

## CONSERVATION COMMISSION

The Connecticut General Statutes establish the purpose of the Conservation Commission as "...the development, conservation, supervision and regulation of natural resources..." With the present concerns for sustainability, climate change and energy independence in this country, the Commission has begun to address what we can do locally to help with national and worldwide efforts.

*The Commission may conduct **research** into the possible utilization of land areas of the municipality.* The Commission worked with the Land Use Department to compare the Town's local conservation status and plans for the future in the context of the State Plan's locational guide map so that we may better review the scheduled update of the State Plan.

*The Commission may **inventory natural resources** and recommend **plans and programs for the development and use of all open areas**.* This year, the Commission, in partnership with the Parks & Recreation Commission and the Old Saybrook Land Trust, contracted again with the Connecticut River Coastal Conservation District to provide a natural resources survey and recommendations for management of non-native and invasive plant communities on the west side of the Great Cedars Conservation Area. This work represents continued stewardship of this property to provide increased but sensitive use of the property by the citizens of Old Saybrook.

*The Commission may **acquire land** and easements in the name of the municipality (in Old Saybrook, through the Land Acquisition Committee and with the approval of the townspeople).* Although the Town did not acquire any properties this year for municipal purposes, the Commission continues to be represented on the BOS' Land Acquisition Committee, which conducted due diligence in its investigation of a few candidates for land banking.

*The Commission may **manage municipally-owned open space** property when the agency normally responsible for such duties (Parks & Recreation, by our Charter) delegates that power.* Since the Town purchased the 315-acre property in 1999 known as the Great Cedars Conservation Area, residents have enjoyed the west side of this land accessed from a parking area on Ingham Hill Road and on the east side of by a parking area off Merritt Lane. In recent years, the Town has established another kind of access – a fishway system through the Oyster River watershed to allow river herring and eels to reach their traditional habitat in the northwestern part of town. In partnership with the Old Saybrook Land Trust and the Connecticut DEEP, the Town has monitored patronage of the fishway system via a "fish counter", and this year, Old Saybrook held the State record for eel migration. Additionally, Pat Ingellis deserves a lot of credit for our progress over the years in the activity of marking boundaries of municipally owned open spaces; this year, Pat worked with Eagle Scout Patrick Malin, who organized marking the 120-acre Great Cedars (East) Conservation Area.

*The Commission must keep an **index of all open areas**, publicly or privately owned, including open marshlands, swamps and other wetlands, for the purpose of making the proper use of such areas.* The Land Use Department maintains an Open Space Map of the Town of Old Saybrook for the Commission; at the present time, open space totals approximately [20.5%] of the Town's land area, which supports the State's goal for overall dedication of open space. With the Open Space Subdivision regulations passed by the Zoning Commission that require all large developments to set aside at least 30-50% of their land area in open space, it would appear that it is only a matter of time before approximately 25% of the land area of the Town is set aside as open space.

*The Commission may make **recommendations on proposed land use changes** to other municipal agencies (often by request of those agencies).* This year, the Commission reviewed modifications to the previously approved "The Preserve" Special Exception for Open Space Subdivision and "Marina Village" Affordable Housing Development.

*The Commission may approve **state grant-in-aid applications** for programs to preserve or restrict the use of open space land to conservation or recreation purposes.* The Commission teamed up with the Old Saybrook Land Trust and The Nature Conservancy to take advantage of State and Federal grants for a 3-year process of cutting or spraying of the beds of the invasive common reed *phragmites Australis* found in tidal marshes throughout Old Saybrook. The Commission will oversee this process in conjunction with the Connecticut Department of Energy & Environmental Protection and the National Fish & Wildlife Service.

*The Commission may **advertise, prepare, and distribute booklets, maps, charts, plans, and pamphlets** for its purposes.* Old Saybrook's Plan of Conservation & Development incorporates the Conservation Commission's 2004 Plan of Conservation & Open Space. The plan's purposes and uses are many, including protecting the Town's natural resources, providing information to Land Use regulatory commissions as they process land use applications, and aiding the Town's Land Acquisition Committee in identifying properties of value to preserve for future generations. This document defines the ongoing work of the Conservation Commission.

**Robert W. Fish, Chairman**