

**TOWN OF SOMERS**  
**Conservation Commission**  
**600 Main Street**

**REGULAR MEETING**  
**WEDNESDAY, FEBRUARY 4, 2026**  
**7:00 PM TOWN HALL**  
**MINUTES**

**I. CALL TO ORDER**

Chairperson Joan Formeister called the meeting to order at 7:00 p.m. The commissioners in attendance were Dan Fraro, Drew Kukucka, Sydney Flowers, and alternate Lise Wood. Joanna Shapiro, the Town of Somers Wetlands Agent, was also present.

Chairperson Formeister seated Lise Wood in place of Candace Aleks.

**II. OLD BUSINESS**

**1. Discussion with DPW: Old Hampden Rd improvements.**

Todd Rolland, Somers Director of Public Works, was in attendance upon the request of Joanna Shapiro and the Commission. Todd provided a memo with background and history regarding Old Hampden Road. The road was accepted as a town road in January 1989, and for about the first 25 years after that, the Public Works Department did little on it other than make it passable for four-wheel-drive vehicles. Todd stated that in 2016, the town was approached by a new landowner on that road (near the Massachusetts border), who informed them he planned to build a house and requested that the town improve the road to allow passenger cars to drive safely. At that time, the town widened the road, removed some trees, and replaced a deteriorated culvert. In April 2021, the same property owner contacted the Public Works Department to request additional road improvements. At that time, the town added gravel and asphalt millings, widened it further, repaired additional culverts, and began winter maintenance. In 2022, the same property owner contacted the town and stated that the road was still not up to spec for a gravel road. Todd Rolland had an engineering firm review the road, provide recommendations, and give an opinion of cost. The estimated cost was beyond the town's budget; therefore, the Department of Public Works widened the road considerably, removed many trees, spread additional asphalt millings, and replaced 4-5 culverts. The town now maintains it as a gravel road and plows it in the winter. Todd reported that many of these discussions occurred in Executive Sessions, including a couple with the town's attorney, to assess options for treating this as a public road. He stated he didn't come to the Conservation Commission for any permits because he understood that typical maintenance involved replacing culverts. He maybe should have done so, but the work was done intermittently rather than all at once. To date, the property owner hasn't built a house, and Todd believes this is due to the cost of obtaining electricity access, and he is trying to sell it.

Drew Kukucka asked whether this was 90 Old Hamden Road. Todd stated he thought so, and it is located on the right, next to the old road that used to go up to Cooksville. Drew stated that the public raised concerns about the town's work on this road, that the Commission has concerns about the culvert work completed in Thrasher Brook, and that the

Commission was never consulted. Drew asked what the precedent is for property owners to request that the town undertake road work. Todd explained that they maintain other roads similarly, such as Camp Road, but Old Hampden Road is unique because it is the only unimproved road in town (excluding the County Road section). Sydney Flowers asked which erosion-prevention measures were implemented during the road construction. Todd stated they completed most of the work when the stream was dry, and there was no flow; on one occasion, they had to install a cofferdam to install three culverts on the north side. Todd stated that the culverts serve as stream crossings and additional drainage areas, and that flooding occurs at the base of the hill, on the Stafford Road side, from time to time.

Joan Formeister stated that we brought this to Joanna Shapiro's attention because it appeared that much of the work was done in the wetlands/watercourse, but she was happy to hear the work was done during a dry period. Joan also stated that we were informed that wildlife activity in that area has declined significantly since this work was completed. Joan told Todd that, from now on, it would be a good idea to run things by Joanna Shapiro so she can determine whether it should come to the Conservation Commission. Joan stated that in the past, Todd came to us for much smaller projects that were far less intrusive to wetlands. Todd stated he would keep this in mind moving forward. Drew Kukucka emphasized that this was a significant project in the wetlands and was surprised that Todd had not shared it with us sooner. Even though he was facing potential lawsuits from the operator/owner, the town cannot circumvent the process. Sydney Flowers stated that we owe it to the town's residents to ensure the commissions/departments communicate with one another, and that if we expect personal landowners to follow the rules, the town needs to, too. Todd agreed. Drew asked Todd if there is any more culvert work planned for that road, and Todd said no, they are in decent shape now except for one area of the hill where the roots are exposed, and there was a discussion with the engineer to fix it, but it would involve land taking and then armoring it. For now, the town is monitoring that section. Drew asked whether any road maintenance had been done other than plowing. Todd stated they grade the road and fill potholes as needed, and they graded it a couple of weeks ago.

**2. Discussion/Possible Decision Application #823: 122 Watchaug Road.** Improvement of farm road in the wetland and upland review area, including culvert crossing of Hall Hill Brook. Oakridge Dairy LLC.

