

Shutesbury Conservation Commission

Minutes – February 12, 2026

Approved – March 12, 2026

Virtual Meeting

Commissioners Present: Beth Willson (Chair), Scott Kahan, Bob Douglas

Commissioners Absent: Mare Fox

Other Staff Present: Matteo Pangallo (Land Use Clerk)

Others Present: Brian Creamer, Edith Hunsberger, Michael Tommie McDuffie, Chanel Jackson, Shyla Davis, Michael DeChiara, Ginna Johnson, Jamuna Prajapati

Call to Order: 7:01pm

This meeting is being recorded and all members are participating remotely.

Comments from the Chair

Willson reports that GZA has completed preliminary designs on the Lake Wyola dam repair and the Town has put it out to bid. The pace is quick because of the emergency.

Willson shares that the public meeting regarding this summer's culvert project went well and there will be another meeting with the Highway Department to go over culvert locations.

Willson reminds the Commission to complete their annual Conflict of Interest training from the state and will forward them the reminder information that she received from the state.

Review and vote on minutes of January 8, 2026

Motion to approve the minutes of January 8, 2026: Douglas; second: Kahan. Vote: Kahan -aye; Douglas - aye; Willson - aye. *The motion is approved unanimously.*

Site Visits Update

Willson notes that the only site visits completed relate to the RDAs coming up on the agenda.

Land Management Update

Kahan notes that the only real land management update is the bid opening later in the meeting. He adds that he would like to start discussing regulations for Town-owned Conservation Commission properties. He notes that there are historical conditions for some of those properties but that the Commission should start drafting ideas for early spring.

Willson notes that a member of the public has asked about trails in the West Quabbin Woodlands Conservation Area. Kahan answers that the priority was getting the parking lot built this past year. He is now in discussion with individuals, including at Kestrel Land Trust, about developing a trail plan for the Area. He notes there are not many access points on the property given the steep incline, but he will be researching grant funding for a potential trail system there.

Willson reports that the next Conservation Commission and Recreation Committee hike will be on March 7 at 1:00pm on the trails behind the Lake Wyola State Park. She reports on the hike recently along New Boston Trail. There will be another hike in April at South Brook.

Willson recognizes Michael DeChiara who reports that the new regulations from the Department of Energy Resources will require a local government representative and he asks that Willson attend the Select Board meeting in March where this will be discussed.

Public hearing, discussion, and vote on Request for Determination of Applicability for Department of Conservation and Recreation's Project Shade, to conduct work on the accessible parking area, plant native trees, and construct a paved path and pad at Lake Wyola State Park at 94 Lakeview Road (Parcel C-5)

Willson opens the hearing at 7:15pm and recognizes Brian Creamer who introduces the other members of the project, shares the application, and explains the project, which is part of a state-wide initiative to bring more shade and comfort to nine State Parks, particularly those that are waterside and that are exposed to extreme heat, using pavilions and trees.

Creamer overviews the details of where the work will take place and what the nature of the work will be in each location and responds to Willson's questions about the placement of erosion controls and work access and supply storage points.

Creamer reviews upgrades to the accessible parking area, but notes there will be no new impervious surfaces. He shares the architectural renderings of the shade structures. He notes that the peak of the roof of the structures was heightened to ensure views of the lake from the road.

Willson asks about the tree planting near the lake and on the border of the buffer zone. Creamer explains that it will be for the purposes of enhancement. Chanel Jackson notes that the trees will also provide shade at an existing picnic table area.

Willson asks about the phasing of construction, access, and material storage locations. Creamer answers that those would be off of Lakeview Road, from the existing parking lot, and materials would be stored within erosion control fencing. Work will proceed from the west to the east.

Willson encourages protection against loose sediment and taking the excavation in stages to avoid exposing soil or supply piles to rain erosion.

Willson notes that there are 400 square feet of new impervious surfaces and asks if the trees being planted are meant to be taken as mitigation for that change. Creamer notes that the trees and the enhanced swale work are mitigations for the new impervious surfaces. He shares photographs showing the location of those mitigations and the new impervious surfaces. Willson agrees that the new grading will solve the existing drainage problems in the field area between the existing boardwalk and the restroom building.

Douglas notes that he resides at Lake Wyola but is not a direct abutter to the project area. He agrees that the changes for accessibility and shading are good additions to the Park. He considers the project well thought out.

Willson invites questions or comments from the public.

Edith Hunsberger asks when the work will happen. Creamer answers that bids will be spring into summer and the work will start after the high season of the summer, likely in September. Hunsberger asks about impacts on fish and wildlife. Ginna Johnson answers that staging will happen to ensure access through Labor Day and some time thereafter, and she notes that no wildlife will be impacted, including animals under migration or reproduction cycles.

