Town of Swanzey, New Hampshire
Conservation Commission Meeting
Whitcomb Hall, Main Street, Swanzey, NH
Meeting Minutes—May 4, 2026

Note: Minutes are subject to review, correction, and approval by the Commission. Review, correction, and approval of minutes generally occur at the next regularly scheduled meeting of the Commission.

CALL TO ORDER

The meeting of the Swanzey Conservation Commission was called to order by Chair Cheri Domina at 4:01 p.m. Committee members present: Chair Domina, Jay Ward, Bob Goodrich, Nancy Karlson, Bud Winsor, Mark Scalera, Bonnie Hart and alternate Roberta Visser. Chair seated Johnson for Scalera.
Also present: Asst. Town Planner Stephon Mehu; Dillant-Hopkins Airport Director Ryan Cooley; Steve Hoffman of McFarland-Johnson; Ken Bergman, Keene Conservation Comm.

Absent: Alternate Jane Johnson

MINUTES

The commission members considered the meeting minutes for April 6, 2025. **Motion by Ward to approve the Minutes. There was a second to the motion by Goodrich and no further discussion. All were in favor; Scalera abstained. *Motion passed.***

The commission members considered the field meeting minutes for April 21 & 25, 2025. **Motion by Ward to approve the Minutes. There was a second to the motion by Scalera and no further discussion. All were in favor. *Motion passed.***

NEW BUSINESS

Airport Management—Hoffman updated members on the airport fence project. He highlighted fence reroutes due to solar array and western area due to additional information. The DES and the FAA have approved the airport's (and our) preferred alternative for location. Domina remarked they did a good job keeping it as close as possible to runway and avoiding excess impact to wetlands. Scalera felt citizens will be satisfied with the positioning of the fence. Hoffman said final wetlands impacts review still in process, anticipating very low impact from posts; contractor will use timber matting to access fence construction. The plan is to construct the fence in late fall/early winter, with completion by summer 2027; they are now moving into the final design phase, to be followed by permitting in early June. Hoffman said the fence will be 9-foot effective height (including barbwire-required); it will be flush with the ground.

Other upcoming airport projects will include a pavement overlay, marking, sealing. A taxiway reconstruction project started last fall and will finish this summer. This summer will be the first phase of a study conducted for obstruction removal project (which trees may obstruct technology to land on runway). Primarily north of the airport. Selective removal or topping may occur. We don't know what the specific radius of the study will be yet.

Revision Solar Array project—Winsor suggested a higher mower height to deter geese; the director agreed this was a good approach. Domina asked about whether the Planning Board could require native shrubs that are beneficial to wildlife, instead of taller trees for screening. Cooley replied that after discussions with entities (FAA, etc) , artificial screening would be better (in-fence slats) to avoid attracting wildlife. Scalera said the Planning Board would evaluate if slats are needed after fence is up.

Beaver trapping—Domina asked about the animals being trapped, citing community concerns about why. Cooley said the trapping was done by Keene Public Works, because beavers are creating dams at culverts along the road to the wastewater treatment plant and raising water levels. Concerns about flooding, and creating ponds that

attract more geese; FAA requires them to manage wildlife attractants. Cooley said KPW removed dams and trapped beavers with kill traps to control population, according to NHF&G best practices. It's not best practices to release them elsewhere—it leaves them homeless and vulnerable, and creates nuisances elsewhere. Domina asked about beaver deceiver devices, and Cooley said they'd been tried in places, and worked for a time. Domina said they do need cleaning out.

Domina mentioned our new Open Space Plan highlights the airport as important habitat and asked if Cooley would be willing to meet with us, Keene Conservation Commission, NH Audubon and other entitites that value wildlife habitat here? Cooley said he would be happy to, but has to follow restrictions in certain areas. Ken Bergman mentioned a survey of grassland birds—should there be a formal study of species at the airport? Hoffman said Audubon and Fish & Game will be monitoring the area where solar panels are going up for a couple of years. There are several protected bird species using the grasslands, which are shrinking with each development.