Jay Ussery from J.R. Russo and Dave Moser from Oakridge Dairy were in attendance. Jay presented a slightly revised plan from the last meeting for the culvert crossing on Hall Hill Brook and discussed the alternatives they had considered since then. Jay mentioned that Joanna Shapiro has been on-site since the last meeting to see what plan to do, and they have made some modifications since then. One alternative is to drive in from Watchaug Road, but that would require building 2,000 feet of access road through a crop field, and they would lose cropland (about  $\frac{3}{4}$  acre of silage corn) and would still need to cross the stream to provide water and power to the area. Another option was a box culvert, but the installation cost would increase significantly. Jay mentioned they wanted to install a 42" culvert to manage the 100-year storm event, but after considering alternatives, they believe a 60" culvert would be more appropriate. Jay noted that it is a perennial stream that is typically dry. They would embed the 60" culvert in the ground and form a natural streambed at the base of the stream. He said this will increase the cost slightly from the 42" culvert, but feels it is a better option. He also mentioned this will not change the amount of disturbance listed on the original application for 42" (about 4,000 square feet). Jay also showed the culvert cross-section, as requested by the Commission at the last meeting, which is included in the plans.

Joanna Shapiro circulated five pictures she had taken during her site visit, and reminded the Commission of the soil scientist's report provided at the last meeting. Sydney Flowers asked whether the brook ever floods, and Jay stated that FEMA maps do not depict a flood zone and that they based their culvert sizes on those upstream and downstream from this location. Joanna brought to our attention streambank erosion in one of the pictures. The tight angle (approximately 90 degrees) in the water flow is causing it. Oakridge plans to address this area during this project by installing riprap and a scour hole. Drew Kukucka asked how they arrived at 42 feet for the culvert, and Jay explained they had to use that length because the narrower culvert would increase the slope and make it unsafe for vehicles. Drew asked how the natural streambed will be constructed within the culvert. Jay explained that the culvert will arrive in sections; each section will be installed, followed by hand-shoveling gravel into the culvert. Jay explained that, over time, the natural streambed will take over the installed gravel. Drew asked for clarification regarding the electrical and water. Jay stated the water would be 42" below for frost protection, and Drew asked about this amount of disturbance. Jay explained that when we refer to wetland disturbance, we mean measures applied on a flat surface (horizontal plane). Drew wanted to know how deep they would need to dig to install the water and electrical services. Jay said it will be about 9-10 feet down where the stream crossing is, and 48" everywhere else, and it will be backfilled with clean sand.

Joanna Shapiro informed the Commission that we received this application at the last meeting and that we can vote on it tonight, or designate it as a significant activity requiring a public hearing, or find that it is in the public interest to hold a public hearing. She also circulated the definition of significant activity from the wetland regulations. Sydney Flowers stated that it would be in the public interest to hold a public hearing because there is significant confusion about the situation, and additional public education is needed. Joan Formeister stated that the Conservation Commission has limited jurisdiction when it comes to farming, that we don't have any control over the trucks, fertilizer, traffic, etc., and that we are only addressing the stream crossing. Joan explained that she understood the farm would truck in the manure mix and use an irrigation system to fertilize the crops at ground level. Joanna explained that access is off Four Bridges Road, not Watchaug, but that the address is on Watchaug Road. Jay Ussery then explained that the equipment the farm will use is already in use in Somers, that there won't be any lagoons or ponds, and that the manure mixture will be stored in enclosed trailers. Joan explained that this project is very different from the one proposed a year ago involving the manure pits. Joan also reminded everyone that farming practices are defined broadly in Connecticut and are exempt from many wetland regulations. Oakridge is attending this meeting solely for the required stream crossing, not for the manure storage. Joanna Shapiro stated that the zoning commission staff liaison also reviewed the plans. Sydney Flowers asked whether public comments at a public hearing are limited to the stream crossing. Joanna said yes; they have to be wetland-related, and we can stop comments that are off-topic or more suitable for zoning/planning. There was discussion that the public did not have sufficient time to prepare a petition (15 days from receipt of the application) because it was not listed on the January agenda, as it was received after the agenda was made public and added to the agenda during the meeting. The minutes were not available until seven days after the meeting. Joan Formeister encouraged people to let their concerns be made known through email, phone calls, and letters to town officials, but don't be surprised if you find that some of the agricultural practices are exempt from certain rules that residents and non-farming businesses have to follow.

Sydney Flowers moved to hold a public hearing on Application #823: 122 Watchaug Road. Improvement of the farm road in the wetland and upland review area, including a culvert crossing of Hall Hill Brook, based on a finding that a public hearing regarding this

application would be in the public interest. Drew Kukucka seconded. Motion carried 4-1, Lise Wood opposed.

The Public Hearing for this meeting will take place on Wednesday, March 04, 2026, at 6:30 pm.

