



TOWN OF

HARWICH

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HARWICH CONSERVATION COMMISSION - MEETING AGENDA
TOWN HALL – GRIFFIN ROOM
FRIDAY, MAY 2, 2025 – 1:00 PM

2025 MAY 22 9:02

RECEIVED
TOWN OF HARWICH
MAY 22 2025

Commissioners and Staff Present

Chairman John Ketchum, Viv Mulhall-Maguire, Wayne Coulson, Mark Coleman, Conservation Administrator Amy Usowski and Executive Assistant Lisa Shaw

Commissioners Absent:

Sophia Pilling

Call to Order

Chairman Ketchum called the meeting to order at 6:00 PM and the Pledge of Allegiance was recited.

Meeting

This public meeting was the second of many meetings to be scheduled regarding turf nutrient practices and was entitled "Public Information Session #2 on Landscape Management." The goal of this second public information session was to inform the public about the work Harwich is doing regarding turf management and obtaining landscape growth without the addition of nutrients. Ms. Usowski stated she has been in contact with Kristen Andres, Director of Education and Outreach for The Association of Preserve Cape Cod, inviting her to speak at a future public information session regarding native landscaping.

Ms. Usowski introduced Mr. Shawn Fernandez, Superintendent of Cranberry Valley Golf Course, to speak about best management practices for turf and landscaping.

Mr. Hernandez spoke about his education and background, the history of the Cranberry Valley Golf Course, current land management practices versus past, utilizing best practice plans and the importance of being proactive rather than reactive in land management.

Ms. Usowski asked Mr. Fernandez his recommendations for homeowners who want to have the quintessential "Cape Cod" lawn but still be as ecologically minded as possible. Mr. Fernandez said homeowners should first and foremost ask their landscaper to perform a soil test, to determine the specific soil type on their property. The next steps are to aerify and thatch the lawn in the spring to get rid of the dead grass and then put down starter fertilizer. Near the end of April is the time to seed the lawn with a very good quality seed mix. Starting late August to early September, the lawn should again be aerified and thatched and then fertilized.

Mr. Fernandez recommended the use of wetting agents as well, explaining the components, how they work and how to apply. He recommended using Dawn dish soap as a wetting agent. He also spoke about the importance of implementing an integrated pest management plan.

As for the amount of fertilizer to use, Mr. Fernandez stated that for the average home with a 15,000 square foot lawn, two and a half to three pounds of total fertilizer will give a lush lawn for the whole year. Mr. Fernandez confirmed that fertilizer should be spread between November and April 1st. He warned that spreading too much fertilizer is not better as it leads to overfeeding and disease.

Ms. Usowski asked where homeowners can get their soil tested. Mr. Fernandez answered that Cranberry Valley soils are tested at UMass or URI. He stated that it would be ideal if Barnstable County could test soil samples as well, just as they do water tests.

The Commission thanked Mr. Fernandez for the wonderful presentation.

Mr. Fernandez thanked the Commission, stating it has taken him many years to get the Cranberry Golf Course to where it is today, adding that the course is now rated among the top ten public courses in Massachusetts.

Mr. Coleman stated that the information at this meeting should be viewed by all residents. Mr. Fernandez said he and Ms. Usowski have talked about doing an interview on Channel 18.

Mr. Coleman asked Mr. Fernandez how much water the budget allows for at Cranberry Valley. Mr. Fernandez responded that he is allowed 23.5 million gallons per year and that per 1,000 square feet, he puts down about a tenth of an inch of water.

Ms. Mulhall-Maguire asked how he removes dew from the grass. Mr. Fernandez stated they drag a rope or a chain off the back of a golf cart to knock off the dew.

Mr. Fernandez answered questions asked concerning soil samples, soil sample test depths, water sample tests, IBDU fertilizer, concerns regarding excess nitrogen and phosphorus leeching into the water, the health and maintenance of freshwater ponds, and concerns regarding the lined irrigation pond.

A discussion was had regarding organic matter in the ponds, specifically leaves, which lead to increased nutrient levels, oxygen depletion, and harmful algae blooms.

Public Comment

Mr. Patrick Otton asked Mr. Fernandez to confirm the amount of fertilizer he spreads. Mr. Fernandez stated he spreads various amounts of fertilizer in different areas in either liquid or granular form. Mr. Otton asked what Cranberry Valley ponds are tested for. Mr. Fernandez confirmed he tests for PH, iron, magnesium, phosphorus and calcium and stated he is willing to give Mr. Otton his soil and water test readouts.

