

Conservation Administrator's Report

Jo-Anne Crystoff, Conservation Administrator

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The Conservation Office continues to be busy with policy work, applications, permits, inspections, and oversight.

The Heating Oil Spill Cleanup and wetland replication across the street from Page Hilltop School continues. The wet weather and late season conditions have resulted in slower than expected progress on the cleanup. The restoration and replication of wetland conditions has not yet begun. The Conservation Commission engaged the services of EcoTec, Inc. to assist in providing oversight for the project. The Conservation Agent has been onsite and in regular contact with the Licensed Site Professionals overseeing the cleanup of oil-impacted stream channels and wetlands. Ensuring the appropriate cleanup ahead of restoration of the wetlands has been a time-consuming and steady effort for the Conservation office.

Infrastructure work on Woodland Way in the Pingry Hill subdivision is behind schedule for completing stormwater structures and the developer has turned attention to housing site development because of the weather. The site as a whole had been reviewed with the Sedimentation Specialist on the project in order to create a winter stabilization plan. The plan has been implemented and work on the house lots can continue into the winter with little risk of sediment impacting wetland resource areas. Weekly site visits by the Conservation Agent continue to be important in maintaining the fragile stability of the development.

Pond Weed Control: The Commission will be assessing the treatments at the end of the summer and making a decision about how to approach the pond treatments for next year. Solitude Lake Management, the contractor for Ayer's pond treatments, will be attending a Commission meeting in January to discuss options for the upcoming season.

Conservation Fund: The Commission has created a Policies and Procedures document for the Conservation Fund. The final Priority Preservation Areas map, created through a grant that the Town received from Montachusett Regional Planning Commission (MRPC), has been delivered and is available for review in the Conservation office.

Open Space Residential Development (OSRD) is allowed by right for newly proposed subdivisions in Ayer and requires a recommendation by the Conservation Commission to the Planning Board for a minimum of 50 percent of the project to be designated as open space. The Commission has created a draft design guidance document for use by developers to help in understanding the process of OSRD. The OSRD design process begins with evaluating the entire site for land with the highest conservation value so that this land may be set aside.

A Certificate of Compliance (COC) is the document issued on behalf of the State by the Conservation Commission that clears the Order of Conditions (OOC) from a property's title. The Request for COC Form is received by the Conservation office and a site inspection is conducted to ensure that what was permitted by the OOC was built or that the OOC expired without the project being completed. Banks, other lenders, and title companies have been requesting COCs for old projects at an increased frequency. Time consuming research is required to understand the scope of a sometimes decades old project.

Land Use Team: The Land Use Team continues to meet weekly. Staff keeps current with each other's projects and offers insight, information, and advice. This meeting is an excellent way for the staff involved in land use issues in Ayer to connect with both large and small projects.

As a way to keep up with Commission projects, the Conservation Commission hears applications for permits on the first meeting of the month, and reserves the second monthly meeting for Commission business. There is, of course, some flexibility with this schedule.

Please contact the Conservation office at 978-772-8249, by email at concom@ayer.ma.us, or drop by with any questions or concerns. Thank you!