3. **Discussion/Possible Decision Application #824: 359 Mountain Road.** Grading and trenching in the upland review area for a new septic tank and grease trap, associated with the construction of a winery tasting room/event space. Somers Mountain Properties LLC.

Jay Ussery from J.R. Russo and the property owners were in attendance. Jay stated that the plan differs little from the plans shown at the last meeting; the silt fence was extended further out and a few trees were marked for removal due to a grease trap, slight grading, and the pond view. Joanna Shapiro visited the site, but it was covered in snow. She was aware that the area where they are building has existing gravel, and the area within the Upland Review Area is currently lawn space, and the building itself is outside the Upland Review Area. Joanna had no concerns.

Sydney Flowers moved to approve application #824, 358 Mountain Road. associated with the construction of a winery tasting room/event space, based on the following:

- The Commission finds that the Applicant has submitted all necessary application materials pursuant to Section 211-7 of the Wetlands Regulations, including but not limited to Section 211-7(E)(5), “Alternatives considered and rejected.”
- The Commission did not find the proposed activities “significant.”
- The Commission finds that the criteria set forth in Section 211-10B have been met by the Applicant.

Lise Wood seconded. All were in favor, and the motion carried.

### III. NEW BUSINESS

1. **Application #825: 207 Stafford Road.** Construction of an addition and an in-ground pool with patio and grading in the URA. Mark Christensen.

Danielle West, representing Juliano’s Pools, was in attendance. The property owners propose to build an addition and an in-ground pool. Juliano’s Pools agreed to attend this meeting to represent both the pool builders and serve as the liaison to the addition contractors. Danielle explained that the septic system is currently occupying their backyard, and the only suitable area to site a pool is about 31 feet from the nearest wetland. They will install a silt fence and straw waddles to prevent erosion; perform minimal grading; and not stockpile any material on site (it will be trucked off). Joanna Shapiro suggested native riparian plantings between the pool and the wetland and provided a list of plants. Danielle stated they had planned to use a stone bed for the planting. Joanna Shapiro stated that it would be best if it were more natural, but we could work on it if there are enough native shrubs planted, because the goal is to have those plants filter pollutants before they reach the wetlands. Danielle stated the plantings were not labeled on the plan because they hadn’t yet decided what they would be. Danielle stated that the builder of the addition informed her that the addition will match the current house's grade and that the pool installation will only raise the back corner by about 1 foot. Joanna agreed that the area is fairly flat. Drew noted that the project description states they will temporarily stockpile on-site during phase one. Danielle said it was an oversight and that they would remove it from the description and

would not stockpile any materials. Drew asked about the extent of tree clearing, and Danielle stated they are trying to stay along the existing treeline but may need to cut back a little for fence installation. Drew asked whether she could show the limit of clearing on the map, and she said she would have it by the next meeting. Drew asked whether any wetland monuments or flagging were installed when the house was built, and Joanna stated that none were, but the topography clearly delineated the wetland. Joanna noted minutes from the original 18-lot subdivision, in which the prior wetland agent stated that there was little wetland activity and that the wetland pockets are not vernal pools. Danielle informed the Commission that Juliano's will coordinate many of the activities with the builder, Taylor Atkins, for the addition, which is expected to be completed around the same time. She will confirm the details at the next meeting. Drew pointed out that the application did not clearly indicate whether the proposed activity involves the deposit or removal of material in or near a regulated area and asked that this be fully addressed at the next meeting. Joanna is hoping to visit the site before the next meeting.

The commission expressed concern about how close this work is to the wetland, and Joanna noted that it may be advisable to add more patio space on the upgraded side and no patio on the side closest to the wetland. Danielle stated they would look into that possibility. Joanna also mentioned that putting in permanent wetland markers, about 2 – 3 of them, should be considered to ensure that further activity does not happen in that area. Drew asked where the pool filter would be located. Danielle pointed it out on the map and stated it was a cartridge filter, so no backwashing is required. Joanna asked whether the pool had to be drained a couple of inches in winter. Danielle said it did, but they would ensure the property owners drained it away from the wetlands and the storm drain. Drew explained that it should not be drained to the storm drain, which drains to a watercourse. Danielle stated that the pool is also a mineral system, so chlorine levels are much lower than in typical chlorinated pools and even lower than in drinking water.