Motion to close the public hearing: Douglas; second: Kahan. Vote: Kahan - aye; Douglas - aye; Willson - aye. *The motion is approved unanimously.*

The motion is closed at 7:32pm.

Motion to issue a negative determination for reason number three: Douglas; second: Kahan. Vote: Kahan - aye; Douglas - aye; Willson - aye. *The motion is approved unanimously.*

Willson asks DCR to keep the Commission informed about when the work will proceed.

Public hearing, discussion, and vote on Request for Determination of Applicability for Massachusetts Electric Company's Pratt Corner Road Reconductoring Project, to remove, replace, and install 36 electric distribution poles and overhead lines and remove trees along the public way of Pratt Corner Road

Willson opens the hearing at 7:34pm and recognizes Shyla Davis who provides an overview of the project, including those parts of the project that are not considered exempt under the Wetlands Protection Act (WPA) or the Shutesbury General Wetlands Protection Bylaw, and shares the maps and photographs of the work areas for the poles that are not exempt.

Willson asks about erosion controls. Davis answers that there will be controls around the poles and to prevent erosion from the tree removal process. Work will be done from the road shoulder and the stump will be left, cut flush to the ground to retain the root system for erosion protection. Davis explains that the poles will be augered down six feet, with approximately a four-foot disturbance area, and any removed sediment will be either backfilled or removed entirely from the resource area. She explains this work is needed to better support the new, heavier-gauged wires being used for the power lines and to prevent them from sagging or coming down.

Willson asks how close the tree to be removed is to the pole. Davis notes that it is about ten feet, and the stump will be left in place to keep the bank stable.

Kahan asks about the timing of the work. Davis answers that this would happen within the next two months, from start to completion, contingent on the results of the hearing.

The Chair recognizes Michael DeChiara who notes that all of Pratt Corner was upgraded to phase three power a few years ago when the solar installation went in and asks why this is happening if the lines were upgraded then. Davis answers that she cannot speak to that.

DeChiara asks if this is connected to the other project National Grid is doing out of the substation. Davis answers that it is just a geographic coincidence. This project is just for roadside distribution whereas the other one is for transmission lines.

DeChiara notes that water flow through the culvert near Pole 7 on the map might become a problem and he suggests that be considered before the work proceeds. He adds that he knows utilities like to cut trees to protect lines and asks about the process for the tree removal, particularly around new poles. Davis notes that there is only one tree removal within the jurisdictional area of a buffer zone, but that other trees to be removed outside of the buffer zones would be removed with the same process.

DeChiara asks how abutters and other people on the road will be notified when tree cutting will happen. Davis does not know the answer but will find out and let him know.

Willson asks how many trees total are being removed. Davis answers that across the entire project seven trees will be removed.

Douglas asks if the stumps will be available for side-sprouting. Davis answers that it would be species specific. Douglas notes that since the tree being removed is a red maple, it will start sprouting again. He suggests that cutting it even a few inches above the soil line would allow it to regrow as part of the immediate ecosystem.

Willson and Davis review the pole numbers that are within a jurisdictional area. Willson shares the language in the WPA and the Bylaw regarding buffer zone utility and Small Project exemptions. She notes that only the removal of one tree falls under the WPA.

Willson suggests a condition that the applicant consult with the Highway Department about the culvert identified by DeChiara and that the proposed work will not negatively impact the quality

of the flow through it or the stability of the bank. She also noted during the site visit that there are other trees providing stability to the adjacent bank, but she thinks the conversation would still be advisable. She will also include a condition that the stump of the removed red maple be left at least two inches over the ground level.

Motion to close the public hearing: Douglas; second: Kahan. Vote: Kahan - aye; Douglas - aye; Willson - aye. *The motion is approved unanimously.*

The motion is closed at 8:02pm.

Motion to issue a negative determination for reason number three: Douglas; second: Kahan. Vote: Kahan - aye; Douglas - aye; Willson - aye. *The motion is approved unanimously.*

Unsealing of bids received in response to the Invitation for Bids for the South Brook/Lake Wyola Conservation Area Trail Repair Project and vote to award bid

Willson provides an overview of the project, the CPA funding, and the bid process. She reports that the Commission received four sealed bids for the project. Pangallo did an initial review of the bids and determined they included all the required materials. Willson asks the Commission for authorization to permit Kahan and Willson to examine the bid documents and contact references to establish the eligibility of the bidders.

