

CITY of GARDNER

CONSERVATION COMMISSION



To His Honor the Mayor and Members of the City Council:

**CONSERVATION COMMISSION
ANNUAL REPORT
January 1, 2018 to December 31, 2018**

Members:

The [City of Gardner Conservation Commission](#) (the Commission) is made up of seven (7) members and a Conservation Agent (the Agent). Commission members and their agent possess knowledge, experience, and skills related to: education, forestry, ecology, turf & landscape management, natural resources management, conservation, recreation, research, business, technology, construction oversight, customer service, and public relations.

Conservation Commission Members and Staff:

Greg Dumas, Chairman

David Beaugard, Member

Norman Beaugard, Member

Duncan Burns, Member

Michael Hermanson, Member

Donna Lehtinen, Member

David Orwig, Member

[Jeffrey Legros, Agent](#)

Christine Fucile, Administrative Coordinator

Wetlands Protection Act (WPA) and Wetlands Protection Ordinance Administration:

During 2018, the Commission actively worked to ensure the protection of wetland resources for the public benefit as mandated by the Wetlands Protection Act and City of Gardner Wetlands Protection Ordinance. As part of these efforts and others, the Commission issued several Determinations and Orders of Conditions to ensure that wetland resources were protected through actions, measures, performance standards, or special conditions. The Commission and their agent continued to work closely with the Department of Public Works, Engineering and Survey Department, Building and Zoning Department, and Community Development and Planning Department and participated in Public Service and Development Review Committee meetings to review several projects involving wetlands, open space, and conservation matters.

Commission Wetland Fees Collected (2018):

Wetland (WPA) Fees Collected:	\$5,472.50
Wetland (Local Ordinance) Fees Collected:	\$4,810.00

Public Meetings & Hearings:

The Conservation Commission held 17 public Meetings during the calendar year 2018. These meetings included a combination of 55 different public hearings, requests, or meeting items related to the administration of the Massachusetts Wetlands Protection Act and City of [Gardner Wetlands Protection Ordinance](#).

Committee Membership and Participation:

As part of his duties to the Commission and [City of Gardner](#), Agent Legros participated as a member of several Committees, and provided technical review for other City Departments, and their related Boards, Commissions, and Committees.

Agent Legros participated regularly in Public Service Committee Meetings and provided the Committee with requested updates and information on Commission activities related to Wetlands Protection Administration and Conservation and Open Space matters. The Agent also participated in Development Review Committee Meetings to facilitate the pre-development planning process with regard to Conservation, Wetlands Protection, and the promotion of stormwater best management practices.

In general, the Commission continued to work closely with other City Departments and Boards such as Engineering Department, Building Department, Zoning Board, Community Development and Planning Department, Health Department, Department of Public Works, and Assessor’s Office. Agent Legros provided support to various Departments and City Officials and acted in an advisory and technical review capacity regarding matters related to Conservation and Open Space and Recreation, Landuse Planning, and Natural Resources Management, and continued to play a leadership role in the Gardner [Forest Stewardship Program](#).

In addition, Agent Legros served as a member of the Local Cultural Council representing the Community Development and Planning Department.

Organizational Memberships & Participation:

In 2018, the Conservation Commission maintained active membership to the **Massachusetts Association of Conservation Commissions (MACC)**, the **Massachusetts Society of Municipal Conservation Professionals (MSMCP)**, and **Massachusetts Association of Tree Wardens and Foresters**. In addition, Agent Legros continued to represent the City of Gardner as a member of the **Montachusett Regional Trails Coalition**.

Professional Development, Training, Presentations, Workshops and Seminars:

Commission members and Agent Legros participated in several training workshops and seminars during 2018. The Agent attended several conferences and workshops related to trail planning & stewardship, urban & Community forestry, conservation, and wetlands administration. Agent Legros, and Commission members D. Beauregard and D. Orwig attended the 2018 MACC Annual Environmental Conference at the College of the Holy Cross. Agent Legros gave a presentation as part of the conference agenda. His presentation focused on prioritization and ecological assessment of potential and existing conservation lands based recent experiences updating Gardner's Open Space and Recreation Plan and the Bailey Brook Landscape Conservation project, specifically the acquisition of the Alisaukas Conservation Area and Omealia property, now known as the Bailey Brook Conservation Area (see more below).

Agent Legros also gave a presentation to the Central Mass Association of Realtors at the Gardner Alehouse as part of a meeting of the association and to inform realtors of the many conservation and recreation lands and opportunities which exist in Gardner. Agent Legros joined Mayor Hawke and Economic Development Coordinator, Maribel Cruz in presenting at the event. The presentation and information provided to local realtors was well received and will be beneficial in promoting the area to future potential or interested buyers.