#### IV. AUDIENCE PARTICIPATION

- Kevin Barbeau, a resident of the town, had a couple of questions regarding the DPW topic on the agenda. Kevin wanted to learn more about the engineering study that the town conducted, which Todd referenced regarding Old Hampden Road. He asked the Commission to review this and determine the scope of the study. He questioned specifically why the culverts are positioned as they are, as some appear not to be functioning. Joanna stated that culverts are sometimes intentionally installed at a higher elevation to capture water during high-flow conditions. Kevin asked whether a stormwater/erosion plan had been developed before they started the work. Kevin stated he understands this is after the fact, but, given the transition in town regarding land use and DPW, he would like to see what due diligence was performed. Kevin asked the Commission how the town feels about alerting DEEP to involve the state. Joanna didn't feel that DEEP would do anything after the fact. Kevin asked whether, if the same activity occurred on a non-municipal project, what would we have next, and whether we should do the same in this instance. Kevin then asked whether a citation or violation had been issued to 47 Old Hampden regarding the earthwork being performed and the soil eroding into Thrasher Brook. Joanna stated that no formal enforcement occurred, but she followed her typical process when something like this is reported: she reached out to the landowners to secure cooperation to resolve the issue. She reported receiving a prompt response and action to remedy the situation from the landowners and felt it was unnecessary to issue a notice of violation at that time, as they were cooperative. Joanna noted that if residents observe further issues, they can report it to her. There is concern about whether the area is fully stabilized at this point, but it is difficult to determine given the current weather

conditions. Joanna had contacted the town attorney to determine whether a permit is required at this time, but the attorney had not yet responded. Kevin asked whether the site could be a candidate for a more comprehensive erosion and stormwater plan. Joanna stated that the zoning commission would do those types of reviews. Kevin asked whether the Commission could issue a referral to the state, indicating that a stormwater plan is needed. Joanna is unsure, but she will speak with Jen in Zoning. Joanna noted that the original plans did not involve the Conservation Commission because of the work's location. However, erosion did impact the wetlands, and she was unaware of an erosion control plan being required as part of the zoning process. Joanna explained that if the original project did not require a wetland permit and there are concerns down the road that are impacting nearby wetlands, you would resolve the issue through enforcement, not through a permit, because permit activities are voluntary, not required. Kevin asked whether, now that the site appears to involve more than five active acres, a stormwater management plan should be implemented. Joanna reported that she would bring it up at the staff level.

- Jeff Catlett was in attendance and introduced himself as the town's new Director of Health, and Director of Land Use as of February 22. Joan Formestier asked him about his background, and he reported that he has been in public health for 25 years, working on septic systems/general environmental issues, working in land-use departments throughout the state, and working with building and county officials. He comes from Manchester, where he worked for 12 years and managed a staff of 14. Joan asked whether Todd Rolland would continue in the land use department. Jeff stated that there would be a transition period, that Todd would be the Director of Public Works only on February 22, and that he would assume Todd's current role in Land Use. Currently, the town has a full-time zoning enforcement officer, a full-time building official, and a part-time wetland agent. Joan asked that he be kept informed of everything happening in the Commissions, as the town lacks communication between the Commissions and encourages daily collaboration. He said he would do all of that, and the Commission welcomed him aboard.

## V. STAFF REPORT

- 330 South Road was not on the agenda this month because there was too much snow to look at the property. Dave Tullock came to the land use office after the last meeting to schedule a time for her to visit, and he seemed a little hesitant about potential resolutions.
- 256 Mountain Road, a licensed forester spoke to Joanna Shapiro about this large property, which contains a stream and a low wetland along one side of the property. The property has one house, a driveway, and is high in elevation. The forester reported that he would not be working in the wetland area and requested Joanna's review to determine whether it should be brought before the Commission. After obtaining additional information from the forester regarding the limits of work/forest harvest, landing area locations, and related details, it was determined that the work would be more than 100 feet from the wetland. The property has not been delineated, but there is a clear topographic drop, and there are no crossings within the wetland/URA. It will not be a clear-cut but a selective harvest of ash for which he provided a timber harvest notice. The work will hopefully be done soon while the ground is frozen.
- 143 Four Bridges Road, Growers Direct's secondary location, is proposing a 30,000-gallon propane tank, which is quite close to the wetlands. Joanna reached out to inform them that a project of that size, so close to the wetlands, must be presented to the Commission. They are now reviewing another possible location for the tank. Joanna provided them with a map

showing the wetland line and the upland review area and advised that staying out of those areas would be helpful. There is concern that the area may be a floodplain, and they may need to identify a different site.

Lise Wood moved to approve the Staff Report. Drew Kukucka seconded. All were in favor.

VI. CORRESPONDENCE AND BILLS

- Connecticut Association of Wetland Scientists Conference on March 04 in Southington, CT. Joanna Shapiro will be attending.

VII. MINUTES APPROVAL: January 7, 2026

Lise Wood moved to approve the amended minutes of January 07, 2026. Dan seconded. All were in favor, and the motion carried.

VIII. ADJOURNMENT

Lise Wood moved to adjourn the February 04, 2026, meeting, and Drew Kukucka seconded the motion. All were in favor, and the motion carried. The meeting was adjourned at 9:16 p.m.

Respectfully Submitted, Commissioner Sydney Flowers, Secretary

MINUTES ARE NOT OFFICIAL UNTIL APPROVED AT A SUBSEQUENT MEETING