

The Village at Thompson Pond Condominium

September 23, 2020

City of Portsmouth Planning Board and Conservation Commission
City of Portsmouth
1 Junkins Avenue
Portsmouth, NH 03801

Application for an after-the-fact Conditional Use Wetland Permit—996 Maplewood

Dear Commission and Board Members,

The following is the letter we emailed to Peter Britz, Environmental Planner and Sustainability Coordinator, in response to his notice of a Wetland Violation. We have amended it slightly to bring it up to date, not to downplay our violation. The response is broken into 3 parts: 1) A brief history of Thompson Pond and environs; 2) What we have done; 3) What we plan to do to improve the buffer.

- 1) We understand that Thompson Pond was part of the Frank Jones estate. Apparently Frank Jones excavated the Pond, which is fed by a spring or springs. At the east end of the Pond there is an ancient concrete weir and a French drain for when the Pond overflowed. It was clearly a Pond designed to be part of his landscape vision. On its banks are ancient weeping willows and maples, presumably framing Frank Jones view of the Pond. Embellishing its decorative intent, at our end of the Pond there is a small man-made island, that for years had a swan house on it.

For many years our neighbors tell us that they would from time to time mow to the edge of the Pond to maintain the original aesthetic appearance of the Pond. In questioning them, they have pointed across the Pond, to the rear of St. Catherine's, where the grass grows to the edge of the Pond, to describe what our side of the Pond once looked like.



To the dismay of our neighbors, Chinburg Builders, the developer of our condominium, ceased maintaining the property along the banks of the Pond and in four years invasive species have completely overwhelmed the area.

- 2) This spring we decided to try to restore the property. To help us plan for the long-range renewal of the buffer, we hired an experienced gardener, Lissa Crichton. Next, we checked with our neighbors who uniformly appreciated our effort to return the property to the way it previously appeared. Then we had Lissa show us what plants were native and what were invasive. We started work in June. She spent two mornings with us as we hacked through invasive species after invasive species. We quickly learned to identify what was an invasive species, and it was truly nothing but invasive species. By the way, this was all done by hand cutting, as our sore backs and poison ivy rashes can attest. The most prolific invasive species were, almost to the

exclusion of anything else, autumn olive, multiflora rose, buckthorn, and Oriental bittersweet. Bittersweet is a particularly noxious vine that was choking and would have eventually killed the weeping willows and maple shown in your photograph. In other unmaintained areas, the swans' island for example, the bittersweet has already taken down a couple of weeping willows. For native species there were a few viburnum and birches that we protected.

We also removed and disposed of decades worth of trash dumping. There were large parts of an abandoned plastic paddle boat, huge inflatable floats, abandoned plastic tarps, debris from the former greenhouse, plastic bags, bottles, food containers, old fence material, etc.

When we finished, around the middle of August, we had piles of brush and were trying to figure out what to do. Although most of the brush came from the buffer, a substantial amount, maybe a third, came from the grove of trees, well outside the 25' buffer, shown in the left picture below. For example, we saved a crab apple that bittersweet was overtaking and culled some dead trees in the grove. Here are a couple of pictures of the resulting brush piles.



Originally, we stacked the brush piles outside the buffer. If you had seen the buffer then, you would have observed that there was considerable growth left in the buffer, grass, wild strawberry, ferns, and small invasive plants we missed or didn't bother with. The mulch now covers most of it. Admittedly, there were areas where the invasive species were so thick that any other growth had been choked out.

We were getting quotes for chipping the piles, when one contractor suggested mulching in place. Since mulching made more sense, we moved the piles by hand back into the buffer zone, so the mulch would be left as compost for the buffer. As it turns out and contrary to our expectations, the machine did not grind everything to a mulch and left large chunks of brush, which we will address below in section 3.

Before we hired the contractor, we checked with our immediate neighbors, who have approved our efforts right along. When the contractor gave us the date he would be here, we alerted our neighbors. One neighbor, who lives at the end of Fairview Drive, across the street from the woman who complained to you, even gave us permission to access our land across hers via Fairview.

- 3) Our intention from the outset was to restore the buffer to its original beauty with native grasses and plants. That is why we hired Lissa to guide us. We had and have no intention of leaving it in its present condition.

If approved, this fall we will remove all large pieces left over from the mulching and smooth out the remaining mulch, filling in low areas, etc.

Depending on soil moisture and whether its shady or sunny, Lissa suggests wild blueberry, winterberry, bayberry, butterfly bush, sweet ferns, etc. However, because of the drought and the consequent likelihood of an early frost, she expressed concerns about trying to plant shrubs this fall. (Coincidentally, on September 20 Portsmouth Country Club imposed a short frost delay on play.)

Instead, she recommends that we spread and mix into the remaining mulch native grass seed and native wildflower seed that will grow in the mulch and stabilize it.¹ In the spring we would begin planting the shrubs and ground covers as depicted in our plan.

We abut Thompson Pond. We care deeply about its health and future and intend to look after it. We understand what Mr. Britz saw concerned him. We only wish he had come a year or two from now to see how beautifully we have taken care of the buffer and Pond and improved it for everyone, our neighbors, wildlife, our families of geese and ducks, and us.



This picture was taken Saturday, September 19, a few feet to the right of where Mr. Britz took his picture inserted in the violation notice.

We appreciate your service and consideration of our application.

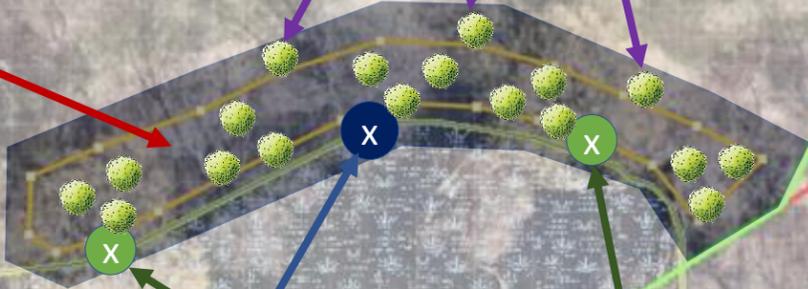
¹ Lissa recommends American Meadows.

Legend

- Main.SDE.Addresses
- ▭ Parcels
- Streets
- ▭ Wetlands
- ▭ 100ft_Buffer

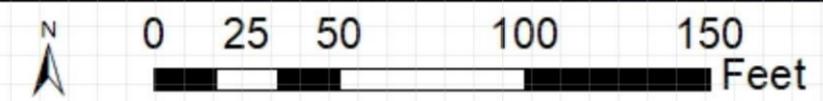
NEW Native NH Species
Winterberry (*Ilex verticillate*)
Butterfly Bush (*Buddleia davidii*)
Bayberry (*Myrica pensylvanica*)
Sweet Fern (*Comptonia peregrine*)

NEW Highbush Blueberry
(*Vaccinium corymbosum*)



Existing Maple
(*Acer saccharinum*)

Existing Willows
(*Salix babylonica*)



Maplewood Avenue - Thompson Pond