

Conservation Commission Monthly Report

Jess Gugino, Interim Conservation Office Administrator

February 2022

A Willow Road/Rte. 2A Intersection Improvement project was submitted by MassDOT and issued an Order of Conditions after ConCom's Feb. 10 meeting. The project sought to replace the temporary signal system with a permanent one, put in left turn lanes on 2A, Willow Road and Bruce Street (the other side of the intersection), as well as a shared use pathway on 2A approaching the intersection from either side. Because the DOT's initial project, as proposed, had all of the new stormwater treatment located in Littleton, and all of the environmental impact located in Ayer, the Commission gave this project extra scrutiny. In particular, a new stormwater drainage pipe was to discharge into Bennett's Brook from just a few feet away, with no treatment – which MassDEP expressed concern about as well. Bennett's Brook runs into Spectacle Pond where Ayer draws most of its drinking water supply. The Commission was very pleased to have been able – through pushback from commissioners and DPW Director Van Schalkwyk's efforts – to get MassDOT to agree to allow the installation of a stormwater treatment structure on Willow Road to allow for the removal of sediments, etc., before discharge into the brook. Mr. Van Schalkwyk will use available funds from DPW's stormwater budget to take on the cost of installing a hydrodynamic separator, and the DPW will then include this unit for regular maintenance.

The Commission continues its work reviewing applications for other projects, including a recent New England Power Company project to replace and improve line structures on the K137/L138 transmission line (that starts at the Bishop Road substation). We issued an RFQ in February for proposals to perform the 2022 invasive weed management on Ayer's ponds (Sandy, Flannagan, and Pine Meadow). We are also having somewhat of a lull in applications, the first we have experienced in many years and are using this much-needed time to catch up on a few things, including revamping our Special Conditions for Orders of Conditions.

Flannagan Pond Public Access. The Commission wrote a strong letter of support, and the Interim Administrator assisted the DPW in preparing an application for CPA funding of a feasibility study, looking at a number of potential locations for a dock, ADA compliance, and parking around the pond.

The Conservation Agent Vacancy remained unfilled during this month. While the job listing was posted to the Mass. Association of Conservation Commissions website in January, the Commission was disappointed to receive only 5 applications in response.

The Waterways signs project continues to be a work in progress. Commissioners reviewed and updated sign locations in February, and hope to have this project completed by the Nashua River Wild & Scenic Stewardship Council's deadline this summer.

Please contact the Conservation office with any questions at concom@ayer.ma.us or 978-772-8220 x143