



CITY OF PORTSMOUTH

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Memo

TO: Conservation Commission Members
FROM: Peter Britz, Environmental Planner 
DATE: February 8, 2018
SUBJ: February 14, 2018 Conservation Commission Meeting

Martine Cottage

This application was first before the Conservation Commission at the November 2018 meeting of the Commission. The proposed application is for a home in a new location with a longer driveway and revised building plans and techniques intended to reduce impacts to the wetland buffer.

According to *Article 10 Section 10.1017.50* the applicant must satisfy the following conditions for approval of this project.

- 1. The land is reasonably suited to the use activity or alteration.* The land in this area is very challenging and is not reasonably suited to the proposed use. The applicant has moved the location of the house further back on the lot however this creates a greater impact from the driveway. The the size of the house septic and driveway all contribute a large loss of buffer function.
- 2. There is no alternative location outside the wetland buffer that is feasible and reasonable for the proposed use, activity or alteration.* Given the lack of upland area outside of the wetland buffer there is very limited space to construct the home without some disturbance in the buffer.
- 3. There will be no adverse impact on the wetland functional values of the site or surrounding properties.* The proposed project will likely create habitat usage impacts to both vernal pool areas shown on the plan because of the proximity of the development. The drainage of the site does not go to the vernal pools however vernal pools are dependent on undisturbed upland areas surrounding the pool for the species that use the vernal pools. Given the size of the proposed house, garage, septic system and the driveway there will be 5,168 square feet of permanent impact and 9,753 square feet of temporary impact all in an undisturbed forest setting. The proximity to the vernal pool wetlands represent a habitat loss and loss of production export and the impacts to the downstream wetlands will create a loss of buffer function for production export.
- 4. Alteration of the natural vegetative state or managed woodland will occur only to the extent necessary to achieve construction goals.* This application chose a different house site than an earlier application which may provide more buffer area for the wetlands but results in a larger amount of clearing. This application will require completely clearing all of the vegetation for the house, garage, driveway and septic system.
- 5. The proposal is the alternative with the least adverse impact to areas and environments under the jurisdiction of this section.* This proposal calls for a new house, barn, septic system, and driveway on a completely undeveloped site. The majority of the proposal is within the wetland buffer. The size of the home and septic system necessary for a five bedroom house along with a garage and long driveway are significant impacts to the wetland buffer in this location. It is not clear from the application that this is the least impacting alternative for this site.

6. *Any area within the vegetated buffer strip will be returned to a natural state to the extent feasible.*

There is no information provided about how the site will be replanted or landscaped however given that this proposal is in an undeveloped area any area, that is not cleared for development and left in a natural state will provide valuable wetland buffer habitat.

Recommendation: The application for a new home, barn, driveway, and septic system completely in the wetland buffer would create an extensive impact to the wetland buffer in a completely undeveloped area. While it may be possible to reduce the impact with a smaller footprint and little to no driveway the current application represents a significant impact to the undeveloped wetland buffer resources adjacent to two different wetland systems. Given the amount of impact proposed in this application staff recommends denial of this application as presented.

1850 Woodbury Avenue

This application is to repave a parking lot, add a new use outside of the 100 foot wetland buffer and install a stormwater treatment system for a lot that currently allows stormwater to flow over the parking lot into the wetland area, with only a small lawn area providing limited velocity reduction and treatment.

According to *Article 10 Section 10.1017.50* the applicant must satisfy the following conditions for approval of this project.

2. *The land is reasonably suited to the use activity or alteration.* The current buffer is a mix of pavement and grass bordering a large wetland complex. As such, the paved area and grass are not providing a positive benefit to the adjacent wetland. The land on this site that this proposal will impact is a previously disturbed degraded buffer. Given the applicant is proposing improvements this land is suited to the activity.

2. *There is no alternative location outside the wetland buffer that is feasible and reasonable for the proposed use, activity or alteration.* The proposed use on the site is outside of the buffer and there is no alternative location for providing improvements to the buffer other than the downslope parking and lawn area.

3. *There will be no adverse impact on the wetland functional values of the site or surrounding properties.* The proposed project is planned to benefit the wetland through stormwater treatment and proposed plantings

4. *Alteration of the natural vegetative state or managed woodland will occur only to the extent necessary to achieve construction goals.* The applicant is only planning to alter existing lawn area. This vegetated area will remain vegetated but serve as a stormwater treatment area.

5. *The proposal is the alternative with the least adverse impact to areas and environments under the jurisdiction of this section.* The proposed project is an improvement to the site over the existing parking lot and lawn area.

6. *Any area within the vegetated buffer strip will be returned to a natural state to the extent feasible.* The applicant has provided some new plantings on the wetland side of the stormwater treatment areas.

Recommendation: The applicant has taken measures to improve the stormwater running off the site currently untreated and has added some positive landscape features. Given that overall there should be a reduction of degraded stormwater entering the wetland area staff recommends approval of this project.