Conservation and Open Space Outreach, Events, and Stewardship Activities:

The Conservation Commission directed many different outreach and stewardship activities throughout the year. In particular, the Commission conducted activities related to trails, boating, habitat protection and enhancement, land conservation and stewardship, and increased public awareness of the City's Open Space and Conservation Areas – all activities identified as goals and objectives of the [2015 Open Space and Recreation Plan](#).

Building on the success of last year's events, in 2018, the Commission hosted another volunteer Earth Day trail maintenance and stewardship event, co-sponsored another Owl Prowl with North County Land Trust, and continued to work with the local Boy Scouts on community trail projects.

A highlight of this year's volunteer earth day event were the bird, bee, and butterfly houses created and installed by local Girlscouts.

- Earth Day Volunteer Planting, Cleanup, and Girlscout habitat houses event at Crystal Lake Community Forest and Wellness Path.
- Owl Prowl Hike with North County Land Trust at Alisauskus Conservation Area.
- Nature & Wildlife in Our Backyard – Photo Exhibit at the Gardner Alehouse highlighting local nature and wildlife here in Gardner and the nearby communities captured by local photographers and artists.
- Boyscout Troop 9 Trail Maintenance & Stewardship Service Projects

In autumn of 2018, a local Boyscout (Troop 9), Gabriel Baczewski, successfully achieved his Eagle Scout Rank by constructing two bog bridges along the trail between Rome Conservation Area and Perley Brook/City Forest off of Brookside Drive with Agent Legros acting as his project sponsor. The bridges provide improved access and sustainability through two seasonably (and often annually) wet areas along the trail. The community and environment will benefit from the project for years to come. Specifically, access for mountain bikers and hikers will be improved and erosion to the streams and wetlands flowing into Wilder Brook will reduced or eliminated at these two trail crossings. A job well-done Gabe and Troop 9!

Forest Stewardship Outreach and Implementation:

The Commission also continued to play an active role in Public Outreach of the [City's Forest Stewardship Program](#). The Commission continued to promote and manage the Crystal Lake Community Forest Wellness and Nature Paths through continuation of the promotion and maintenance of enhancements and interpretive educational activities and opportunities completed as part of a Forest Stewardship Implementation Grant project in 2017, last year. The newly created Crystal Lake Community Forest, a native forested garden and nature trail with interpretive signage for teaching and learning opportunities, continues to provide visitors, patients and staff of Heywood Hospital, and local students with education, wellness, and recreation opportunities and experiences. The Commission and local volunteers continued to maintain habitat enhancements and native gardens which include plantings for wildlife forage and pollinator species and interpretive educational signage focused on forest stewardship, ecology, and watershed protection promoting outdoor recreation and wellness. The Wildlife Forage Shrub Garden, Forested Wetland Rain Garden, and Natural Pollinator Garden became well established in 2018 and were thriving and supporting an abundance of birds, bees, butterflies, beetles, and presumably other wildlife species. It has been exciting to watch them grow and literally buzz with activity!

Agent Legros also worked with the Mayor's Office, DPW Director, and City Engineer and in coordination with the Massachusetts Department of Conservation and Recreation (Mass DCR)

Urban and Community Forestry division toward becoming a Tree City USA designated City, by the Arbor Day Foundation, to further develop achieve our City’s urban and community forestry goals. In May of 2018, Gardner was designated and inducted as a “Tree City USA” community by the Arbor Day Foundation at a ceremony at Look Park in Northampton, sponsored by Mass DCR.

Open Space Plan Outreach and Implementation:

The Commission conducted many activities aimed at implementing the goals of the [Open Space and Recreation Plan](#). See descriptions of activities below related to Goals 1 – 5 of the Plan:

Goal 1. Protect and improve the quality of existing open spaces, parks and recreational opportunities:

The Commission continued to promote and implement the City’s Forest Stewardship Outreach Program and manage, maintain, and promote the City’s many trails and Conservation and Open Space lands. In particular, the Agent was involved in the City’s designation as “Tree City USA” through the Arbor Day Foundation. The Agent routinely monitored the City’s Conservation Areas, trails, and Open Space Lands and worked closely with the DPW and volunteers to address litter and dumping issues in an effort to reduce occurrences of such activities. Trail bridges and sign posts were installed at Perley Brook Reservoir and interpretive educational nature signs and bird, bee, and butterfly houses were installed at the Crystal Lake Community Forest. A canoe paddle-stop (riverside rest area) signs was installed along the Otter River Blue Trail by a local Boyscout within the Cummings Conservation Areas in cooperation with the Miller’s River Watershed Council and Conservation Commission. Trail mapping and maintenance was also conducted at the Cummings Conservation Area, Otter River Conservation Area, Crystal Lake Community Forest, City Forest, Perley Brook Water Supply Protection Area, and the newly acquired Alisaukas and Bailey Brook Conservation Areas.

