

**CITY OF PORTSMOUTH, NEW HAMPSHIRE
CONSERVATION COMMISSION**



**MEETING MINUTES
WEDNESDAY, JULY 8, 2026, 4 pm
City Hall Council Chambers, 1 Junkins Ave., Portsmouth**

For the Zoom recording:

https://www.youtube.com/live/rbPysCN_U7A?si=o4_lbtXK4W2qZ7dT

Meeting called to order at 4 pm. Roll Call:

MEMBERS PRESENT: Chair Samantha Collins; Vice Chair Barbara McMillan, Lynn Vaccaro, Alice Carey, Brian Gibb. Via Zoom: Jessica Blasko

MEMBERS ABSENT: Talia Sperduto, Oliver Chag, Stewart Sheppard

STAFF PRESENT: Kate Homet; Environmental Planner

1. [04:40] Draft Minutes from the June 10, 2026 meeting

On a motion by Gibb seconded by McMillan the Commission voted to approve the June 10, 2026 minutes with Carey abstaining as she was absent from that meeting.

2. [05:43] New Business: Wetland Conditional Use Permit & State Wetland Bureau Application

124 Heritage Avenue
Assessor's Map 284 Lot 8
124 Group Inc, Owner
LU-26-61

On a motion by Carey, seconded by Vaccaro, Commission voted to approve the request to postpone the CUP and State Wetland permit application until the August meeting.

[6:20] New Business: Wetland Conditional Use Permit

E94 Utility Right-of-Way
Assessor's Map 239 Lot 18, Map 239 Lot 16, Map 238 Lot 20, Map 237 Lot 56,
Map 236 Lot 34, Map 240 Lot 2-1, Map 240 Lot 2-2001, Map 240 Lot 3 and Map
240
Lot 3 Public Service of New Hampshire d/b/a Eversource Energy, Owner
LU-26-90

Sherrie Trefry, VHB representing Eversource discussed the project for proposed utility maintenance on the existing 115kV E194 Transmission Line in Portsmouth within Eversource property or Eversource-held easements and as part of Eversource's ongoing maintenance program conducted to ensure reliable electric service for their customers. The project involves both temporary and permanent impacts within the 100' wetland buffer and temporary impacts to wetlands. The location is along Rte 16 and Liberty Mutual and Portsmouth Regional Hospital parking lots.

This work:

- Replaces 12 wood structures (15, 16, 18, 21, 22, 23, 24, 26, 37, 38, 39, and 40) with new weathered steel structures in the same configuration.
- Commences by fall 2026.
- Is located within vegetated and commercially developed areas of the E194 ROW.
- Access to the ROW will be from established roadways that intersect the ROW or commercial parking lots that occur within the ROW.
- Installs the replacement structures within 5 to 10 feet ahead or behind the existing structure footprint.
- Increases the height of the structures 5-20 feet to gain compliance with current regulatory standards, meet safety clearance requirements, accommodate the site topography, and minimize environmental impacts.

VHB Wetland Scientists surveyed for and delineated jurisdictional resource areas in August of 2025. Resources delineated within the project area included multiple wetlands and a small section of an ephemeral stream. VHB has consulted with New Hampshire Fish and Game, and the Natural Heritage Bureau for rare, threatened, and endangered species on behalf of Eversource. The project will work with time constraints and care taken not to obstruct winter nesting sites for turtles. Project does not rise to the level of needing an alteration of terrain permit. Waiting to file statutory notices until August to allow for a full year of work and restoration before the permit expires.

Prior to accessing work sites with construction equipment, crews will install wildlife friendly erosion and sediment control barriers. The upland terrain includes the City 100' wetland buffer.

- 100 x 100 gravel pads on upland terrain and 4' x 16' sections of timber matting in wetlands;
- Access routes are proposed as 16' wide permanent gravel roadways in uplands and timber matting in the wetlands;
- The upland impacts proposed within wetland buffers will be reduced to 60' x 35' permanent gravel pads and both these and the roadways will remain to allow for future access to facilitate maintenance or repairs and are expected to revegetate;

- Erosion control will be implemented in the vicinity of wetlands;
- All excavated spoils will be spread within an upland area of the project ROW or trucked off-site and properly disposed of.

Commission discussion

[15:25- 18:38] Collins: Any other examples of an Eversource gravel road within the wetland buffer to see how they revegetate?

