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TOWN OF AYER  
TOWN CLERK



## Town of Ayer Conservation Commission

Town Hall \* One Main Street \* Ayer, MA 01432 \* 978-772-8220, ext. 143  
Minutes for 2/9/2023

Location: Ayer Town Hall, 1st Floor

Present: Jon Schmalenberger (Chair), Mark Phillips (Vice-Chair), George Bacon (Member), Jen Amaya (Member), Jessica Gugino (Member/Clerk), Heather Hampson (Conservation Agent)

APAC taped: YES

All Public Hearings are opened under the Wetlands Protection Act (MCL Ch. 131, section 40)  
and under the Ayer Wetlands Bylaw (Article XXVI)

### 7:00 PM – Open Meeting

- **Confirmation of Agenda**
  - G. Bacon moved to confirm the agenda as posted; M. Phillips 2<sup>nd</sup>.
    - Motion approved unanimously 5-0.
- **Approval of Meeting Minutes**
  - G. Bacon moved to accept the minutes for 1/26/2023 as written; M. Phillips 2<sup>nd</sup>.
    - Motion approved unanimously.
- **Public Input**
  - None received.
- **Discussion: Ayer Pond Treatments 2022, Year-End Report, Water & Wetland LLC**
  - Joe Onorato, of Water & Wetland, presented a summary of their Year-End Report for the 2022 treatment season and answered questions.
    - The Year-End Report is available on ConCom's Town website under the category of "Ponds" (<https://www.ayer.ma.us/conservation-commission/pages/ponds>).
  - The primary goal for the treatments of Sandy, Flannagan, and Pine Meadow ponds are for the eradication of the bulk of invasive aquatic vegetation – variable milfoil, fanwort, and curly-leaf pondweed, as well as some isolated invasive stands of phragmites on Sandy Pond – and for the scaling back of the overgrowth of native water lilies (in Flannagan and Pine Meadow) in order to preserve open water for habitat and recreation.
    - (Pine Meadow Pond is about a third covered over with cattails, lilies, and other vegetation; allowing it to be covered over completely would be unhealthy for the pond itself.)
  - Some details included:
    - there is no observable fanwort in Pine Meadow Pond, and also no phragmites, just native cattails;
    - as increased control over fanwort and milfoil is established, Water & Wetland is starting to observe the return of more native species such as bladderwort and ribbon weed, a good sign;



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- fanwort and milfoil primarily spread through fragmentation of the plants, but curly leaf pondweed has a different propagation style making longer-lasting systemic control more difficult;
- phragmites were not treated in Sandy Pond in 2022 because of State restrictions when a Public Health Advisory closes a water body due to a toxic blue-green algae bloom.
- The 2022 blue-green algae bloom (aka cyanobacteria) that closed Sandy Pond in late August and through much of the fall was discussed further – how to detect, how to prevent, how to treat.
  - Mr. Onorato said that three things are needed for such blooms to occur, all of which were present in 2022: water, sunlight, and nutrients.
  - One of the factors that contribute to toxic blooms is the amount of Total Phosphorous in a waterbody.
    - Mr. Onorato looked at a portion of the 2016 Geosyntec Pond Survey (also available on ConCom's website) which indicated that the Total Phosphorous (TP) in Sandy Pond at that time was around 28 parts/billion – not horrible but also not great.
      - He said keeping TP below 20 is optimal.
  - One of the things adding to TP levels is the use of lawn fertilizers.
    - Public education needs to emphasize that this is not simply an issue involving immediate abutters to a waterbody, but really involves the use of fertilizers by anyone within the actual and more extensive *watershed*.
    - The USGS maintains a website with streamstats that details the extent of specific watersheds.
      - (J. Amaya later circulated the actual website:  
<https://streamstats.usgs.gov/ss/>)
  - In addition to public education, another tactic that can be used to control TP inflow into a waterbody is the use of filters at focused points, such as stormwater outfalls.
    - Two filters mentioned were Biochar (activated carbon) filters and EutroSORB filters.
  - Mr. Onorato recommended annual tracking of TP levels – and ConCom will check with the DPW as they have been doing some regular monitoring per the recommendations of the Geosyntec report.
    - He also said measuring for “free reactive” phosphorous levels (which are different from TP measurements) can be a good predictor of a possible toxic bloom if those levels are high.
  - Another cheap and easy measurement that could indicate the risk of a toxic bloom is the use of a Secchi disk to measure water clarity/turbidity.
    - This is part of Water & Wetland's standard practice when performing treatments, but Mr. Onorato noted that there is usually a substantial gap between their late spring/early summer treatments and their return in late



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August/early September to treat for water lily overgrowth and do their post-treatment survey.

