

# WETLANDS FAQS

January 14, 2026

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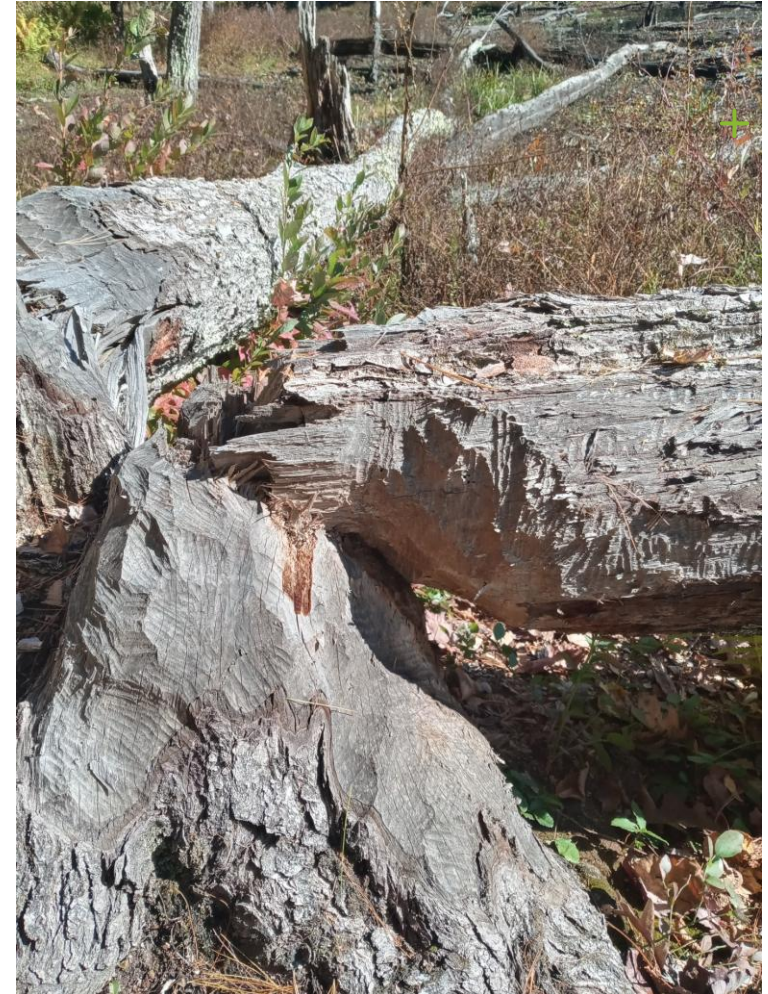
# What is a wetland?

- A wetland is land consisting of poorly or very poorly drained soils, specific plant species, and is water saturated either permanently or periodically through the growing season. Wetlands are often flooded in spring and after heavy rain events.



