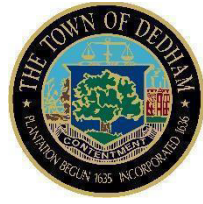


Tim Puopolo, Chair  
Erik DeAvila, Vice Chair  
Stephanie Radner, Clerk  
Nathan Gauthier, Associate  
Leigh Hafrey, Associate  
Elena Taurasi, Associate



Dedham Town Hall  
450 Washington Street  
Dedham, MA 02026

Tel (781) 751-9210

Meredith LaBelle, Agent

## TOWN OF DEDHAM

Website  
[www.dedham-ma.gov](http://www.dedham-ma.gov)

### CONSERVATION COMMISSION

#### Minutes of May 15, 2024

In response to the COVID-19 pandemic and given the current prohibitions on gatherings imposed by Governor Baker's March 23, 2020 "Order Assuring Continued Operation of Essential Services in the Commonwealth, Closing Workplaces, and Prohibiting Gatherings of More than 10 People," this public hearing was conducted virtually, as allowed by Governor Baker's March 12, 2020 "Order Suspending Certain Provisions of the Open Meeting Law," G.L. c. 30A, §20.

#### **The following Commissioners were present:**

Tim Puopolo, Chair  
Erik DeAvila, Vice Chair  
Stephanie Radner, Clerk  
Elena Taurasi, Associate  
Leigh Hafrey, Associate

#### **The following Staff were present:**

Meredith LaBelle, Conservation Agent  
Chris Reardon, Environmental Specialist

#### **The following Commissioners were absent:**

Nathan Gauthier, Associate

#### **The following Open Space Subcommittee members were present:**

Jim Maher, Chair  
Eric DeAvila, Conservation Commission Representative

The Commissioners met the Open Space Chair, Jim Maher, and Conservation Staff Meredith LaBelle and Chris Reardon at the Dedham Town Forest Trailhead on Washington St. Commissioner Puopolo called the meeting to order at approximately 5:05 pm in accordance with the Wetlands Protection Act, M.G.L. Chapter 131, Section 40, the Dedham Wetlands Bylaw, and the Dedham Stormwater Management Bylaw.

#### **1. Public Comment**

Commissioner Puopolo opened the floor for general comments from members of the public, with no one responding.

#### **2. Site Visit: Dedham Town Forest**

The intent of the visit to the Town Forest- as stated in previous Conservation Commission and Open Space meetings was to give the Commission and the newly designated Open Space Subcommittee

a chance to communicate with each other and establish potential goals and strategies for improving the conservation and recreation value of Dedham's publicly accessible conservation lands.

After meeting at the trailhead, the group traversed the trail network, staying on the official trails and noting the number of unofficial trails that have appeared in the Town Forest in recent years. The tone of the meeting was informal and no votes were held, save for the votes to open and close the meeting. Thus, these minutes are an incomplete account of the topics that were discussed.

**Trails:** Commissioner Radner noted that Eagle Scouts had constructed and marked the only official trail on the property. The attendees discussed the fact that mountain bikers and other trail users had blazed a number of other trails throughout the woodland. Several attendees suggested closing off select trails that were redundant or were routed in such a way that they caused excessive disturbance. Replacement trail markers were also suggested. On the topic of official vs unofficial trails, Commissioner Puopolo suggested that usage of unofficial trails could be reduced by creating an official trail map and posting it on multiple platforms online. It was also suggested that loop trails be a priority for any formalized trails, as this trail type is often more desirable to hikers. Some sections of trail were steep and/or rocky, prompting Commissioner DeAvila to improvise several walking sticks, including a re-purposed rusty old rake. The Commissioners noticed several lumps of asphalt slag on the trailside. Commissioner Puopolo suggested signage at the beginning stretch of the walkway into the trail network such as "Trail begins in 200 feet" so that walkers aren't discouraged by the loud highway noise at the entrance of the forest. He then suggested that the beginning of the loop, about 200 feet in from the main entrance, could be a good location to put a map stand.

**Biodiversity:** Commissioner Radner shared details of the biodiversity within the Town Forest, drawing from her experience to point to native plant populations (such as *Uvularia sessilifolia*) around the property and describe a difficult-to-access vernal pool that is used by breeding Spotted Salamanders. Wild Sasparilla was extremely abundant throughout the property. There were indications of animal activity all throughout the property, including Deer bones and ever-present bird song. Invasive plant species noted at the property included Asian Bittersweet, several large patches of Garlic Mustard, and Multiflora Rose. Agent LaBelle noted some priority invasive management areas on a paper map, including a large patch of Garlic Mustard located at the DOT-pull off area on the northbound side of the highway. However, there were few places within the woodland where invasive species had visibly outcompeted native species; i.e. even in the areas with abundant Garlic Mustard, at least one native plant species seemed to exist at a similar or greater abundance.

### Education and Outreach

The idea of including interpretive trail signs was raised, with suggestions for topics including:

- The early 20<sup>th</sup> century planting by WPA or CCC workers of *Betula lenta* trees brought in from New Hampshire
- Glacial topography/history
- How invasive species work, with examples of native and invasive species
- Spongy moth- an invasive moth that can alter forests
- Stone walls on site from former grazing lands
- Signage highlighting interesting ecological dynamics and species
  - o Spring ephemerals and "The Seasons of Life"
- Poison ivy ID and awareness
- 

**Accessibility:** Throughout the visit, several accessibility challenges were noted. The trail on the easternmost side of the forest was quite narrow in certain locations and could pose accessibility issues for hikers. Commissioner Hafrey raised the issue of trail users being kept away by road noise from I-95. He suggested the possibility of implementing noise reduction measures, such as wrapping the fences around

the property with noise dampening fabric. The most serious access issue remains a lack of parking nearby the trailhead, which could limit the number of people able to get to the trailhead.

Overall, the attendees all expressed enthusiasm for this surprisingly vibrant wild space. There was an informal consensus that trail improvements and education/outreach work would be beneficial for Dedham residents as well as for the habitat quality of the Town Forest.

The meeting was adjourned at 6:50 pm.