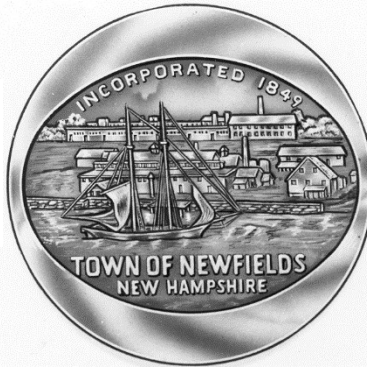


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**Conservation Commission Meeting
Monday, July 20, 2026 | 7pm
Meeting Minutes**

Present: C. Shanelaris, C. McDade, C. Fields, T. Rettburg, L. Hill

Absent: A. Watts, J. Lent

Others present: M. Kasper (Select Board Liaison)

Minutes prepared by C. Thayer (not in attendance)

1. Call to order at *unknown*. (Time not stated at start of meeting.)
2. Minutes – No vote tonight, edits needed.

T. Rettburg – We have the recording, and some minutes from last year were almost verbatim, which was fairly useful because missing a few sentences could miss a lot. I don't know how long they are archived but want to make sure we have them.

H. Harmon (Select Board) – The minutes recorded are archived within the town.

C. Shanelaris – Since we use Teams, you can also download a complete transcript.

a. May 18

T. Rettburg – It seemed like between 1h 29m and 1h 46m the minutes were thin with content from the presentation remarks, I will ask C. Thayer to go through it again.

C. Shanelaris – I have changes as well. “Soil inspection” to “visual inspection”. Stating that there was a vehicle chart stated as fact but was actually a generalization. There are some things in the summary that are inaccurate.

b. June 15

T. Rettburg – I have a couple of changes to recommend, including the report that C. Shanelaris wanted to have included.

C. Shanelaris – One comment from C. Fields that was attributed to me.

3. Treasurer's Report

Conservation Account - \$76,116.08

Current Use - \$21,903.82

- a. Invoice from PREP ([Piscataqua Region Estuaries Partnership](#)) – Organizations in the budget for funding. \$1,000 – C. McDade recommends approving payment.

C. McDade moved, T. Rettburg second, all in favor. Motion passes.

(Conversation about taking an agenda item out of order.)

C. Shanelaris – I received information from Select Board chair relevant to item 10, the Vernon Family Farm site parking plan which warrants moving the item up in the agenda and warrants [T. Rettburg's] recusal on the topic. I feel it has bearing on other agenda items this evening.

T. Rettburg – Is it recusal, or disqualification as chair?

C. Shanelaris – I think recusal.

C. McDade – Could we take care of the alternate member?

C. Shanelaris – I think it has bearing on that also.

C. Shanelaris made a motion to move the discussion of Vernon Family Farm (agenda item #10) as the next order of business. *There was no second, or vote.* T. Rettburg recused himself. Agenda item #10 is now Minutes item #4.

4. Commission process to move forward on VFF site parking area plan
 - a. Legal
 - b. Management of Questions

C. Shanelaris – Before this meeting, an email was provided to me; the email is from T. Rettburg to Attorney Amy Manzelli on Wednesday, July 15th. The email reads, *“Hi Amy. We do have a fair number of agenda items totally unrelated to the Anderson easement. Yet you ask a fair question and I will answer it fourfold, 1) VFF and the site plan likely will have mention in terms of previous meeting(s) and Minutes but discussion will be cut off at the gate if it seeks to delve deeper or raise additional points, 2) I plan to bring up how we are going to proceed with commission action on the site plan approval for future meeting(s), not the merits, but internal rules and pathways that will be effective to follow, 3) a member might bring something up that I am not aware of, but again will not be allowed to delve into further evaluation of the parking management plan, 4) under "correspondence" I plan a brief mention of the recent land disturbance complaint submitted by Jeremiah Vernon. Being hypothetical, were you to submit, say, a written report or response of some kind, its receipt would be mentioned but there would be no plan to have that launch into further discussion on July 20, unless requiring high urgency or were you to speak as the public. (Item #2 above needs sorting out.)* Regards, Tom Rettberg Chair, Newfields Conservation Commission”. Receiving this as the Vice Chair was unexpected and disappointing and raises serious concerns about the integrity of this commission. From what I’ve read, our Chair has made a private commitment and acted on behalf on an outside party. Our Chair has attempted to prevent independent consideration of relevant information, and attempted to deprive commission members of our rights to express our views and our obligation to share information, to make the best possible decision for the easement, the community, and our town. The conduct by definition is collusion. At the very least, it’s improper and inconsistent for impartiality for a Chair. Eventually, I think this has bearing on our bylaws, and no offense to anyone recommended as an alternate but I have not seen any information on alternates,

