

Comments prepared by Robert E. Clausi for presentation to the
Stamford Board of Representatives Land Use-Urban Redevelopment Committee on September 16, 2025

I'm Bob Clausi and I have served as the Executive Director of the Stamford Environmental Protection Board (EPB) for the past three years after working at the Greenwich Inland Wetlands & Watercourses Agency for over 20 years. As you know, among its other duties the EPB currently serves as Stamford's Conservation Commission.

As Ms. Bilcznianski noted in her recent email to your committee, I brought up the idea of separating the conservation commission function from the EPB last year when I came before you during the update of the EPB regulations. I am therefore pleased that the ambitious recommendations for protecting environmental quality and enhancing the City's climate resilience contained in the draft comprehensive plan "Stamford 2035" include a recommendation (ST-10.2) that a stand-alone Conservation Commission, separate from the EPB, should be established to conserve, develop, supervise, and regulate natural resources through the type of nature-based solutions outlined the UCONN Conservation Commission Fact Sheet¹ that is hyperlinked to the plan.

I encourage the Board of Representatives to support implementation of this recommendation. Chairman Gary Stone and I have discussed the idea of separating the conservation commission function from EPB and he agrees with this proposal.

Implementing this recommendation will bring Stamford in line with the best practice laid out in the 2002 position paper entitled "Combined vs Separate Conservation and Inland Wetlands Commissions"² prepared by the Connecticut Association of Conservation and Inland Wetlands Commissions (CACIWC) and which states that "every Connecticut town should have a Conservation Commission and that the duties and responsibilities of that commission should not be combined with another town board or agency".

We all know that there is intense pressure to develop land within Stamford. An independent Conservation Commission composed of concerned, motivated residents with dedicated technical staff support can provide recommendations to the other land use boards and city departments for ways to mitigate the environmental impacts of this ongoing development. A stand-alone Conservation Commission can also better collaborate and partner with individuals and organizations beyond city government.

You may ask "Why doesn't the EPB do this now?" The CACIWC position paper and the discussion of dual-purposed commissions on page 5-6 of the 2023 WestCOG report entitled "An Investigation of Inland Wetlands Commission Practices in CT"³ both note what I have found to be the case here in Stamford – EPB staff and board members have very little time for any natural resource conservation research and advisory work beyond our statutory inland wetland and floodplain regulatory responsibilities. In fact, the ONLY things the EPB really does in its current role as the City's

¹ <https://resilientconnecticut.uconn.edu/wp-content/uploads/sites/3830/2023/05/Conservation-Commission-Fact-Sheet.pdf>

² https://www.caciwc.org/library/position_statement_16Dec02.pdf

³ <https://westcog.org/an-investigation-of-inland-wetlands-commission-practices-in-connecticut/>

Conservation Commission is to maintain an inventory of conservation easements and administer activities that property owners want to undertake in conservation easement areas on their properties. Note that both of these functions would have to be assumed from EPB by a stand-alone Conservation Commission.

The broader range of environmental sustainability and climate resilience initiatives discussed in the UCONN Factsheet are currently being handled piecemeal by various City departments under the general oversight of the Environmental Sustainability Coordinator Danielle Petretta in the Office of Operations⁴. Besides assuming this coordination role, a stand-alone Conservation Commission would also be in position to take advantage of potential upcoming municipal opportunities, such as serving as the Tree Advisory Board if the City Forester requested in the pending budget is hired and if a tree ordinance is enacted.

I mentioned the Greenwich Conservation Commission to your committee last year. So, in closing, I'd like to run down a partial list of the activities the Greenwich Conservation Commission has been busy with this year in order to give you a sense of the exciting range of opportunities that having a vibrant Conservation Commission would offer to the residents of Stamford:

- Conduct educational outreach such as a recent Purple Martin event held at Greenwich Point, tabling at the environmental events of local non-profit groups, speaking to school groups, etc.
- Collaborate with organizations such as Pollinator Pathway and Audubon,
- Plan for targeted open space acquisition
- Provide expert referral comments regarding the full range of wildlife and other resource conservation issues involved in applications made to the other land use boards.
- Advocate for and undertake initiatives on topical issues, such as:
 - Seasonal leaf blower restrictions,
 - Composting,
 - Deer management,
 - Canada geese control,
 - Spotted Lantern Fly control and removal of the invasive SLF host plant Tree-of-Heaven from town parks and school grounds,
 - Horseshoe crab tagging,
 - Fish counts at the Mianus River fish ladder,
 - and installation of high water markers around flood prone areas.

Thank you.

⁴ Recommendation ST-9.4 in the draft comprehensive plan proposes “transitioning the part-time Sustainability Coordinator position to a full-time Director of Sustainability role to expand the city’s capacity to proactively plan and implement climate and sustainability initiatives.” Directing the activities of a stand-alone Conservation Commission would seem a logical duty for this full-time professional.