

A photograph of the Stamford skyline, featuring several tall, modern high-rise buildings with orange and grey facades. The buildings are reflected in the calm water of a harbor or river in the foreground. A marina with many small boats is visible on the left. The sky is a mix of blue and orange, suggesting a sunset or sunrise. The text is overlaid on the top half of the image.

Stamford Conservation Commission

An Advisory Body for Conservation, Science & Natural Resources

Created pursuant to C.G.S. §7-131a

Supports informed environmental decision-making

No regulatory authority

E.P.B. VS. Conservation Commission

The EPB already performs both regulatory and conservation functions. This ordinance, requested by the EPB, simply separates its existing conservation duties into a dedicated advisory Conservation Commission. The EPB remains the regulatory agency. No new powers are created.

<https://www.caciwc.org/library/ccHandbook.pdf>

Separating Existing Responsibilities

Environmental Protection Board (EPB)

Regulates inland wetlands and watercourses

Reviews permit applications

Holds public hearings

Issues permits

Can approve, deny, or condition applications

Enforces wetlands regulations

Administers Connecticut Inland Wetlands Act

Makes binding regulatory decisions

Focuses primarily on wetlands

Proposed Conservation Commission

Advisory only

Conducts research and scientific review

Advises Planning, Zoning, EPB, Board of Representatives, Mayor, and City departments

Recommends conservation ideas

Studies flooding, forests, wildlife, climate resilience, and water quality

Develops natural resource inventories

Recommends greenways and open space planning

Provides environmental education and public outreach

Addresses the City's broader natural resource and conservation issues

How this commission Benefits Stamford;

Environmental Focus

 **Water Quality**

 **Flood Resilience**

 **Climate Resilience**

 **Open Space/Invasive Species management**

 **Greenways & Trails Walking Biking**

 **Natural Resource Planning**

 **Wildlife Habitat**

 **Tree Canopy & Urban Forests**

Why It Matters

Protecting streams, rivers, and reservoirs helps safeguard drinking water, public health, and Long Island Sound.

Natural landscapes absorb stormwater, reducing flooding, erosion, and costly damage to homes, businesses, and public infrastructure.

Planning for hotter temperatures, stronger storms, drought, and sea-level rise helps communities prepare for future environmental challenges.

Parks, forests, and natural areas provide recreation, improve mental and physical health, and preserve Stamford for future generations.

Connected open spaces create opportunities for walking and biking, improve public access to nature, and link neighborhoods and parks.

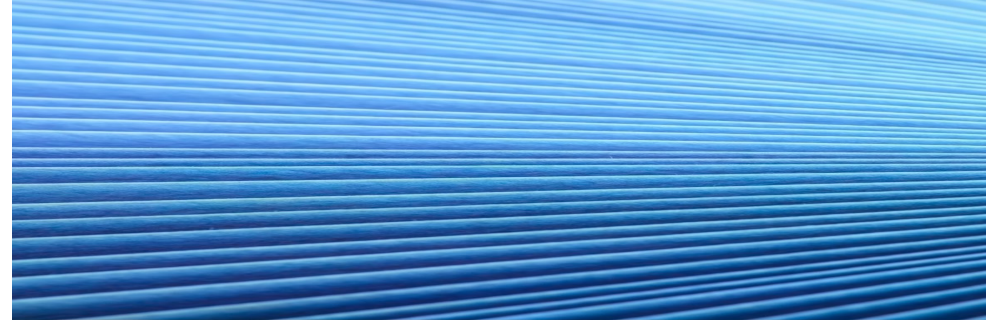
Scientific inventories help the City make informed, evidence-based decisions about land use, conservation, and infrastructure investments.

Healthy ecosystems support pollinators, birds, and other wildlife while maintaining biodiversity and ecological balance.

Trees reduce flooding, lower summer temperatures, improve air quality, store carbon, reduce energy costs, and increase property values.

******This ordinance AS WRITTEN has earned support from City departments that routinely work with development applications;***

- The Planning Board
- The Environmental Protection Board (EPB)
- The Director of Operations
- The Mayors office
- The 2035 Plan while it fully supports development, recommends this commission be implemented



****** These departments, land use experts, and planning documents publicly support the ordinance and have addressed the concerns that have been raised, concluding they are non-issues because state law already protects the City.

****We also could not identify another Connecticut municipality that added these restrictions.**

“The Proposed Amendments per our legal team are Unnecessary and May Create Unintended Legal Ambiguity”

The proposed amendments duplicate protections already provided by state law.