Goal 2. Selective expansion of open spaces, parks and recreational opportunities:

Between 2017 and 2018, the Commission acquired 224-acres of land now known as the Alisaukas Conservation Area, 84-acres of land, now known as the Bailey Brook Conservation Area, and an additional 36-acres of land to be known as the Bailey Brook Open Space Park. All of these properties will be protected in perpetuity under Article 97 of the Massachusetts Constitution and will serve to protect the Bailey Brook and provide unmeasurable public benefits. These lands were acquired through grant programs administered by the Executive Office of Energy and Environmental Affairs: Landscape Partnership grant; Land Acquisition for Natural Diversity (LAND) grant program, and Parkland Acquisition and Renovations for Communities (PARC) grant program.

These lands, located between Winchendon and Gardner since acquired now provide permanent protections and a contiguous connection between existing open space lands and adjacent parcels

of forested lands within the headwaters of the Bailey Brook cold-water stream corridor, an area containing *BioMap 2 Critical Natural Landscape*, *Landscape Block*, and *Wetland Core* habitat.

Goal 3. *Protect water resources and improve water quality:*

In 2018, the Commission issued Orders of Conditions for multiple projects for which stormwater standards were strongly considered to ensure that water quality is protected within the City. Given the importance of water quality and future stormwater regulations (MS4 program), the Commission continues to make stormwater management a high priority when reviewing and approving projects under their jurisdiction and during the Development Review process.

Goal 5. *Increase public awareness, use and stewardship of the City's water resources, forests, parks, conservation areas and recreational opportunities:*

The Commission improved outreach and education efforts through the continued partnerships between the Commission and Mount Wachusett Community College, Gardner High School Environmental Science students, Boy Scouts of America Troop 9, Mount Grace Land Conservation Trust, North County Land Trust, and the Millers River Watershed Council to provide conservation volunteer opportunities and promote teaching and learning opportunities within Gardner's Open Space and Conservation Lands. Specifically, the Mount Wachusett Community College Hiking Club and Gardner High Environmental Science students, who were an integral part of the volunteer efforts to implement the Forest Stewardship Habitat Enhancements at the Crystal Lake Community Forest, continue to explore outdoor classroom opportunities for forestry and plant and animal identification related labs and course work.

In 2018, the Agent also helped to apply for designation as a "Tree City USA" community to promote and enhance the City's urban forestry efforts. Efforts aimed at developing a shade tree inventory and the planting and the construction of a public tree nursery have continued and will be a focus of 2019.

In addition, the Commission continued to identify important conservation, open space, and recreation resources and implement City-wide trail enhancements aimed at improving trail signage and parking areas, access to and along trails, and the development of trail maps, and wayfinding and interpretive signage.

In 2019, the Commission will continue to protect wetlands, and implement goals of the Open Space Plan to promote conservation, recreation, and wellness opportunities to the City and public. Specifically, they will work toward the completion of city-wide trail enhancements in partnership with the Boy Scouts of America, Troop 9 and the Gardner DPW Signs & Lines Division. The Commission will continue to work toward the protection of the Bailey Brook Coldwater Stream corridor through efforts to attain Conservation Restrictions from willing landowners to protect Wetland Resource Areas, Riverfront Areas, and Flood Zones providing a

protected “greenway” from the border with Winchendon to the confluence with the Otter River. The Commission will continue to pursue public boating access improvements at Lake Wampanoag and Parkers Pond.

Conservation and Open Space Land Acquisitions:

In June of 2018, the Commission acquired 84-acres of land, now known as the Bailey Brook Conservation Area, for conservation purposes under Article 97 through the Land Acquisition for Natural Diversity (LAND) grant program, and an additional 36-acres of land (also protected under Article 97) for an Open Space Park through the Parkland Acquisition and Renovations for Communities (PARC) grant program. A \$71,038 grant from the Land Acquisition for Natural Diversity (LAND) program, City funds, and Federal funds through the North American Wetlands Conservation Association were utilized to purchase an 84-acre portion of the former Omealia property, located north of Clark Street and off of Leo Drive, straddling both sides of Bailey Brook, north to the border of the Alisaukas Conservation Area, as conservation land under the care and custody of the Conservation Commission. A \$121,073 grant from the Parkland Acquisition and Renovations for Communities (PARC) grant program, and City funds were utilized to acquire an additional 36-acres of land, consisting of a portion of the former Omealia property and the RHO parcel on Leo Drive, as protected Open Space Parkland to be held under the care and custody of the Gardner Department of Public Works, Recreation Division. The acquisition of these lands accomplished specific targets of the Open Space and Recreation Plan to protect high priority conservation parcels and create a park in West Gardner to accommodate the needs associated with the residential growth and development of the area over the past few decades. Further, the acquisition served to further protect the Bailey Brook cold-water stream corridor and provided a contiguous and broad forested connection to the 224-acre Alisaukas Conservation Area land parcel acquired by the City in 2017. A PARC grant will be submitted in July of 2019 for the development of the park and playground within the Open Space parkland portion of the land.