# What is an upland?

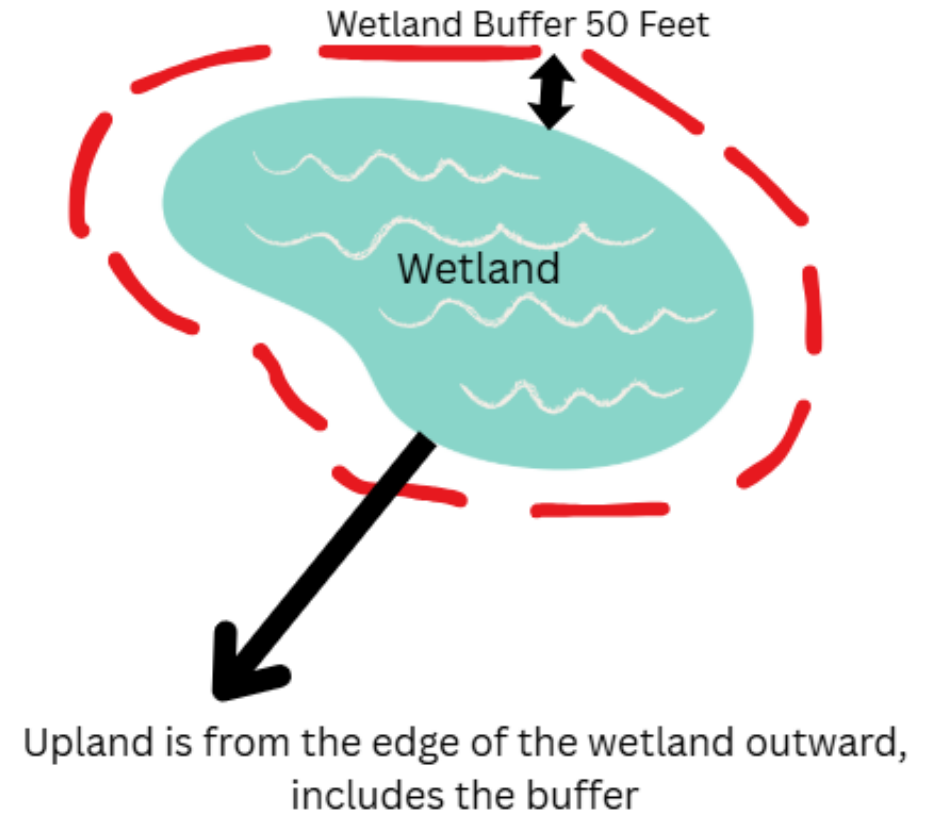
- An upland is simply any land that is not defined as a wetland. Uplands generally consist of well drained soils.



Beaver activity at Gumpas Pond  
Preservation Area

# What is a wetland buffer?

- A wetland buffer is the upland area that surrounds a wetland. Buffers help wetlands remain in their natural state. Development is generally not allowed in a wetland buffer.



# What is a Wetland Conservation District (WCD)?

- In Pelham, a wetland buffer is called the Wetland Conservation District (WCD). The WCD is a 50-foot-wide buffer that surrounds all wetlands that are larger than 2,000 square feet. This buffer is sometimes referred to as a “no cut, no disturb” zone.



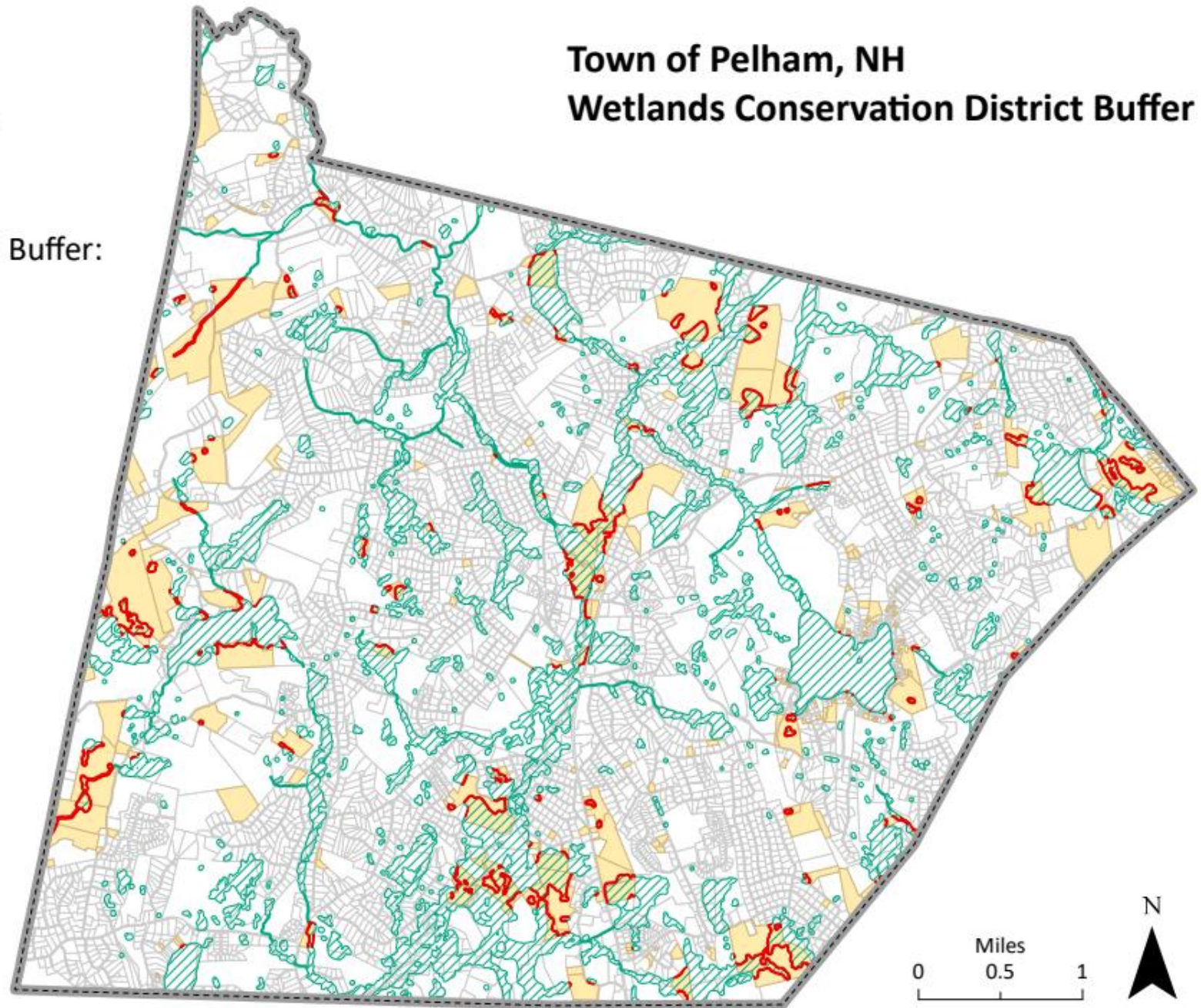
## Town of Pelham, NH Wetlands Conservation District Buffer