we had a brief update last meeting. It creates a lot of questions in my mind, and I believe it needs to be taken up at a later point. But for now, as indicated in our June 16th email from our chair to have members do further research, which I had done, and I'd like to share that. It's brief but important.

L. Hill – Who sent you this?

C. Shanellaris – The Select Board Chair.

C. Shanellaris – I have information I'd like to share; I have 4 points. With regard to soil testing, 1) the easement language supports it; 2) the historical record shows why we need soil testing; 3) it bears directly on the commission's legal obligations and fiduciary responsibility; and 4) the farm has made some claims that show it would benefit from soil testing.

1) If you read the easement, it says *"The management and control of this conservation easement shall vest with the Newfields Conservation Commission."* Meaning we are responsible for this easement. It also states on page 4, *"agricultural for industrial or commercial purposes shall be performed, to the extent reasonably practical, in accordance with a coordinated management plan for the sites and soils of the property. Said agricultural management activities shall be in accordance with the then-current scientifically based practices recommended by the UNH Cooperative Extension, U.S. Natural Resources Conservation Service..."* Simply put, compliance cannot be achieved without soil testing.

2) Between March 2014, when the Vernons first expressed interest in purchasing the property, and December 2014, the Commission meeting notes indicate on five occasions that the Vernons needed to submit a management plan before operations began. On October 20, 2014, the meeting minutes showed that the abutters at the time attended to raise the concern about why operations on the farm commenced without a plan. The then-chair said he would remind Jeremiah Vernon about submitting a plan, which was received in January 2015. That plan includes doing soil testing as a best management practice, but we have no documentation of soil testing happening. In the May 2026 meeting, Attorney Manzelli asked us to trust that the land will be taken care of, but in my opinion, the record has not earned that trust.

3) We are responsible for ensuring that current use is in alignment with the easement and management plan. With on average 75 cars being parked for up to 50 events annually, we're looking at cumulative impact. We are legally responsible for any environmental impacts that occur, including any cleanup or mitigation that may be needed. In my opinion, requiring a scientifically supported management plan which includes doing soil testing is doing our due diligence. The question we have to ask ourselves is whether the Commission has taken reasonable, defensible steps to prevent adverse impacts.

4) On their website, Vernon Family Farm asserts that they do regenerative farming, and state they "focus on restoring and enhancing the health of the soil." NRCS defines regenerative farming as a *"conservation management approach that addresses natural resource concerns through soil health, water management, and biodiversity to improve the productivity and prosperity of agriculture"*. That's for agriculture, and we're talking about parking. The NRCS requires soil health testing for its Regenerative Farming funding program to establish baseline conditions and measure change over time. Because regenerative farming is defined by soil health, soil testing is essential to substantiate that claim.

In conclusion, the current proposed management plan from Waterstone Engineering relies solely on observation and self-governance by Vernon Family Farm. Observation has value, but UNH and NRCS say observation is a starting place, not a substitute for soil testing, and says that early-stage compaction will not be visible until it has already begun. In my opinion, Vernon Family Farm has not exercised

appropriate stewardship for the property. This Commission has a legal and fiduciary responsibility to the town to uphold the easement.

C. Fields – I also reviewed the 2015 plan, which does include baseline best practices which includes soil testing, limits on parking, aeration, rotational parking, and more. I also reviewed the more recent plan we received to [Rockingham County Conservation District \(RCCD\)](#), and they laughed it off, saying there was nothing to it.

