

DRAFT

**WALLINGFORD CONSERVATION COMMISSION
Ordinance Committee**

SPECIAL MEETING

**Basement Conference Room, Town Hall
45 South Main Street, Wallingford, CT**

Thursday, April 9, 2026, 3:00 p.m.

MINUTES

Present: Commissioners James Loughlin and Dianne Saunders, and Erin O’Hare,
Environmental Planner

Other: Bob McCarthy, local resident, from the public.

Note: Italics used in text below represent action items.

Commissioner Loughlin called the Meeting to order at 3:05 p.m. indicating the purpose of the Special Meeting was for the Ordinance Committee to discuss and draft proposed ordinances regarding the use of Town open space. The Committee was appointed to address problems that occur on various Town-owned open space parcels by drafting proposed Town ordinances for: damage to highly sensitive areas; removal of/damage to trees and plants; and metal detecting and digging; and to address the discrepancy of open/closing times for open space properties to align with CT DEEP.

Commissioner Saunders shared a partial working draft organizational chart listing the problems that need to be addressed in open space areas (and quantifying those numerically by number of recorded incidents), the current Town ordinances, Town rules, State statutes and State of CT regulations that may be in effect to handle those problems, and ‘glitches’ with certain issues. She said in general, the various existing Town ordinances that could be used for problems on open space properties may lack language or intent that reflects the unique nature of open space. Also, many of the problems that occur on open space properties are not covered by existing Town ordinances.

Per one example of problems that occur on open space properties, it was agreed that the topic fires/cooking needs to be addressed, due to the apparent glitch in existing ordinances, and recent events (2 significant fires in difficult locations, and several small fires). Weather in recent years has also created a greater risk of wildfires. This item was added to the 4 priority issues previously defined by the full Conservation Commission.

Commissioner Loughlin clarified that although the administration of open space falls under the Park & Recreation Department in Wallingford, both the CT General Statutes and the Town ordinance for the Conservation Commission define what Conservation Commissions may/shall do in terms of trying to

advocate for the character, quality and care of the Town's open space areas. Commissioner Loughlin provided answers on some general questions of law, e.g. the difference between the purpose of an ordinance vs. operating rules on a sign, and the difference in enforcing a state statute vs a town ordinance.

Per research, Commissioner Saunders found that examples of ordinances used by other CT towns were all different, perhaps based on the amount and character of open space in each town, i.e. there was no 'one-size-fits-all' that could be used as a basis for an ordinance/ordinances for Wallingford's open spaces. Some towns with a significant amount or character of open space have specific ordinances/ordinance language under the general topic of 'open space' all in one location in their document, which Commissioner Loughlin referred to as a 'one box' approach, vs many problem-specific 'stand-alone' ordinances. Based on the lack of completeness and clarity of ordinances which could/should address problems on open space in Wallingford, Commissioner Loughlin stated it may be helpful to use the 'one box' type of ordinance where all issues related to open space were addressed at one location in the ordinance document.

Given the number of various types of issues that take place on open space, and the relative lack of addressing these in the Town's ordinances, both commissioners felt an opinion on this issue of the 'one box' approach vs proposing several stand-alone ordinances should be sought at a full Conservation Commission meeting. *They will request this matter be placed on the next Commission agenda.*

Commissioner Saunders will continue drafting the language for relevant issues, based on the research gathered from other towns and state regulations. She had brought printouts of samples from other towns and of state statutes/rules/regulations for reference. Work on the organizational chart is incomplete and will continue and will be reported at the next Commission meeting. Definitions had also been researched and printed for examples, but this item was not taken up due to possible length of discussion needed.

Erin O'Hare provided a few edits to the working organizational chart and suggested Commissioner Saunders complete a brief executive summary of this complex topic. *Commissioner Saunders will do.*

Commissioner Loughlin will report on progress at the next Conservation Commission meeting.

The meeting was adjourned at 5:05 pm.

Respectfully submitted,

Dianne Saunders,
Conservation Commissioner