Total Land Within 50' Buffer:  
1209.7 Acres

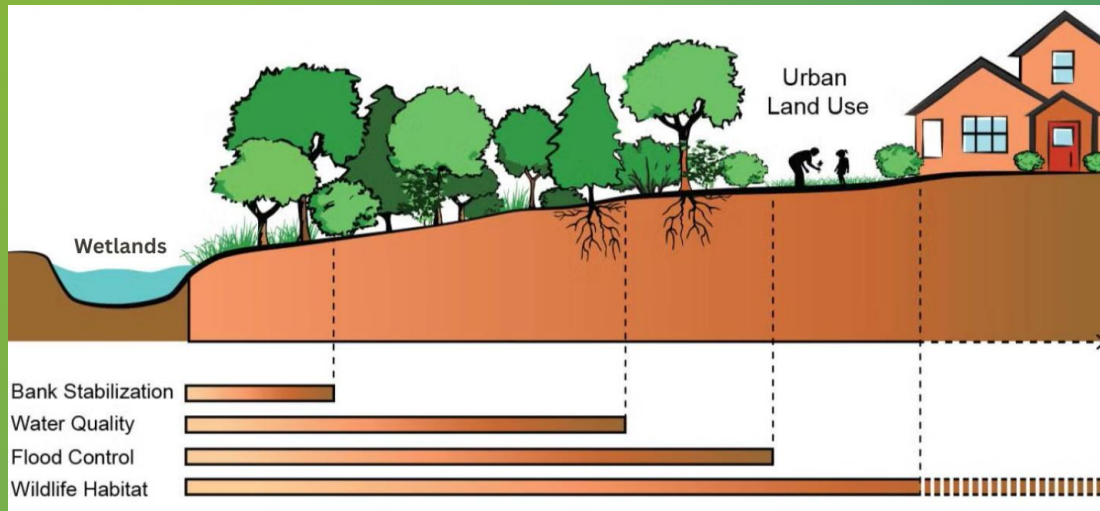
Total Vacant Land Within 50' Buffer:  
144.6 Acres

### Legend

- 50' Buffer Within Vacant Land
- Wetland
- 50' Buffer
- Vacant Parcel
- Parcel



# What is the purpose of wetland buffers and WCDs?



- As rain falls, the rainwater flows downhill, through the buffer and into the wetland. Along the way, the buffer filters the water and absorbs much of it into the ground, raising ground water levels that fill our wells. Buffers are also areas that flood when wetlands overflow hence providing flood storage. Buffers are typically implemented to ensure clean drinking water and reduce the damage from flooding.