- This measurement is something ConCom itself could do every couple of weeks during July and August, in particular in Sandy Pond.
  - There, at the beginning of the swimming season, Mr. Onorato said they typically observe water clarity down to 3-4 meters in depth.
    - If clarity is reduced to 3-4 feet, that can indicate a possible bloom is in the offing.
- As for possible treatments if a bloom is caught early, Mr. Onorato said the use of copper-sulphate can help control algae growth.
  - He recommended ConCom amend its Order of Conditions for pond treatment to have a contingency in place that authorizes the use of copper-sulphate if necessary.
- Mr. Onorato also mentioned the possibility that Sandy Pond may have been treated with alum, to bind and reduce nutrient phosphorous in the water, several decades ago, but no one on the Commission had any knowledge of this.
- Resident Frank Macklin, of 43 Groton Harvard Road, asked for information about the floating islands of dead weeds appearing around Flannagan Pond.
  - Mr. Onorato said those muck islands are formed when the rhizomes (root/stems) from decaying waterlilies fill with gas, detach from the water bottom and rise to the surface, pulling bottom muck along with them.
    - Often these will sink back to the bottom in the winter, or they can be broken up and/or dragged to the shore if too dense.
    - They aren't bad as they do provide good habitat for water fowl.
- Mr. Onorato was also asked for his opinion on some alternative suggestions made recently by a resident for treating invasive aquatic weeds in the ponds.
  - Dredging to regain depth is not a very viable solution – it would cost in the millions and would need to involve the Army Corps of Engineers.
  - Ecoharvesting was something mentioned that was being done in Littleton on Spectacle Pond.
    - Mr. Onorato said when Water & Wetland started up a few years ago, they looked into purchasing equipment for ecoharvesting.
      - First, they went to see one in action and immediately observed that its use resulted in floating plant fragments everywhere.
        - Since fanwort and milfoil, two of the primary treatment targets for Ayer ponds, spread through fragmentation, this would not be a great tool for our ponds.
      - Second, they were told by Dr. Ken Wagner, a western Mass. specialist in water resource management, that the equipment for ecoharvesting is made of aluminum and does not hold up well to travel from site to site.
  - Sterilized carp?



# Town of Ayr Conservation Commission

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- August 2nd, September 1st and for water lily growth and the lake.
- pro- treatment survey.
- This movement is something that can itself could do every couple of weeks during July and August in particular in Sandy Pond.
- There at the beginning of the swimming season, Mr. Quatro said they typically observe water lily down to 3-4 meters in depth.
- It clearly is reduced to 3-4 feet that can indicate a possible reason is in the spring.
- A possible treatment if a bloom is caught early, Mr. Quatro said the use of copper-sulfate can help control algal growth.
- It's recommended Council amend its Order of Conditions for pond treatment to have a contingency in place that authorizes the use of copper-sulfate if necessary.
- Mr. Quatro also mentioned the possibility that Sandy Pond may have been treated with algaecide and reduced nutrient phosphorus in the water several decades ago, but no one on the Commission had any knowledge of this.
- Resident Frank Mitchell of 43 Gorton Lane and Board asked for information about the floating islands of dead weed appearing around Thompson Pond.
- Mr. Quatro said those much islands are found when the flowers (floaters) from floating waterlilies fill with gas, detach from the water bottom and rise to the surface, pulling bottom muck along with them.
- Often these will sink back to the bottom if the wind so they can be broken up and discharged to the shore if too dense.
- They don't bad as they do provide good habitat for water fowl.
- Mr. Quatro was also asked for his opinion on some alternative suggestions made recently by a resident for treating invasive aquatic weeds in the ponds.
- Regarding to regain depth in not a very viable solution - it would cost in the millions and would need to involve the Army Corps of Engineers.
- Boat-dredging is something meant to be that was being done in Littleton on Spectacle Pond.
- Mr. Quatro said when Walter A. Weiland started up a few years ago they looked into purchasing equipment for dredging.
- First, they went to see one in action and immediately observed that its use resulted in floating plant fragments or fragments.
- Since farm on and milled, two of the primary treatment targets for Ayr ponds spread through fragmentation.
- this would not be a great tool for our ponds.
- Second, they were told by the Ken Wagoner's western class specialist in water resource management that the equipment for dredging is made of aluminum and does not hold up well to gravel it can stir in the

