

DRAFT Article: Conservation Conversations: Foundation vs Commission. 1/19/09

Another routine trip to the Village Market vegetable isle—asparagus or beans today? Interrupted by a familiar voice—“hi, saw you on tv, Conservation right?” An old neighbor (as in long time). “Right, what’d you think?” “Well, seemed like a lot of talk about the ‘aura’ with lawyers and engineers. I want to know what you’re going to do about the trees that fell near the road on your Conservation land.”

I knew the property and explained that land was owned by the **Conservation Foundation**, which is quite different from the **Conservation Commission**. I explained, “The Foundation basically acquires and manages land for conservation purposes. Sometimes land is given to them and sometimes they purchase land. Those are the people to talk with about those trees.” “The Commission, on the other hand, is a regularity board responsible for enforcing the Wetlands Protection Act (WPA) by assisting property owners with compliance. In addition, we manage over 1200 acres of town-owned land set aside for conservation.”

“Oh, so that’s what all the permitting discussion is about?” he says examining a cucumber.

“Right. Because much of the land we deal with is land held in private hands. You mentioned the ‘aura’. AURA stands for the **Adjacent Upland Resource Area**, which in most cases is property within 100 feet of a wetland or coastal bank. Every property owner in Chatham who owns property in the AURA should notify the Conservation Commission if they plan ANY activity in that zone. It’s all about protecting our valuable wetland and coastal resources.”

“B-o-r-i-n-g” says my neighbor, now selecting a head of lettuce.

“Not really. You can imagine how many properties there are on our coastlines and surrounding ponds, wetlands and rivers. Property owners are forever wanting to prune, clear, build, or landscape--often that impacts the AURA. Every property is different-- often finding a balance between the homeowners’ objectives and what the WPA permits is a challenge, but we usually strike a win-win solution.”

“I can only imagine the issues.”

“You don’t have to! Tune us in every other Wed at 7:00 or 4:00, Channel 18. Our Nielsen ratings could use a boost!” I laughed and escaped with the asparagus.

The Conservation Commission wants to see Chatham property owners proceed with their projects while protecting the valuable wetland resources that benefit all of Chatham.

360 words.