Mr. Ketchum asked Mr. Fernandez if he reports the total amount of nitrogen and phosphorus being spread. Mr. Fernandez said the exact amount cannot be measured, the test results give a range to let him know if the amount found is too high or too low within the range.

Mr. Otton spoke about his Citizens Petition included on the Town Meeting warrant to vote on limiting the application of fertilizers and pesticides in Harwich. Mr. Fernandez stated that at Cranberry Valley he is already trying to limit use. Voicing his concern about the passing of the petition, Mr. Fernandez stated that if the petition passes, the Town will be on their own to regulate it and will no longer receive help from the State if there are any issues. He noted that as long as the State is the regulator, the Town has access to UMass and URI and any monies and technology available. He stated that the towns on Cape Cod need to work together to fight the issue on a state and federal level, and that property owners need to be more educated and informed.

Mr. Ketchum told Mr. Otton that this meeting was not the proper venue for speaking about his citizen's petition.

A discussion was had regarding businesses mailing solicitations to homeowners promising a green lawn. Ideas were discussed as to how Harwich might educate homeowners about land management best practices.

Gerie Schumann, Harwich Garden Club member, informed the Commission that to get the information out to the public, an insert could be included in homeowner water bill envelopes. It was discussed that some people receive bills electronically and would not receive the insert.

Ms. Usowski stated that another option is to offer the information to those who have signed up for alerts from the Conservation Department via the Town of Harwich website. Mr. Coleman said that the Town should engage a marketing consultant to help get the best practices information out to the public. Ms. Usowski and Ms. Mulhall-Maguire spoke about consolidating the information and offering a QR code for the public to easily access the information. Ms. Usowski stated that the USDA might have information to offer, noting that the best management practices need to be developed first and marketing will come next.

Mr. Rob Mador, Sand and Soil Scientist for Robert B. Our Company, stated he can be a contact for homeowners looking for soil tests and offered ideas about educating and informing homeowners. He stated that MASS DEP offers waste and recycling grant opportunities specifically earmarked for municipalities. He stated that dangerous herbicides and pesticides need to get out of the hands of people who are non-licensed applicators, stating that it is not the licensed applicators who are the culprits, it is the homeowner. It was brought up that a certification process for those completing a workshop on best management practices could be put in place and the list of companies completing certification could be listed on the Harwich website.

A discussion was had regarding top soil. Mr. Mador recommended that minimum standards for putting down topsoil at new builds and land lot clearings be written into building code regulations. He also added that stripping topsoil should be prohibited.

Mr. Mador was asked if landscape contractors request the soil test results conducted by Robert B. Our. Mr. Mador answered that the good contractors do ask.

Mr. Mador mentioned that Penn State Extension offers a basic soil science class, Robert B. Our also has information on their website about soil science and the National Sanitation Foundation has information about contaminants.

Ms. Usowski stated that Town Meeting is scheduled for Monday, May 5 and that people should attend if able. She said that there are a number of pertinent articles on the Town Meeting Warrant including Mr. Otton's citizen's petition, the CPC article for the design, study and permitting of the boardwalk to the Herring River pedestrian bridge and Phase 3A of the sewer system.

Mr. Coulson asked if a water test for the Reservoir could be done. Ms. Usowski said she will check on the algae content.

Mr. Ketchum said that the Harwich Ponds Coalition requests that an additional number of Harwich ponds to be added to the Spring Ponds and Lake Stewards (PALS) water quality samplings program. Ms. Usowski stated that the Harwich Natural Resources Director position will hopefully be filled soon as the Natural Resource Department performs the PALS samplings. Ms. Usowski also stated that the Association to Preserve Cape Cod (APCC) has reached out to inquire if Harwich still wants to participate in the APCC's water quality sampling this summer.

Adjournment

Mr. Ketchum moved to adjourn the meeting. Mr. Coulson seconded.

Vote: 4:0

Motion carried; meeting adjourned.

Minutes taken and transcribed by Lisa Shaw, Executive Assistant

Meeting Attendance

Patrick Otton

Gerie Schumann

Rob Mador

Bon Kingsbury