C. Shanelaris – I've seen from local farms on social media talking about their soil testing and how it impacts their farming and products. It seems like a no-brainer.

C. McDade – So what do we need to do right now? It seems like we need to do further discussion around what we go back to the Vernons with in terms of our expectations.

C. Shanelaris – I can share these recommendations and information, and then I think it needs further consideration.

M. Sununu (Public Comment) – My family owns Waterville Valley, we deal with environmental service all the time. From a process standpoint, we are required to do all kinds of testing. In order to make sure the decision makers are getting the best information, the forest service hires the consultant but I pay for it. So I recommend the Commission put out an RFP for soil testing, you hire it but [VFF] has to bear the cost.

C. Shanelaris – I like the idea of putting out an RFP. We can explore next steps to get an independent professional recommendation for soil testing.

C. McDade – What are we going to ask for? Asking for the consultant to create the plan, or here's the plan, tell us what we should do?

C. Shanelaris – I think we need to explain the circumstances, with a copy of the easement and approved uses. Then tell them what we're trying to protect in the easement, and have them work a plan based on that.

C. Fields – When I talked to RCC and told them what we did, they said they have a regimented plan that tells you what to do.

C. McDade – So do we look at that before an RFP?

C. Shanelaris – I know UNH and NRCS will help farms put together a plan and their ability to support farms, that would be a good place to start.

L. Hill – Before we hire someone to give us advice, maybe we should do soil testing. We need this baseline to put this all to bed. I don't know that we need to pay someone.

C. Shanelaris – None of us are scientists, and it was suggested to have someone give us unbiased information.

M. Sununu (Public Comment) – Groups like UNH and NRCS will help you craft the RFP for free.

B. Meserve (Public Comment) – As soon as compaction starts, the soil starts to die. I think you made a very good point that this is putting the town at risk, and if something happens, the taxpayers will be paying for it.

D. Singer (Public Comment) – I put together agricultural easements for Cuyahoga National Park, and we required periodic soil testing. There is a point with compaction where the soil can't be brought back and it will have to be removed.

C. Shanelaris made a motion for the Commission to reach out to UNH and/or NRCS for resources to issue an RFP and assess what we find from that investigation. C. McDade seconded. All in favor. T. Rettburg

recused.

C. Shanelaris – I do think the email that I read needs to be discussed at some point. I don't believe that communication was becoming of a Chair.

H. Harmon (Public Comment) – Our attorney has a conflict on this and has provided us with a name for another attorney for anything related to the Conservation Commission.

T. Rettburg seated again for the remainder of the agenda.

T. Rettburg – For agenda item #10, I want to take suggestions on how we handle this moving forward. When it comes to legal, we had town counsel review and answer important questions. After our June 15th meeting, we discussed having legal involved and discussed that with H. Harmon, and then June 30th was informed that our attorney had a conflict of interest and an alternate would be provided. On July 17th, H. Harmon shared the name of the alternate with me. I also learned that future legal counsel would come out of the Conservation Commission budget. I think we have no choice but to have legal support and allocate funds on this issue.

C. Fields – I think we have enough local resources that we don't need to hire someone for this. We're looking at a soil management plan and believe we have resources for this.

T. Rettburg – I'm not talking about soil testing. I'm wondering about potential lawsuits.

M. Kasper – I think it's worth it to consult with an attorney.

5. Correspondence

- a. SELT – Had an event tonight, unable to attend
- b. Lamprey River Association – They have a summer newsletter shared with everyone
- c. ESRLAC – Following up on a DOT request for invasive plant clearing

6. Public Comment

M. Sununu – October 3rd [Exeter Household Waste Collection](#)

7. Committee Work:

- a. Alternate Member

T. Rettburg – A. Watts asked if I had additional notes on the candidates. I will say there was no discussion around legal matters. It was entirely about opportunities, land, safety, etc.

T. Rettburg made a motion to approve D. Luchsinger as alternate. L. Hill seconded. T. Rettburg, L. Hill and C. McDade vote in favor. C. Shanelaris and C. Fields abstain. Motion passed with a majority of the quorum.