Below is a summary of the recent and ongoing Bailey Brook Landscape Conservation Project, Greenway, and Open Space Park:

- Winchendon & Gardner Landscape Partnership Project – Bailey Brook Coldwater Stream Landscape Conservation and Habitat Connection Efforts. City of Gardner and Partners. 2017 – Present (ongoing). Various grants and project phases:
 - Alisaukas Conservation Area land acquisition project, **224-acres**; City of Gardner. 2017. Massachusetts EOEEA Landscape Partnership Grant (\$357,525).
 - Bailey Brook Conservation Area land acquisition project, **84-acres**; City of Gardner. 2018. Massachusetts EOEEA LAND Grant (\$71,038).

- Bailey Brook Open Space Park land acquisition project, **36-acres**; City of Gardner. 2018. Massachusetts EOEEA PARC Grant (\$121,073).
- Bailey Brook Greenway land acquisition and protection project – Conservation Restrictions on **~100+-acres** of Riverfront Area, Flood Zone, and Wetland Habitat proposed along remaining unprotected segment of Bailey Brook coldwater stream within Gardner to confluence with Otter River; City of Gardner, private landowners, and USFWS National Wetlands Conservation Association Grant (2017 – Present, Ongoing).
- Additional land protection within the Bailey Brook watershed landscape in Winchendon, MA. Partners: City of Winchendon, Mount Grace Land Conservation Trust, Mass Department of Fish and Game, US Fish and Wildlife Service; Regional Project Coordinator and Team Leader: Janet H. Morrison, Land Conservation Consulting.

The landscape-level protection of a majority of the watershed of Bailey Brook, a state-designated Cold-water Fish Resource Area is significant and unique. The land includes prime forest land with existing trails, prime farmland of statewide significance, core wetland habitat for rare & endangered species and those of conservation concern, and land on *both* sides of Bailey Brook. The area is adjacent to the Rome Conservation Area located north of Leo and Brookside Drive and was ranked as a high priority for Conservation within Gardner’s 2015 Open Space and Recreation Plan. Further, it was ranked as the highest priority for protection within the City of Gardner by the Mass Audubon, Mapping & Prioritizing Parcels for Resilience (MAPPR) tool. These recent acquisitions and ongoing efforts to protect the Wetland Resource Areas and Flood Zones of the remaining corridor south to its confluence with the Otter River could result in complete protection of this important resource within the municipal boundaries of Gardner, creating a “greenway” along a critically important state-wide resource area and a one-of-a-kind landscape level conservation project. Such an effort, if successful could also be considered one of statewide, regional, and even national importance, and potentially a model for future conservation planning efforts.

The Commission would like to recognize and thank Janet M. Morrison, Esq., Land Conservation Consulting, for assisting the City and Commission by providing consultation services to the City in 2017 and 2018 to help secure and facilitate the Landscape Partnership grant, LAND grant, and PARC grant for the acquisition of the Alisauskas Conservation Area, Baily Brook Conservation Area, and Bailey Brook Open Space Park; without her guidance, dedication, diligence, and determination such a successful outcome would not have been guaranteed.

Transportation and Landuse Planning Activities:

- Complete Streets Prioritization Planning Project (Tier 2). City of Gardner. 2018. Massachusetts Department of Transportation, Complete Streets Planning Technical Assistance Grant. (\$49,991)

- Complete Streets Infrastructure Improvement Project (Tier 3). City of Gardner. 2018 - 2020. Massachusetts Department of Transportation, Complete Streets Infrastructure Improvement Grant. (\$327,949)

- Safe Routes to School Infrastructure Improvement Project. Elm Street School, Sidewalks and Pedestrian and Bicycle, Safety and Accessibility Improvements. City of Gardner and Gardner Public School Department. Grant Submission: 2018; Anticipated Project: 2019 – 2020. Massachusetts Department of Transportation, SRTS Program Infrastructure Improvement Grant. (\$1.2 Million)

Respectfully Submitted,
On behalf of the Conservation Commission,

Jeffrey D. Legros, Conservation Agent