TOWN OF GRANBY
Conservation Commission
Special Meeting March 25th, 2026 7:00 p.m.
Senior Center Activity Room 2
And Via Zoom

Attending.
Commissioners: Chairwoman Kara Rogers Marshall, Kent McCord, Jim Szipszky in person; David Desiderato via Zoom
Guests: First Selectman Mark Fiorentino, Lee Shaw, Peggy Lareau, Ricky Bentley

1. **Call to Order.**

   Kara called the meeting to order at 7:05.

2. **Public Comment.**

   Lee Shaw, Barn Door Hills Rd., noted the increase in wildlife this year on the town-owned, leased fields adjacent to her property with the planting of corn, compared to tobacco previously. She questioned the farmer's reported spraying frequency and stated that it seemed more spraying occurred than he reported. Warning signs after spraying were not dated accurately, leading to complacency.

   Peggy Lareau, Reed Hill Rd., summarized a letter she sent to the Commission dated March 13. It would be less complicated for the town to pay for soil testing on the land it leases to the farmer. She does not want to make it harder for him, but there have been delays, for example in cover cropping. She is an environmentalist; while we are not headed in the right direction nationally, we should do better locally, and join the other towns showing leadership in managing their farmland.

3. **Review and Approval of the February 26, 2026 Meeting Minutes.**

   Kara asked if everyone had reviewed Jim's requested additions to the minutes and asked for comments. There were no comments. David moved to approve the minutes as amended, Kent seconded, and all approved.

4. **Continued Farm Lease Conversation.**

   Kara opened the discussion with appreciation for comments and work to date and stated that we cannot change the terms of the lease, currently in year two of five.

   Jim responded that the lease does allows for supplemental amendments. He reviewed the Commission's engagement on this issue, which began in December 2024 with concerns raised by neighbors of the Barn Door Hills parcel. The DEEP (CT Dept. of Energy and Environmental Protection) citations on the farmer in 2025 made it clear that our stewardship of this land is inconsistent with the goals of the Plan of Conservation and Development. We asked for a dialogue with town leaders nearly a year ago which did not happen until recently. We were asked to develop recommendations with the Agriculture Commission, which we completed in the fall of 2025; these included planting cover crops, testing soil, and improved communication and information, possibly using an online tool such as that used by the town of Mansfield. In response, the farmer planted cover crops, though very late. He did soil tests in April 2025, though fewer than recommended, and only provided to the town a few weeks ago; the results showed low organic matter content. Jim consulted with Dr. Amelia Magistrali, of the UCONN Agricultural

Extension, for background information about soil health and soil testing and reported that she is available for consultation to the town or on-farm. He noted there are several ways to get the soil tested, that there are funding sources that reduce the cost, and suggested that the town could use a small portion of lease payments to do the testing.

Kara thanked Jim for his comments, reminded the Commission of its advisory status and reiterated that we are not able to amend the lease. She apologized for not getting all information out as quickly as she could have.

Kent expressed appreciation for the work done on the project, stated his full support, and agreed that the cost of testing is nominal compared to the benefits.

David added he supported Jim's points and the underlying research and expressed frustration that these commonsense recommendations were not adopted by the town and the farmer many months ago.

Kara noted that the farmer is working hard, and that economic realities make it difficult to farm in this state. She is glad we are discussing how farming could be, and best practices, and noted the pressure of alternative uses for the land such as housing development. She stated that the town's position is that it is making progress in line with the Commission's recommendations and expressed appreciation for Mark's willingness to attend tonight.

Mark noted that the town has put in a substantial amount of time with the farmer and that we are moving from a history of no regulation to more regulation. Regulations would need to be applied equally, to all the leased town-owned land, including Holcomb Farm. He said the farmer has in his experience been responsive, posting signs, testing soil, and planting cover crops, though these were late and he had to reseed. The farmer met with town leaders and the Chairs of the two Commissions and freely admitted that he did not do soil testing initially and is willing to do it every year, noting that early tests will mostly reflect soil conditions before the lease. He agreed to look at the online tool used in Mansfield. Mark noted that if we want him to do more, we have to remember that this is a partnership, not "my way or the highway."

Kent agreed that two samples for the entire East St. parcel is not enough, and that proper stewardship of the land requires more testing. He asked if there is an objection to the town administering soil tests. Mark replied that it is worth discussing doing more tests, with very specific recommendations developed in coordination with the Agriculture Commission that clearly identify the costs and who would pay for it.

Kara asked if those recommendations can be developed and discussed at the Commission's April 14th meeting; Jim agreed to take responsibility for that.

5. Energy Conservation & Renewables on Town Property.

Kent reported that he has been working with a solar company on the town garage solar project and that it needs to be packaged up. Town Manager Mike Walsh has expressed interest in carport solar, such as for the police station, but it would need to be larger to be economically viable.

Jim reported that two 2 Eversource engineers went through each of the town buildings on February 5, looking at energy usage, equipment, and building envelops, and that we are waiting for their assessment. Kara will check with Eversource colleagues on their timeline.

Kent reported on a second Holcomb Farm solar project, on the barn at 87 Simsbury Rd. It would be different from the CSA barn installation where the system is owned by a 3rd party, which leases the roof and provides 22% of the revenue to Holcomb Farm at a fixed price. The second project could be directly owned and offset usage on the property, which is more financially advantageous in the long run.

6. Broadleaf Solar.

Mark reported that the project has clearly slowed down, possibly due to complications in East Granby, where the project needs to tunnel under the Salmon Brook to connect to the regional grid. There had been ongoing communication via conversations every other week, which were halted 6 months ago and will resume when the project gets going again. Broadleaf recently projected a late spring / early summer Siting Council filing, which may be over-optimistic. The town will receive it 30 days in advance, and Mark asked for a public meeting for input at that time as well, like the one held in late 2024. The company appears well-resourced and sophisticated. Its property taxes increased recently because the land no longer qualifies for an agricultural exemption; the company appealed and lost, and now owes $300,000, an amount that is not up for negotiation.

Kara asked if there would be money for remediation if the company were to go bankrupt. Kent replied that this is a standard agreement.

Mark suggested we review and re-submit the recommendations the Commission provided the town, as did other town entities, so the town can represent our collective interests in negotiations with Broadleaf.

Jim asked if the strip of land along Rte 10/202 is on the table; Mark replied that yes, the town intends to ask for both corners for commercial development. Broadleaf has asked for a tax stabilization agreement, which may be in our interest as well.

7. Composting

There was no discussion, in Will's absence.

8. Bear Mitigation Education

Kara observed that there is an education role we can play on bears, and that it is related to composting. She noted she'd suggest some educational outreach in conjunction with a composting plan.

9. Plan of Conservation & Development.

Jim reported on the POCD Committee's meeting the previous night, which mostly focused on the town center. In general, leaders of the Committee appear to be negative about telling property owners what they need to do in the public interest. Community Development Director Abby Kenyon provided a useful example of how getting people together solved a problem. The Open House March 12th went great.

10. Meeting Topics for April 14, 2026

Kara suggested we keep the same topics and there were no changes.

11. Final Comments from Commissioners.

Mark stated his willingness to attend Commission meetings whenever he is needed. David (tongue in cheek) noting Mark's engagement and knowledge on the Commission's issues and the historically low participation by registered Republicans, invited him to seek the open position on the Commission. Mark said he appreciated the invitation and noted that he did serve on the Commission in the past.

Kara expressed appreciation for Commissioners' work and commitment.

12. Adjourn.

Kent motioned for adjournment, David seconded, and all agreed.

Minutes taken by David Desiderato