

Approved 10-27-21

**Plainfield Conservation Commission
Minutes of Meeting Held September 29, 2021**

The meeting was held in Town Hall. ConCom members present: Erik Burcroff, Judy Ferber, Jack Nelson, Alice Schertle, Judith Williams (chair)

Also present: Joan Wattman, ZBA; Peg Keller, ZBA; Bob Baker, Finance; Judy Cole, Planning; Patrick Williamson, Select Board; Ed Stockman, Agriculture; Tee O'Sullivan, Finance; Dario Coletta, Historical Commission.; Ronald Weeks, Health and Assessors; Conrad Liebenow, Energy; Dudley Williams, Resident; Pleun Bouricius, Resident, Ed Morann, Resident

The purpose of this ConCom meeting was to present the draft local wetlands by-law to representatives of town committees, boards, and commissions and to obtain feedback and suggestions from those present.

Call to Order, Judith Williams, 6:35 p.m.

Judith W. opened the meeting with a welcome and introductions of those attending, including Board/Committee affiliations.

Jack made a Power Point presentation of the proposed bylaw, including text, graphs, photos, and diagrams. He described the bylaw as deriving from and consistent with Plainfield's Municipal Vulnerability Preparedness Plan (MVP). He pointed out that the WPA is generic, made to fit all MA towns; the proposed local bylaw is specific to our area. The ConCom has studied other local wetland bylaws, especially those of Western Mass. Subjects covered in Jack's presentation included:

- A brief summary of the Wetlands Protection Act (WPA)
- Importance of wetlands for resiliency under changing climate conditions. The need to prepare for increased extreme weather events and to moderate the effects of drought.
- The importance of wetland buffer zones.
- How the Bylaw and WPA differ.
- Exemptions in the WPA that remain unchanged.

There was a discussion of the ways in which buffer zones protect wetlands by mitigating extreme weather events. Vegetated buffer zones, for example, promote sheet flow and avoid damaging channelized runoff. Wildlife has been shown to need, over their lifetimes, much more upland buffer zone than is currently provided.

The proposed bylaw includes:

- Designation of the buffer zone as a Resource Area with a 50 ft. minimum No Disturbance Zone, affording it more protection
- Extending the 200 ft. Riverfront resource area to intermittent as well as perennial streams
- Creation of a 100 ft. buffer to any wetland, not just those bordering a body of water
- the discretionary ability to require a continuous vegetated strip of up to 100 ft. of buffer zone or 200 ft. of Riverfront.

--Extending protection to "Potential Vernal Pools" identified by Mass GIS and certified Vernal Pools not located in Resource Areas.

--Expansion of Vernal Pool buffer zone from 100 to 200 feet.

--No additional filing fees. WPA fees would still apply.

Jack also described things that would not change from the WPA.

In the ensuing discussion, the following reactions and suggestions were offered:

--The 200 ft. Riverfront Area should not be extended to intermittent streams. There is so much runoff in Plainfield, with intermittent flow of all sizes and significance, that the resultant regulation would be too broad.

--Would strict adherence to the new regulations have prevented the building of existing homes?

--Existing regulations are effective and sufficient

--Discretion should be eliminated in favor of specific stated rules. This ConCom has been reasonable and helpful. Would future Commissions misuse discretion?

--Prepare for development pressure, which is heating up in Plainfield.

--We need better mapping to indicate the path of future water travel. Better mapping would help us enact protection for areas of anticipated water flow and ensure the safety of future residents.

Judith W. pointed out that the WPA says a project can go forward if there is no reasonable alternative.

Jack and Judith said the suggestions and reactions expressed tonight will be very helpful as the ConCom amends and fine-tunes the proposed bylaw. Judith thanked everyone for attending and invited participants to contact the ConCom with any other ideas, concerns, or suggestions.

The next regularly scheduled meeting of the Conservation Commission will take place Wednesday, October 27, at 6:30 p.m. in Town Hall.

Adjourned 8:05 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Alice Schertle