

City of Dover Conservation Commission
Minutes for March 20, 2006
Workshop Session: Wetland Buffer Workshop
5:30 pm, City Hall, City Council Conference Room

Commission Members Present: Tom Fargo, Chair; Marcia Colbath, Vice Chair; Britt Schuman, Secretary; Alban Lobdell; Ed Millman; Aimee Colbath
Members Absent: Bill McCann; Susan Eisler

Purpose of Workshop:

The Commission met to review technical information related to developing recommendations for potential modification of Dover zoning rules related to wetland setbacks.

1. Wetlands Buffer Background

Chairman Fargo provided the commission with a brief history of how the current regulations came to be. Current Dover City Code under 170-27.1 (G) requires a 50 ft. setback for any construction altering the surface configuration of the land within 50-feet of a Wetland Protection District. In addition section G requires a 75 ft. setback for a septic tank or leach field from a Wetland Protection District.

Prior to the current code a two-tier system existed. Poorly drained soil had no setback, while very poorly drained soil had a 75 ft. setback. The new rules made wetlands delineation for the City's regulations consistent with State of NH regulations. The State of NH under RSA 674:55 requires wetlands to be defined using the Army Corps of Engineers methodology. This resulted in the two tier system no longer being valid.

2. Discussion of 50 ft. buffer

The group discussed whether a 50 ft. buffer for all wetlands was appropriate. Topics covered included impacts on animal and plant habitats, areas of high natural resource value, functions and values provided by the wetland, and the wetland's size relative to the lot. Fargo stated that there is much reference information available regarding wetland setbacks to promote wildlife habitat. The generally held dimensional standard is 100 meters or 300 feet. Fargo stated that this is not very workable in Dover. Fargo suggested that the Commission focus on wetland buffers for water quality protection, as protecting water quality is consistent with principals of zoning regulations that protect the health and welfare of people. People need clean water.

3. Conclusions

The Commission discussed and agreed to keep the 50 ft. setback, however it was decided by the group that a functions and values system should be created. The system would allow the Commission to determine whether an application is appropriate for a Conditional Use approval.

The Commission members will review the "Highway Methodology Workbook: Wetland Functions and Values" published by the US Army Corps of Engineers, New England District. Once reviewed the group will further discuss the creation of the functions and values system.