Review for Planning Board / ZBA / Town
PB—Site Plan Review, Bell's Septic, Old Homestead Hwy—Mehu said the project is not within the Shoreland Zone for the S. Branch Ashuelot River. Members agreed to request motion sensors on all lights. Seemed no need to have lights all over the building and on until 10 pm or 24/7—plans were unclear.

OLD BUSINESS
ConCom Members/Officers—Ward noted that Visser will be approved by Selectmen this week. Karlson is a regular member until we find another; then she'll serve as alternate.

Open Space Plan Update—Jeff Littleton of Moosewood Ecological just sent the draft today. He discussed each part of the plan. Three main parts include first, a mini-NRI, with many new updates since 2018. Domina suggested we need to know the criteria for including conserved land in the tables. Which lands are included? Yale Forest? Municipal lands? Would be best to only include land that is truly conserved. Jeff will ask and get back to us, but said fee-owned lands were included (i.e. municipal lands). The definition of conserved is highly nuanced. Other parts of the plan are conservation focus areas, recommendations, and appendices. Methods in an appendix to keep the body of the report short. We will receive a parcel-based assessment; not included in the public plan. They are also creating an online story map for us.

Littleton suggested it's important that the town incorporate the report into its Master Plan. We should review our 2024 ordinance audit annually as well.

Visser asked if we could have an overlay of the contaminated lands map, to lay over other maps. Littleton said they could create a data mapper: an online tool to add and remove layers. Littleton will send Jaffrey's as an example. Would be at an additional cost. Different from story map.

Members need to review plan and give feedback. Final draft available 2-3 weeks after comments are received from ConCom. Domina asked for comments in two weeks.

Motion by Scalera to pay invoice from Moosewood Ecological, for Open Space Conservation Plan #2, $5,880. Second by Ward. All in favor—motion passed.

Swanzey Lake and Musterfield conservation easements—Domina said NH F&G noted 10-12 tires in a wetland at Muster Field, and a large metal canister. Did they float there, or are vehicles able to dump? Can we restrict access? She'll go look at where they are. Can we have Americorps remove them?

Mt. Cresson Trails—Domina is meeting with Jeremy Turner from Meadowsend tomorrow at 9 am to show him the re-routed section of trail for them to do. If they can't do it this spring, we could make it an Americorps job. She'll call Joe DiRusso to see if DPW can add some gravel to the trailhead. Mark offered to help build a kiosk for

the parking area. Winsor, Hart, Domina and Scalera will form a subcommittee to look at maps & kiosk for the property. Still need to meet with Mike Kowalczyk about the rail trail connection—Americorps could build that too.

Partridgeberry Lane property—Ward reported that he discussed with Lori Rautiola and she was intrigued by possibilities. Could the house there replace current archive storage? The town officials are planning a site visit to determine suitability. We should vote on whether to recommend this project after the town reviews it.

Checklist for Conditional Use Permit—Domina said it's hard to convert our criteria list into a checklist—needs some additional thought. Ward wondered if we could wait until permits are brought to us then develop as needed. Could also create an outline template to guide discussion with room for comments. Consensus says this is a good idea.

Swanzey Lake & Wilson Pond news

Swanzey Lake—Winsor reported that the town had met with SWRPC and is open to the On-Call Engineering study for Talbot Hill Road. Town would need to contribute partial funding; could the ConCom and Swanzey Lake Assoc. contribute? We are talking about $2-3,000. Agreed to send town a letter of support.

Winsor made a Motion to send a letter to town saying we agree to contribute some funds to the On-Call Engineering Study in conjunction with the Town and Swanzey Lake Protective Assoc. Amount TBD. Ward seconded. All in favor—motion passed.

Next Meeting: June 1

ADJOURNMENT

Motion was made by Scalera to adjourn, second by Winsor, without further discussion. All were in favor. ***Motion passed.*** Adjournment occurred at 6:46 pm.

Respectfully Submitted, Bonnie Hart & Cheri Domina, Chair

DRAFT