Ashley Nicole, Eversource: Yes. Replacement near Portsmouth Ford defined in after-the-fact permit, following the rerouting of a CUP path that originally crossed a wetland. Can provide a list.

18:45-20:45 McMillan asked how often the structures need to be maintained and other justification for the permanent access.

Nicole: Primarily there in case of emergency but also maintenance.

[20:47- 24:34] Size of gravel and moving of topsoil.

Topsoil removed for the 100x100 pads is then reused when reducing the size to 60x30 and on the sides of the roadway. BMPs applied to be aware of invasives, cleaning the mats and otherwise minimizing potential for spreading, including in the buffer although not required.

[24:40- 26:35] Carey asked about limiting access to the wetlands via the new roadways.

Eversource asks underlying landowners to monitor for trespassers and place boulders or gates to limit access without preventing emergency access. They modified the plan to eliminate one access point.

26:40 – Collins asked about using removed soil to top dress the gravel.

Yes, that could be considered in this project.

[29:10- 32:26] Vaccaro refers to City memo suggesting that Eversource do what it can to avoid permanent impacts to the wetland buffer zone. Recognize 25' limit and use the timber matting instead of gravel in those areas?

Eversource prefers to leave the road to avoid redoing it when needed. Also pulls the roadway back 15' from wetlands to avoid impact. Could accommodate the 25' limit but not the 'no cut' as clearing is needed regularly for maintenance.

[33:00-33:27] Hamet noted no impact sheet in packet for timber matting or gravel as well as maintenance required. Eversource to provide.

[33:45- Macmillan made a motion to approve CUP for E94 with several conditions due to the project's significant impacts:

- Include detail sheet
- Use timber matting within 25' of wetlands instead of gravel
- Use removed soils to cover the gravel
- Monitor and remove invasives in upland as well as wetlands for a 2 year period with report on maintenance to the City staff.

Seconded by Carey. Discussion about limiting the number of gravel sections.

[38:30-43:15] Gibb asked if this approval could be a template along with any insights from similar prior projects elsewhere to be consistent and best practice for the whole series of anticipated other projects. Coming back with timber mats multiple times might be as bad as the one permanent impact. Hamet noted that emergency access is infrequent and does not have to mean permanent access. Gibb suggested Eversource take time to go back to consider options to produce a well-documented response that also reflects best practice to them rather than listing stipulations. That would expedite future similar reviews. Blasko agreed and asked Eversource to consider options for the least long term impact.

[44:52-46:40] Mcmillan withdrew her original motion, concurred by Carey, and made a new motion to postpone approval of the CUP until the August meeting to provide time for Eversource to provide the technical details discussed. Seconded by Gibb. Carey requested additional explanation for the location of the road. Roll call vote was unanimous to postpone.

3. [46:55] STATE WETLAND BUREAU APPLICATIONS (OLD BUSINESS)

Dredge and Fill – Major Impact
550 Peverly Hill Road
City R.O.W. & Multiple Private Lots (see application for full list)

[46:55-52:04] Brian Colburn, McFarland Johnson consulting engineer for the City on this project and Christine Peron wetland scientist spoke to the impacts in this project to improve a critical link in the City's multimodal access. Majority of the work between Middle and Banfield Road.

- 10' shared use path to west of Peverly Hill and 6' sidewalk to the east between Middle and West with a 24' wide roadway.
- New curbing along the entire length.
- Increasing impervious pavement from 5 acres to 6.15 acres.
- To mitigate increased flow and provide stormwater treatment, proposing 2 formal stormwater treatment structures: a 2.64 acre gravel wetland behind YMCA/Tai Kwan Do which pulls the gravel a bit more out of the buffer, and 0.388 acre underground infiltration chamber in the DPW parking lot. Plus sediment basins: 1.2 acres near Moffatt Rd. and 1.6 acres at Banfield Rd. Consolidated BMP. Stormwater treatment wherever gravity allows.