Concern expressed; “the commission will impede or Slow development”

“The Proposed Amendments per our legal team “are Unnecessary and May Create Unintended Legal Ambiguity”



The Ordinance Already Limits the Commission to;

- *Advisory only*
- *No regulatory authority*
- *No permitting authority*
- *No enforcement authority*
- *Cannot approve or deny applications*
- *Cannot impose conditions*
- *Cannot slow down development*
- *Existing land use boards retain all decision-making authority*

State Statute ADDRESSING HOUSING CONCERNS

The Commission:

- **Cannot** stop projects
- **Cannot** deny applications
- **Cannot** delay review
- **Cannot** impose conditions

****It only provides Scientific based information**

WHAT THE LAW DOES NOT AUTHORIZE

No authority to advise on or:

- Set housing density
- Make zoning policy
- Recommend architecture
- Comment on traffic
- Regulate affordable housing

Concerns expressed; “Can the commission own land?”

No. The Commission cannot own land. It may accept gifts of land on behalf of the City.

For example, a family owns 15 wooded acres bordering an existing park. They no longer want to maintain the property and offer to donate it to the City instead of selling it. The Conservation Commission studies the parcel, evaluates its ecological value, and makes a recommendation to the appropriate City officials regarding whether the gift should be accepted.

Actual Stamford examples

While many of Stamford's larger parks were acquired through purchase or public investment rather than gifts, the City has benefited from donations of parkland and conservation land over the years. Examples include:

- **Mianus River Park** – created through cooperation among Stamford, Greenwich, and the State, with significant land donations and acquisitions that protected the watershed.
- **Bartlett Arboretum & Gardens** – the property itself originated from the estate of Dr. Francis A. Bartlett and today is permanently protected through a partnership with the City and the Bartlett Arboretum Association.
- **Smaller parcels** of open space and conservation easements have periodically been donated to the City or to organizations such as the Stamford Land Conservation Trust.
- **Courtland Ave. Park** – donated as parkland.

Examples of property that could be gifted to Stamford



Woodlands or Forest Parcels

- A resident donates a 10-acre forest to preserve it as open space. The Commission could recommend accepting the donation and developing a stewardship plan.



Stream Corridors

- A property owner donates land along the Rippowam River, Mill River, or Noroton River to protect water quality and reduce flooding.
- The Commission could recommend preserving the riparian buffer and restoring native vegetation.



Greenway Connections

- A parcel that connects two existing parks or trails is donated.
- The Commission could recommend acceptance because it expands public access and creates a continuous greenway.



Meadows and Pollinator Habitat

- An undeveloped field is donated to remain as native grassland or pollinator habitat.
- The Commission could recommend habitat management rather than intensive landscaping.



Wetland Buffers

- A property adjacent to wetlands is donated to create a permanent buffer protecting water quality and wildlife habitat.

Should we prohibit the commission from accepting gifts or acquiring land

"We have been unable to identify another Connecticut municipality that has established a Conservation Commission while prohibiting it from accepting gifts or acquiring land in a manner that departs from CGS § 7-131a."

This raises a good question;

If no other Connecticut municipality has found it necessary to rewrite this portion of the state statute, what problem are we solving in Stamford?

If the Conservation Commission is prohibited from accepting gifts, a landowner could instead donate the property to the Stamford Land Trust or another conservation organization. In that case, the City would not have the opportunity to decide whether to accept the gift or establish any conditions for City ownership. If the gift is offered to the City, however, this Board has the opportunity to review it and determine whether accepting it is in Stamford's best interest. Why would Stamford choose to eliminate that option?

We represent the people of Stamford. Why would we tie the hands of future Boards by preventing them from accepting gifts or acquiring land on behalf of the public? Some of our nation's greatest public spaces exist because leaders had the foresight to accept donated land—from Franklin D. Roosevelt's conservation legacy to Francis Bartlett's gift that became Bartlett Arboretum.

Why would Stamford choose to give up that opportunity?

Why does it benefit a city to acquire land through a cc rather than directly?

- **Access to grants.** Many state and federal conservation grant programs are designed to work with municipal conservation commissions, which can identify priorities, prepare applications, and oversee conservation projects.
- **The Conservation Commission is the City's conservation expert,** while the City itself makes the ultimate decision. Under Connecticut law, the Commission doesn't get to act entirely on its own—it operates within the framework established by the municipality.
- There are several practical benefits:
- **Expert evaluation.** A Conservation Commission can determine whether a parcel has conservation value—such as wetlands, wildlife habitat, drinking water protection, flood storage, forest, or trail connections—before recommending acceptance.
- **Stewardship.** The Commission can inventory, monitor, and advise on the management of conservation land after it is acquired.
- **Long-term planning.** Conservation Commissions typically develop open space, greenway, watershed, and natural resource plans so acquisitions fit into a broader strategy rather than occurring on an ad hoc basis.
- **Does the City have to use the Conservation Commission?**
- No. The Conservation Commission's role is generally to **identify, evaluate, and recommend** conservation acquisitions. It provides scientific and conservation expertise; it is not intended to replace the City's governing bodies.

