contributing illustrations and scientific observations to the digital presentation. Some members expressed concerns about ensuring sustained student involvement beyond the initial experience. Ideas such as student-created field journals, animation contributions, and community engagement events were considered to maximize educational impact.

Motion to approve writing of a $5,000 grant application to the Eightmile River Watershed program for the educational initiative in collaboration with Life Forms Inc. and East Haddam Middle School.

There were concerns regarding the level of detail in the budget and the lack of clarity regarding the Conservation Commission's direct role in the initiative. There was discussion about ensuring that the deliverables were well-defined and that the Commission was not placed in a position of financial liability. Additionally, questions were raised about the administration of funds through the town and how the implementation of the project would be monitored.

Olin/Ponanski

Favor: Sina, Gillis, Bernard, Ponanski, Olin
Abstain: Beard, Walls
Motion Passed

A discussion was held regarding trail development at the newly acquired Kronberg property, with input from Superintendent DeBrito and Middle School Science Teacher Shaleen Thody. The Commission reviewed opportunities for collaboration with the New England Mountain Bike Association (NEMBA) to assist with trail layout and construction. Plans include identifying key environmental features such as vernal pools and geological formations for educational purposes.

The school representatives expressed interest in involving students in the trail-building process, incorporating their efforts into outdoor education and science curricula. The Commission emphasized that trail development would align with conservation goals and educational opportunities while ensuring safe public access. The discussion also covered potential funding sources and logistical considerations for trail construction.

6. Chair's Updates
Chairman Sina provided updates on ongoing projects and issues, including reports from reserve monitors on ATV activity and unauthorized trail use at Nichols and Lena. The Commission is working with local law enforcement and town officials to deter such activities.

There was also discussion about maintenance efforts, including fallen tree removal and plans for professional forestry services to address hazardous trees near trails and power lines. Funding for these projects was confirmed, with revenue from prior timber harvests available to cover necessary services.

7. Old Business

i. Stewardship & Forestry Management – Mr. Gillis
Mr. Gillis provided updates on trail maintenance and clearing projects at multiple preserves. Issues regarding signage were raised, with a review of current measures and potential improvements for better visibility.

The continued problem of ATV activity, particularly at Nichols and Lena, was discussed. The Commission considered additional deterrents, such as installing surveillance cameras and barriers. The need for professional forestry services was emphasized, with a recommendation to allocate available funds for hazardous tree removal near trails and property lines.

ii. Outreach and Promotion – Mr. Wilson
The Friends of Machimoodus State Park will host their 4th Annual Spring Fling on March 23, 2025, from 12:00 PM to 3:00 PM. The Conservation Commission will have a table at the event.

iii. Climate Resilience – Mr. Olin
The Succor Brook study is nearing completion, with the final report expected in April. Recent discussions with Goodspeed focused on potential flood mitigation measures, including the removal of the Rehearsal Hall. However, Goodspeed expressed concerns about relocating the Rehearsal Hall until a new location is found, likely at the old Chevy building. While FEMA funding is available for the building's removal, Goodspeed has shown little progress on this matter. Mr. Olin raised concerns that major flood events could damage infrastructure in the coming years due to the lack of action.

8. Liaison Reports

a. IWWC Updates – Mr. Walls
No updates.

b. P&Z Updates – Mr. Gillis
No significant updates.

c. Open Space Updates – Mr. Sina
No updates.

d. Eightmile Committee Updates – Mr. Beard
Grant opportunities remain available for conservation-related projects.

e. Sustainability Committee – Mr. Ponanski
No quorum at the last meeting.

9. Planting and Existing Garden Updates
No updates.

10. Reserve Monitor Discussion
Reports of ATV activity at Nichols and Lena were discussed. Monitoring efforts will continue.

11. Bills
The following bills were reviewed and approved for payment:

- Shagbark: $46.97 for gloves and field spray.
- Lowe's: $66.09 for boundary posts.

Motion to approve payment of bills.
Gillis/Olin – Passed Unanimously.

Motion to approve $200 for supplies to be included in the Eightmile River grant.
Ponanski/Beard – Passed Unanimously.

12. Public Comment
No public comments were received.

13. Next Meeting
The next meeting is scheduled for Tuesday, April 1, 2025, at 7:00 PM in Room #1.

14. Adjournment
Motion to adjourn at 9:20 PM.
Olin/Gillis – Passed Unanimously.

Respectfully Submitted,
E. Ruth Ziobron
Recording Secretary