# How are the boundaries and size of a wetland determined?

- Only a wetland scientist can determine the boundaries and size of a wetland. A wetland scientist must visit the property, take soil samples, observe plant species and consider other factors that together define a wetland. Wetland maps are often approximated and cannot be used to accurately determine the boundaries of a wetland for development purposes.



# Who has authority over wetlands?

- The New Hampshire Department of Environmental Services (NHDES) has authority over all wetlands.
- <https://www.des.nh.gov/water/wetlands>



# Who has authority over wetland buffers which are also known as the WCD in Pelham?

- The Town of Pelham has authority over Pelham's wetland buffers, also known as the WCD.



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# Do other towns in Southern NH have wetland buffers?

Yes, most do, here is a short list:

<u><b>Town</b></u>	<u><b>Buffer Size</b></u>
Amherst	50 feet
Derry	75 feet
Hollis	100 feet
Hudson	50 feet
Londonderry	50 feet
Windham	100 feet for wetlands over 1 acre

\*Note that all are equal to or greater than Pelham's 50-foot buffer.



# What is a prime wetland?

- As defined by NH State law [\(RSA 482-A: 15\)](#) “Prime wetlands are jurisdictional wetlands that because of their size, unspoiled character, fragile condition or other relevant factors, make them of substantial significance.” In other words, prime wetlands are the highest functioning and most valuable wetlands. Prime wetlands must be at least 2-acres in size, not consist of a water body only, be at least 50 feet wide at its narrowest point, and have at least four of the following primary wetland functions, **one of which must be wildlife habitat.**

