

Town of Harwich
Real Estate & Open Space (REOS) Committee
Meeting Minutes
August 15, 2025

Members Present: David Callaghan (Chair), Margo Fenn, Marcie Smith, Kathy Green.

Guests: Mike Lach (Executive Director Harwich Conservation Trust)

9:00 AM - meeting called to order.

Call for public comment - Mike Lach spoke at the podium regarding the impact of the tax exempt status of conservation properties on property tax assessments. This topic comes up very often on town meeting floor and it is misunderstood frequently. Mike offered an example of how these numbers are calculated. He cited a case study using a 2+ acre of land in South Harwich - after calculations showing that the resulting tax impact of taking that land off the tax rolls and putting it into conservation was 1/5000th of a penny per dollar. The implication is that taking land off the tax rolls does not increase property taxes. Sometimes it has the opposite effect - real estate goes up in value when in proximity to open space. Mike suggested REOS submit a letter of support or comment letter to be included in the LCP appendices. Committee members felt that all those numbers would be confusing on town meeting floor and that taxpayers were looking for an instant answer to how much **THEIR** taxes would go up if a particular piece of land was put in conservation. This will be discussed at next month's meeting.

Mark Kellerher, the REOS BOS liaison, spoke to the committee. He mentioned that at our July meeting we were discussing funding sources for a property research project and he wanted us to know that the Finance Committee had a fund set up to provide for unforeseen expenses - something to think about.

Approval of minutes - Kathy made a motion to accept the minutes July 11, 2025. Margo seconded. All were in favor - motion accepted.

Old Business - Dave said that in July, the ad hoc committee dealing with the custody of select board properties had met and decided to add the 5.7 acre Sand Pond property to its list. The committee is starting to meet with department chairs - specifically Water, Conservation, and Select Board. At the same time a parallel project has emerged - there have been errors found in the listings of Select Board properties that should be under the custody of the Conservation Commission because they were bought with Land Bank funds. Dave is seeking a comprehensive list of CPA funded land purchases, Land Bank funded purchases and purchases of conservation land before those funding sources, by the Town of Harwich. A discussion ensued about how to fund Mark Robinson's work. A possible application for CPA funding would need to designate the intention of the project, and the scope of the project - which in turn would drive the estimated costs. Providing information on volunteer hours vs. professional hours and what the final outcome would be - (increased protection of land and records correction) would be advisable. Dave will work on this for the next meeting - October 1, 2025 is the CPA application deadline.

New Business - none. Member Reports - none

Next Meeting - September 19, 2025.

Adjournment - Margo made a motion to adjourn, seconded by Kathy. All in favor. Meeting adjourned at 9:47 AM.