Motion to permit Kahan and Willson to examine the bid documents and contact references to establish the eligibility of the bidders: Douglas; second: Kahan. Vote: Kahan - aye; Douglas - aye; Willson - aye. *The motion is approved unanimously.*

Kahan asks about the timeframe for reviewing the bids. Willson suggests they do it next week. Pangallo will find out when they need to respond to the bidders and he will send the bid packages to the whole Commission.

Vote to submit a Community Preservation Act grant application to the Community Preservation Committee for the purchase of approximately 9 acres adjacent to the South Brook Conservation Area from Kestrel Land Trust

Willson explains the location of the parcel that Kestrel Land Trust is purchasing this summer and the nine acres that the Trust is offering to sell to the Town in the fall. She notes the application has letters of support from the Recreation Committee and the Open Space Committee. Rita Farrell is interested in using a two-acre portion for an affordable housing property, which is why the application is in both the recreation/open space and community housing categories.

Kahan asks if the Town is buying the entire parcel or if it is bound to the acreage indicated in the application. Willson notes that it is the entirety of the parcel and the application refers to "9+ acres" because the land will not be re-surveyed until after Kestrel purchases the entire lot.

Kahan is very supportive of the plan. Willson explains it would still have to be approved by Town Meeting and the Community Preservation Committee would be presenting it. Pangallo,

who chairs the CPC, notes that as a direct abutter to the parcel, he will have to recuse himself on presenting this grant application and so Willson will have to present it to Town Meeting.

Willson explains that Kestrel would hold the Conservation Restriction and there is money in the grant application to pay for that as well.

Motion to submit a Community Preservation Act grant application to the Community Preservation Committee for the purchase of approximately 9 acres adjacent to the South Brook Conservation Area from Kestrel Land Trust: Kahan; second: Douglas. Vote: Kahan - aye; Douglas - aye; Willson - aye. *The motion is approved unanimously.*

Discussion with Michael Tommie McDuffie regarding joining the Conservation Commission

Willson recognizes Michael Tommie McDuffie who clarifies what he understands about the Commission's role and duties. He asks about what role the Town plays in giving approval for the Commission's decisions. Willson notes that occasionally the other land use boards, the Planning Board and the Zoning Board of Appeals, have a role in permitting many projects. McDuffie asks what other kinds of work the Commission does. Douglas notes that the Commission issues both Town and State permits, which means the Commission enforces both the Town's Wetland Protections Bylaw and the State's Wetlands Protection Act. He notes that one of the best parts of the job is being a caretaker of the Town's many acres of protected land and their trails.

Kahan asks about McDuffie's background and his interest in the Commission. McDuffie explains he moved to Massachusetts in 2009 for graduate school and his family came to the Amherst area three years ago. He works remotely for a company in Boston, so he's in Boston about once a week. The Commissioners introduce themselves.

McDuffie explains that he has been looking for ways to get involved with the Town, he loves being outdoors, and he loves what the Town has done to take care of the environment.

Willson reviews the Commission's meeting schedule, site visit policies, and the nature of the commitment as a Commissioner, as well as the support and training provided by the Massachusetts Association of Conservation Commissions.

McDuffie asks about legal representation and Willson answers that they have recourse to Town Counsel for both regulation review and for advice on applications when needed.

Willson explains that a big project on the horizon this year is a transmission line upgrade on the National Grid power lines that run through Shutesbury. It will involve access roads, power pylons, and tree removal. The Notice of Intent for the project should be coming in the fall.

Willson suggests that McDuffie consider what he has learned and, if he is still interested, the Commission vote on recommending his appointment to the Select Board at the Commission's March 12 meeting.

Unanticipated Business

There is no unanticipated business.

Adjournment

Motion to adjourn: Douglas; second: Kahan. Vote: Douglas - aye; Kahan - aye; Willson - aye.
The motion is approved unanimously.

Adjourned: 8:41pm

List of Documents Used:

- Request for Determination of Applicability for Department of Conservation and Recreation's Project Shade, to conduct work on the accessible parking area, plant native trees, and construct a paved path and pad at Lake Wyola State Park at 94 Lakeview Road (Parcel C-5)
- Request for Determination of Applicability for Massachusetts Electric Company's Pratt Corner Road Reconductoring Project, to remove, replace, and install 36 electric distribution poles and overhead lines and remove trees along the public way of Pratt Corner Road
- Invitation for Bids for the South Brook/Lake Wyola Conservation Area Trail Repair Project
- Sealed bids or the South Brook/Lake Wyola Conservation Area Trail Repair Project
- Community Preservation Act grant application for the purchase of approximately 9 acres adjacent to the South Brook Conservation Area from Kestrel Land Trust
- Conservation Commission Membership Questionnaire from Michael Tommie McDuffie