

Norwich Conservation Commission December Meeting DRAFT Minutes
December 16, 2025

Lynnwood Andrews called the meeting to order at 7:05 pm

Present: Lynnwood Andrews, Andy Torkleson, Alex Gottlieb, Chris Rimmer, Peg Merrens, Cody Williams, Lindsay Putnam

Public members present: Sara Cavin, Jeannie Kornfeld

Discussion of Melendy Parcel -- Sara Cavin, the Special Projects Manager for Willing Hands, gave an update on activities on the Town owned Melendy Parcel. She is managing the informational kiosk project there which the NCC is assisting with. Sara updated us on the text and pictures of the kiosk. More photos would be useful in order to break up the large amount of text. Lindsay will try to find additional photos.

Sara summarized the growing season, which began with a very wet spring, delaying the planting and stalling management efforts. Weeds proliferated and were difficult to control. Potatoes weren't planted until the end of June, when the weather turned exceptionally dry, resulting in a poor yield of this and other crops. Willing Hands harvested >4000 lbs of food from Melendy, with fairly good yields of squash and corn. There is a plan for more mechanized weed management in 2026 and some other new practices, but volunteers will continue to be important to the operation. Irrigation is not a viable option, due to challenges of getting water across the RR tracks, so this is effectively a "dry farm" model.

We discussed the possibility of an educational bee hive at Melendy, which an anonymous donor has offered to support. Alternatively, this could be installed at the Church Street headquarters of Willing Hands; the two sites are close enough together that bees would likely visit both gardens. Site selection may depend on what flowering plants will be grown at the two sites, and what the surrounding landscape at each site supports. We would look to the beekeeper for advice.

Listserve and other educational initiatives

Topics of recent listserve posts have been:

Native plants project at Frye meadow: Lynnwood's smothering, technique (to take out the non-native grasses), what native species were planted.

Light pollution had been a proposed topic, but it was not done yet. This is an important topic in terms of wildlife and it will be addressed in future posts.

Lynnwood wrote an article for the Norwich Times about soil biodiversity, particularly soil invertebrates.

Lynnwood would like to post something every week, ideally, but we have not accomplished that. She asks for help from other Commission members.

Andy suggests writing about how salt intrusion from road salt can affect people's wells in addition to our ecosystems. He will research this.

MFNA

Lynnwood is trying to increase biodiversity of meadow through the above described work of smothering non-natives in small areas and replanting with native flowers and grasses. Currently there is a monoculture of non-native grasses. Plastic over the summer killed the grass, but left very thick dead thatch which is hard to remove. Cardboard covered with mulch was not as effective at smothering as had been hoped. Three feet from the edge still had grass. Lynnwood has a couple of ideas about how to kill grass using black plastic and a weed torch.

Jeanne Kornfeld suggested use of steam torch.

A question was raised about going after invasive plants in the forest. Jeanne suggested using "fern sod" as HHS students did at the high school woods. Lynnwood suggested potential problems if certain types of fern (Hay scented, New York) are in there. We should find out the plant list (in the sod) before considering this idea for MFNA.

Christmas tree chipping idea (Solid waste Committee idea)

The Solid Waste Committee proposed that the NCC could collaborate with them to recycle Christmas trees dropped off at the Transfer Station. Lynnwood thought we could chip them and use the chips to smother areas of the meadow. There doesn't appear to be any place to store the trees until spring; and no funds to have a company come, chip, and transport. Lynnwood suggests it is a good idea, but that we should work on it for next year. Not enough time to work it out at this point. We would need to find someone who can commit to chipping before we even begin to set this up.

Trails Report

Winter is a slow season for trail work. The Trails Committee is currently planning 2026 projects. The long stone staircase on Ballard Trail needs repairs from a professional stone builder. Ballard Trail has lots of water crossing issues. Finish material is needed on the new treads on fire tower. After forest management plan at Schmidt Bog is developed, trail work might be done there. Bridge from Episcopal church to MFNA needs work. Stringers need replacing as well as treads.

Might replace the whole thing. Need to communicate with church. The open question is who will pay. The bridge is on church property. They paid for original one.

Lynnwood asked about the “bog” bridge going to old parsonage from MFNA. It has sunk into the mud and is blocking stream flow. Cody will look at it. Cody mentions that big rainstorms have caused erosion issues all around and water crossings in general continue to have more and more issues.

Andy asked about Upper Valley Trails Alliance and how much work they do in Norwich and how they get their funding. Cody reports that they do quite a bit of work on Norwich Trails, including the Milt Frye accessible trail, Rosemary Reiser trail, and the King Arthur Trail.

Emerald Ash Borer

Stalled and/or backslid on the project.

Winter / Snowplowing will delay removal of hazard trees.

Chris says we need to ask for another appropriation. TM initially suggested taking a year off from asking townspeople for money, but after discussion seemed to agree with Chris that we have to keep going or things will get worse.

There is a legal question of trees outside of public ROW. Who pays for tree removal if we want to take down a dangerous tree on private land? E.g. 39 trees at beginning of Beaver Meadow that are dangerous and only 5 are in ROW. Fall back plan: just do ROW trees at first. Unknown cost right now because we can't yet send out RFPs. A site is needed to bring downed trees/logs/chips if the tree is on a steep slope that comes down towards the road. Cody suggests talking to Eric Fretz who is in charge of wood bee about using that area. He will be contacted. To ask for money from Town, we need to have a petition with 200 signatures.

Miscellaneous

Some committee members' terms have expired. We will be alert to keeping our membership numbers up.

Question was asked about raising money through grants. Committee believes it is not a very realistic idea. We did private fund raising for EAB inoculation. Chris and Doug will talk to SB.

Michael Loots is planning to resign. Ideas suggested for replacements.

November minutes were approved as submitted. Adjourned at 8:25.