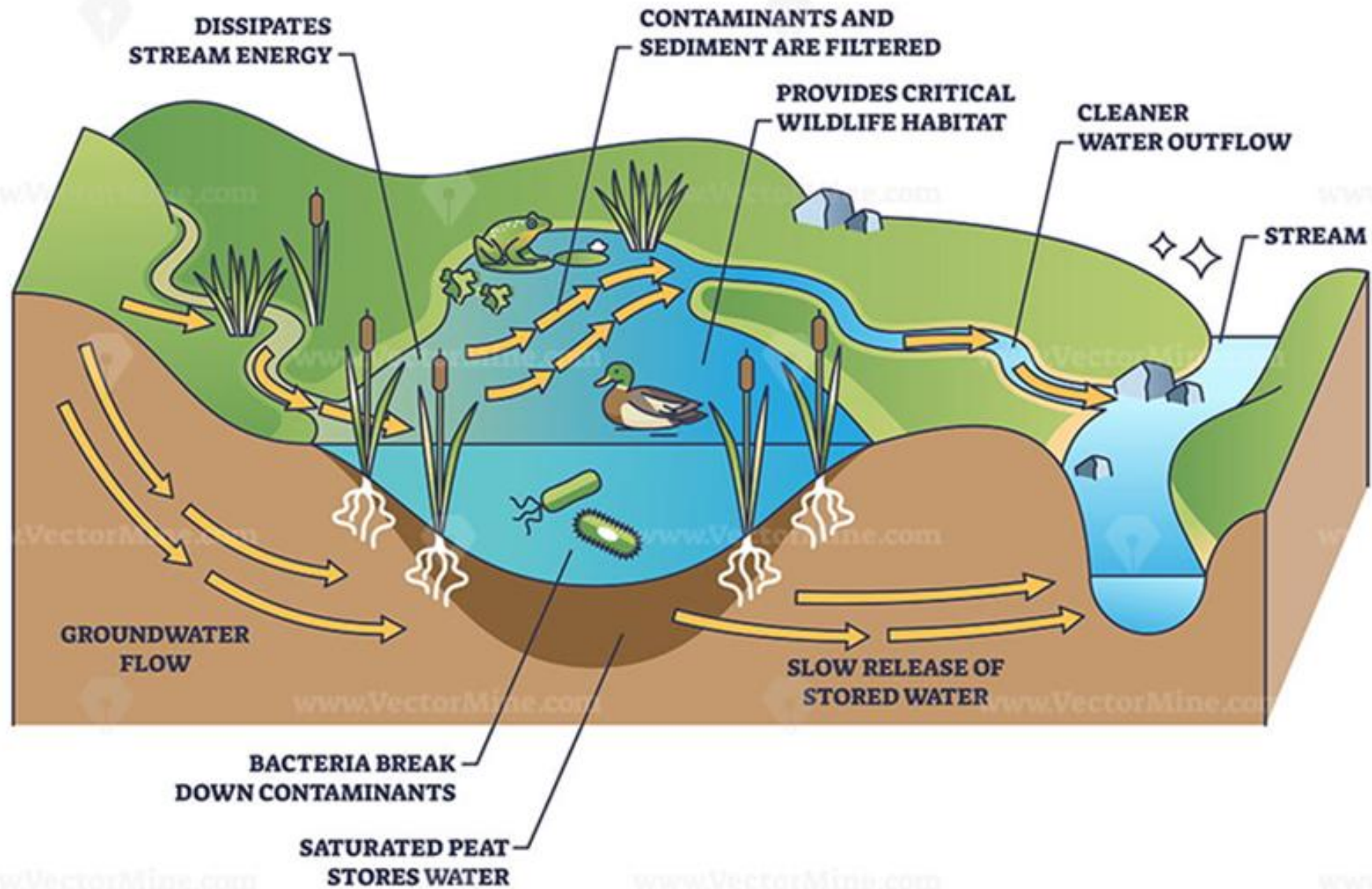


## Primary Wetland Functions include:

- Ecological Integrity
- Wildlife Habitat
- Fish and Aquatic Habitat
- Scenic Quality
- Educational Potential
- Wetland Recreation
- Flood Water Storage
- Groundwater Recharge
- Sediment Trapping
- Nutrient Trapping, Retention and Transformation
- Shoreland Anchoring
- Noteworthiness



# WETLANDS





# Does Pelham currently have prime wetlands?

Yes, Pelham currently has 916-acres of prime wetlands. Here is a list of all existing prime wetlands:

<u>Year created</u>	<u># of</u>	<u>total size</u>	<u>Town Vote</u>	
	<u>prime wetlands</u>		<u>In Favor</u>	<u>Opposed</u>
1987	7	331 acres	1226	490
1999	4	48 acres	2727	454
2007	1	413 acres	2114	509
2008	3	124 acres	2313	468

# Why have prime wetlands?

- Since prime wetlands are the most important wetlands, they get the highest level of protection. Any disturbance to a prime wetland must be mitigated by a factor of 10 to 1. In other words, were a developer to fill 5,000 square feet of a prime wetland, they would have to create 50,000 square feet of wetland somewhere else on the same parcel. If a developer does not disturb the wetland, there is no impact from prime wetland status.
- <https://www.des.nh.gov/water/wetlands/faqs/wetlands-and-stream-crossings#faq34621>







# Who has authority over prime wetlands?

- The NH Department of Environmental Services has authority over all wetlands including prime wetlands.
- <https://www.des.nh.gov/sites/g/files/ehbemt341/files/documents/2020-01/wb-25.pdf>



# Do prime wetlands have buffers?



Video from Jonathan Kamal

- In the past, the NH Department of Environmental Services placed 100-foot buffers around prime wetlands. Pelham has four such prime wetlands with 100-foot buffers. NHDES no longer places buffers around prime wetlands. NHDES has authority over these existing 100-foot buffers. All prime wetlands have the 50-foot WCD which the Town of Pelham has authority over.

# Contact Information

- Have more questions? Email one of the folks below by clicking their contact form:
- Dena Hoffman – Health & Environmental Officer for the Town of Pelham
  - <https://www.pelhamweb.com/FormCenter/Boards-Commissions-14/Contact-the-Pelham-Stormwater-Stakeholde-75>
- Ken Stanvick – Pelham Conservation Commission Chair
  - <https://www.pelhamweb.com/formcenter/Boards-Commissions-14/Contact-the-Conservation-Commission-64>