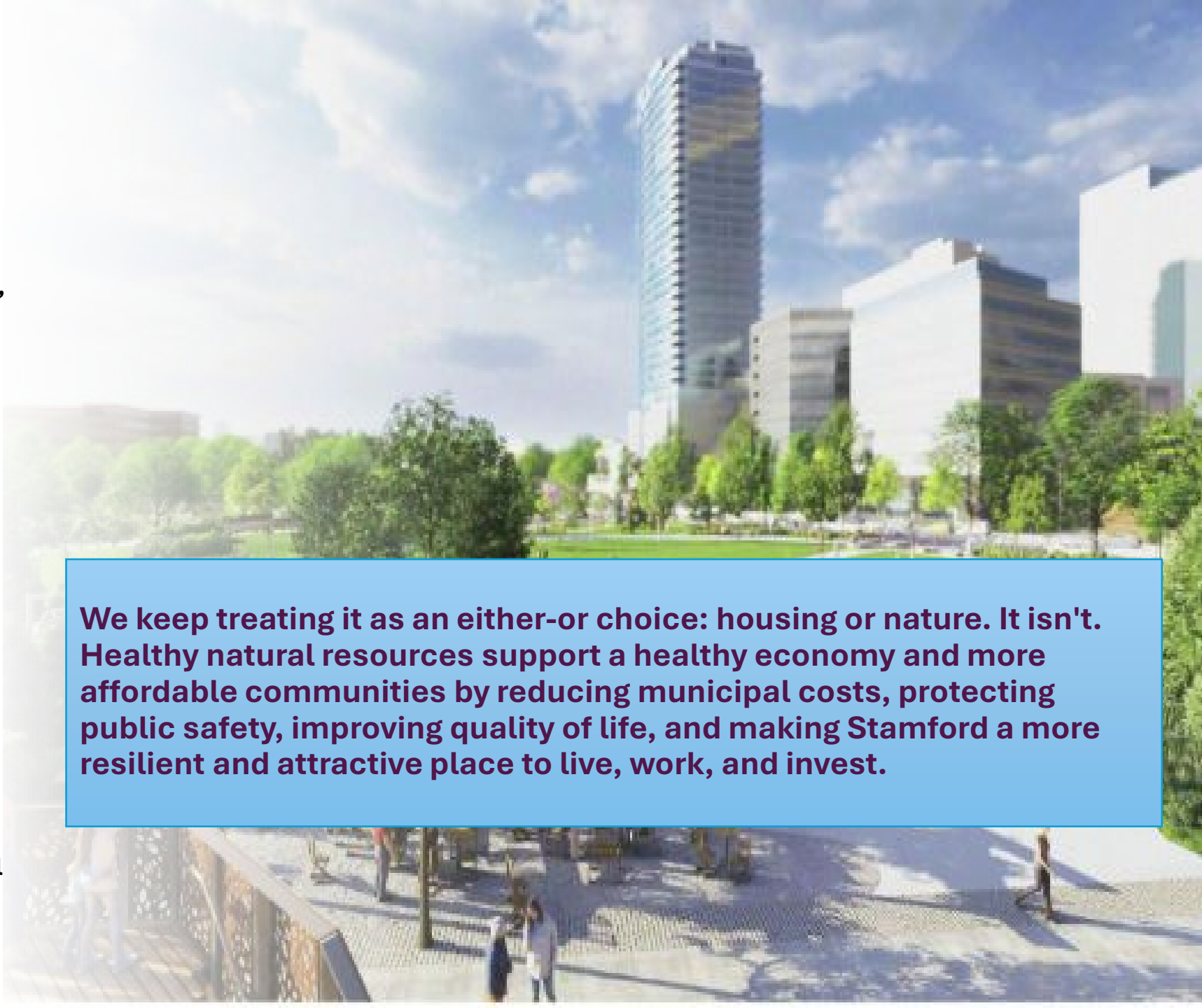
- The world's most desirable cities have learned that economic vitality and environmental stewardship are not competing goals—they are complementary ones.

- *Parks, trees, clean waterways, connected green spaces, and climate resilience are among the very qualities that attract residents, employers, investment, and visitors. A Conservation Commission helps ensure those assets are considered alongside growth, (not instead of growth) making Stamford not only a city where people can live, but a city where people live healthy lives.*

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- 🌳 Trees
- 💧 Clean Water and Clean air
- 🏞️ Parks & Open Space
- 🚶 Walkability and bikeability
- 🌱 Biodiversity
- 🌍 Climate Resilience

- These are precisely the kinds of environmental resources Connecticut General Statutes § 7-131a authorizes a Conservation Commission to study, inventory, and advise on.



We keep treating it as an either-or choice: housing or nature. It isn't. Healthy natural resources support a healthy economy and more affordable communities by reducing municipal costs, protecting public safety, improving quality of life, and making Stamford a more resilient and attractive place to live, work, and invest.

THANK YOU!