Shelby County



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- A nonstarter in Massachusetts since they are illegal in this state.
- However, Mr. Onorato also noted that the use of carp in three waterbodies in Connecticut, where they are not illegal, was documented.
  - The carp apparently ate all the native vegetation first, then the invasive vegetation, so that it has now become a challenge to try to re-vegetative those waterbodies.
- ConCom members thanked Mr. Onorato for his presentation and the great information provided.
- **Conservation Commission Office and Member Updates**
  - Ayer Solar II, 0 Washington Street, Ayer Solar II LLC/Rohit Garg, MassDEP # 100-0444
    - H. Hampson finally received the requested documentation from Mr. Garg showing that NHESP (Natural History & Endangered Species Program) had “no comment” in response to changes made to the project from the approved plans.
    - On her Wednesday morning site visit, H. Hampson observed that contractors were working on fixing the left side of the retaining wall (when looking toward the wetlands), but that she also learned that work ceased right after she left the site.
    - There has been no response yet to ConCom’s request for an Amendment to the Notice of Intent (see vote taken at 1/26/2023 meeting), given all the changes from the approved plans, some of which appear to have increased impact to resource areas.
    - H. Hampson is watching an underground stormwater basin – the cover on this has now been removed and water is in the basin, however one of MassDEP’s General Conditions states that stormwater cannot be hooked up and used until signed off on by a professional engineer.
  - Meeting with Town Manager Robert Pontbriand on 2/8/2023
    - J. Schmalenberger, J. Gugino, and H. Hampson met with the Town Manager for H. Hampson’s 6 month review and other matters.
      - Mr. Pontbriand noted that feedback he has received from other departments in Town Hall has been very positive.
      - J. Schmalenberger had also contributed that ConCom is itself very pleased with Ms. Hampson’s job performance.
    - Flannagan Pond Public Access
      - The report from Tighe & Bond, commissioned by the DPW to study Flannagan Pond public access possibilities, was just received and H. Hampson will forward it on to the Commission and Mr. Pontbriand.
        - In brief, the report identifies the Central Avenue pumping station as the most feasible site for creating public access – at an estimated price tag of around \$520,000.
        - This will be discussed further at a future meeting with DPW Director Dan Van Schalkwyk as the cost, which includes substantial re-grading, seems a tad excessive!






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- Beaver activity
    - Mr. Pontbriand will also be scheduling a meeting with Mr. Van Schalkwyk about managing the impact from beaver activities at various points in Town.
    - 2021 was a particularly bad year, given an abundance of rainfall, while 2022, with its drought, saw less negative impact.
    - It was also noted that current water levels in the ponds appear to be very high.
  - Friends of Pine Meadow
    - A reincarnation of something like the former Greenway Committee was discussed as well.
    - Mr. Pontbriand agreed with H. Hampson that a 'Friends of...' designation was preferable to a 'Committee' designation as it sounds less like a formal body that meets regularly and has to take minutes, and more than an informal group that could join together to provide stewardship services on Ayer's conservation land.
      - This in turn might make public participation more attractive to Ayer residents.
    - H. Hampson will be developing a flyer for circulation.
  - J. Amaya observed that work has begun again at the Panther Place subdivision, off Washington Street, and H. Hampson confirmed, saying also that the erosion controls on this site are in pristine condition.
  - M. Phillips said he has not yet received any communication that the new signs, with the corrected spelling for Flannagan Pond, are ready for pick up.
- **8:33 PM – Adjourn Meeting**
    - G. Bacon moved to adjourn; M. Phillips 2<sup>nd</sup>.
      - Motion approved unanimously 5-0.

Minutes Recorded and Submitted by Jessica G. Gugino, Clerk

Date / Signature of Approval:

3/9/2023 



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- However, it is noted that the Commission will also be scheduling a meeting with the Ayr.
- Mr. Thompson also managing the impact from forest activities in various forms in Ayr.
- 2011 was a particularly bad year for an abundance of timber, while 2012, with its drought, saw less activity.
- It was also noted that some of the forest in the hands appear to be very high.
- Friends of Pine Mountain.
- A refinement of something like the former (conservation) Commission was discussed as well.
- Mr. Thompson agreed with Mr. Thompson that a Friends of Pine Mountain was preferable to a "Committee" designation as it sounds less like a formal body that meets regularly and has to take minutes and more like an informal group that could join together to provide stewardship services on Ayr's conservation land.
- This in turn might make public participation more effective in Ayr's decisions.
- Mr. Thompson will be developing a flyer for circulation.
- A. Ayr was observed that work had begun again in the Timber Place subdivision off Washington Street and Mr. Thompson continued saying also that the erosion controls on this site are in pristine condition.
- Mr. Phillips said he has not received any communication that the new signs of the the proposed spelling for Thompson Road are ready for pick up.

• 11:30 PM - Adjourn Meeting  
 • Motion moved to adjourn. Mr. Phillips 2nd  
 • Motion approved unanimously 5-0

Minutes prepared and published by Jessica G. Higgins, Clerk

Signature of Approver: 3/10/2003  
[Signature]