- b. Electronic Data

T. Rettburg – C. McDade and J. Lent have an email in their inboxes about the new organization.

- c. Bylaws

T. Rettburg – Final edits complete and H. Harmon’s review in May, draft has been final since June 7th.

C. Shanelaris – I’d like to revisit a few items.

No vote taken.

8. Land / Stewardship:

a. SELT monitoring visit of Sellers-Newlin 1, 2, 3.

T. Rettburg - Site visit happened, included Newfields Garden Club. Have not seen a report on this yet.

C. Shanelaris – It’s amazing piece of property and bigger than I thought.

C. McDade – I think there may be some opportunities for a trail there in the future.

b. Anderson Easement 6/9/26 Site Monitoring Report

T. Rettburg – A. Spears sent a report which was discussed at the June meeting.

T. Rettburg made a motion to accept the report. C. Shanelaris seconded. All in favor. Motion passed.

c. Email regarding wetlands disturbance

T. Rettburg – Email was sent to Commission and Select Board about possible wetlands disturbance by a neighbor. I looked into it with DES and he could not find a complaint on this. Leaving this for now.

d. DES Wetlands Rules and Process

T. Rettburg – DES held a webinar about changes underway. I want the Commission to have a wetlands specialist, who would like to volunteer to learn about this and present in October?

C. Fields – Volunteer.

9. Updates:

a. Resource Waste Svcs permit application

T. Rettburg – DES approved the permit in Epping, but at 1/3 limited capacity. I’m calling that a bit of a victory because without our and the public’s involvement it might have been full capacity.

C. Fields – Did they share anything about what an emergency response plan would be?

T. Rettburg – They said they had regulations to follow and would be in compliance with.

10. Previous Meeting: Board Rules, Courtesies, Incorrectness

T. Rettburg – Boards need to have guidelines to help manage meetings better. I’m learning more about this and tactics to help us. When it came to our June meeting, where the agenda wasn’t posted in time,

that the meeting was mis-handled when we had the meeting but with no votes. I got guidance from an attorney at the [New Hampshire Municipal Association](#) (NHMA).

T. Rettburg made a motion to add a sentence to the June minutes about the error of holding the meeting without proper notification. C. Shanellaris seconded. All in favor. Motion passes. ‘

T. Rettburg – The posting of the meeting with the agenda needs to happen by 2pm on Thursday to meet requirements, but we only need a high-level agenda, not the entire thing.

C. McDade – That severely limits people who may want to provide input on an agenda item, if we aren’t posting the whole thing.

T. Rettburg – I can commit to posting this on Thursdays at the post office.

T. Rettburg – At the last meeting, A. Watts recused herself on a topic but spoke at the podium – I learned from NHMA that board members don’t lose their right to speak as a citizen but not as a board member, and not to influence any decision. Also, C. Shanellaris mentioned a very personal medical situation, and the main point was lost beyond the emotion of our response. My recommendation is to leave the personal situations out. Finally, the letter that C. Shanellaris read from wasn’t shared with the commission directly or on the drive in a timely manner. I believe that letters or items should be shared in advance of the meeting.

C. Shanellaris – I felt it needed context, but certainly something for discussion.

T. Rettburg – Just want to make sure we’re doing things in the spirit of transparency.

T. Rettburg – Finally, at the last meeting I made a statement about how the discussion could have gone on until midnight. Using the May minutes as an example, 1 hour and 39 minutes was used for discussion, and 74% of that was from 2 commission members. I’d like to see discussions not be dominated by only a couple of people. We’re all equal here.

C. McDade – I’d like to see you think about this too, because tonight you’ve spent a lot of time talking and not asking for input from others.

M. Kasper – Maybe as a courtesy to all, try to abbreviate your comments.

11. August library/town-newsletter article (due 8/5/26)

T. Rettburg – Who will own this and writing it?

C. McDade – I already reached out, planning a topic about window dressers and will include information about the hazardous waste day as well.

12. August Meeting

T. Rettburg – Do we want to take August off? Or September?

No. August and September are on.

13. Adjourn – T. Rettburg moved, L. Hill seconded. All in favor. Motion passes. (*Time not stated.*)