[52:15-56:25] Wetland

- No stream or tidal wetlands impact but wetland impact on two prime wetlands to the west and east of Peverly Hill road and tidal buffer impact on 67 sf. Impact to west;
- Applied to DES for waiver impact on 100' buffer issue for work in the existing roadway; 39 sf impact at edge of roadway
- Tidal buffer on east impact Sagamore Creek system. – within 100' buffer 9500 sf BMP at gravel at YMCA
- Tidal buffer zone remains vegetated so applied for DES waiver of mitigation rules;
- Presence of Blandings turtles so implementing construction BMPs

Commission Discussion:

[56:30 Collins asked about original submission. Held off on attending due to delay. Discussion of context for area (Sheet 10)

59:20- 1:02:40] McMillan asked about cutting trees and controlling invasives. Christine – can provide tree plan. Will access BMP construction via 10-15' wide trench for drainage pipe and from TaiKwanDo parking area. Most outside 100' buffer. Balancing maximum stormwater drainage by gravity and 100' impact.

[1:02:42-1:03:38] Alternatives? Greenleaf Avenue but that location is also in the buffer. Area around the stream is steep and not conducive to drainage.

[1:03:45- 1:04:44] Carey asked why project is so big – addressing other stormwater drainage? Includes the whole roadway and invokes MS4 rules apply, alteration of terrain permit – treats where there is no formal stormwater treatment at the moment.

[1:05:00- 1:09:47] Collins asked about road/side path/sidewalk configuration, widening from 24' to 44'. Sidepath side has a 4' strip of grass and tree plantings between to separate the path and the roadway. Design options presented during public necessity hearings posted on City project page. [Peverly Hill Road Complete Streets Project | City of Portsmouth](#)

[1:07:49- 1:11:40] Collins asked for a comparison of existing impacts of the road and shoulder on the 100' buffer and wetland compared to the new plan. McMillan asked about the Conditional Use Permit and submitting both before the August meeting deadline.

[1:11:42- 1:12:27] Collins proposed a site walk of the proposed gravel feature. Suggestion that Eric Eby, project manager arrange, accompanied by consultant. Aug 5.

[1:12:30- 1:18:44] Collins asked which large trees will be cut for sidepath, asked to add buffer line on all plans (CUP will have) – relative to treeline, intersection at YMCA? Footprint not extended by culvert that carries stream under Peverly at Banfield. Will outfall to right of YMCA affect the stream? Vegetative and fertilizer/maintenance plan. Project timeline is to advertise bid Oct-Nov, tree clearing over the winter.

[1:19:17- McMillan made a motion to postpone approval of the application for 550 Peverly Hill Road, invoking the 14-day delay, until the August meeting when the Commission would be considering a vote on the CUP. Collins would like to review with questions at the CUP level. Carey seconded in order to look at the whole project in one piece, with the 100' buffer marked more clearly. Feels the BMP behind YMCA is problematic. McMillan would like to hear more about the stormwater flow and treatment considerations in making the choices. Gibb asked that Homet detail the requests in an email. On a roll call vote the Commission voted unanimously to postpone.

Other Business

- [1:23:50] **224 Cate Street** required to submit two monitoring reports showing reconstruction work in the buffer. First report submitted by new owner who plans to submit the second later this fall.
- [1:25:27-2:06:22] **Wetlands Ordinance Article 10 review.** Discussion about page 11 and the cutting table. Planning Board chair plans to bring

his comments to the Planning Board for discussion this month and then combining the two. Discussion about expanding the vegetative buffer. Decision to leave the no cut and presented by the original working group. Hamet noted Portsmouth has the strictest limits in the state. Gibb commented that going to 50' limited cut seems an overreach – people are working with city to get to 25'. Commission decided to keep the 'no cut' buffer at 0-25' to 0-50' and adjust the limited cut at 50-100'. City should consider mapping vernal pools.

- #(3) tree-cutting edit as noted
- Wetland buffer markers – exceptions if other signage is used – or in a developed area. Confusion that the markers are educational not disciplinary in nature.
- 10.1018.50 Recommended changing heading to include salt storage: snow storage and covered salt storage be located outside the 50' buffer or be removed offsite.
- Vaccaro suggested noting the dates of Ordinance edits, noting original dates and then once adopted by Council. Hamet suggested adding a comment on the side for future discussion.
- [2:05:41] Vaccaro made a motion that to approve the draft edits identified by the Commission and recommended for submission to the Planning Board. Seconded by Carey.

Hamet suggested dates for joint Planning Board and Conservation Commission work session noting the easiest to schedule is a Thursday, 6-7 pm – the hour before the Planning Board meeting. Recommended having Planning discuss their edits and then schedule joint session.

The meeting adjourned at 6:06 pm.