

SHERBORN CONSERVATION COMMISSION



MEMO

TO: Sherborn Zoning Board of Appeals and the Sherborn Select Board

FROM: Conservation Commission

DATE: August 25, 2025

RE: Proposed Restoration Planting Plan and Sketch for Washington Street Sherborn Homes - Lot 3 (based on Site Plan revised August 20, 2025)

Normally, the Commission bases a restoration and mitigation plan on several factors: the number, size, and type of trees removed; the quality of the understory (shrub and herbaceous layers); and the extent and quality of buffer zone areas altered versus unaltered, pre- and post-project. Mitigation in previously altered buffer zones, such as converting lawn back to a naturalized buffer, is also frequently required when permitting new buffer zone activity.

For this project, approximately 52,000 square feet will be disturbed, of which roughly 25,000 square feet involve the alteration of two wetland buffer zones. Because these buffer zones are currently in a natural, undisturbed condition and functioning well, opportunities for compensatory mitigation are limited. The most effective approach is to restore portions of the project-altered buffer zone (as identified on the revised Site Plan dated August 20, 2025) to a more natural state protective of wetland resources.

A densely vegetated band along the newly graded and altered buffer zones is essential for improving water quality, reducing pollution, and enhancing wildlife habitat. The Commission therefore requests the following Comprehensive Permit conditions for restoration:

BUFFER ZONE RESTORATION PLANTING AREAS (See attached sketch):

(1) PLANTING AREA #1 – Isolated Vegetated Wetland (IVW)/Vernal Pool Buffer Zone
Within the limit of work, approximately 2,500 square feet of buffer zone will be altered. Nearly all of this area will consist of graded slopes, and the entire area is proposed for restoration planting.

(2) PLANTING AREA #2 – Bordering Vegetated Wetland (BVW) Buffer Zone
Within the limit of work, approximately 22,500 square feet of this buffer zone will be altered. Most of this area is proposed for the septic system, lawn, building, driveway, and stormwater management. 8,000 square feet between elevation 213 and the limit of work, approximately

8,000 square feet, are proposed for restoration planting. This is significantly less than half of the proposed buffer zone alteration.

RESTORATION PLANTING:

(a) Tree Layer/Canopy

Though a substantial number of trees will be cut in the buffer zone, the areas of restoration are along the remaining tree edge are judged to be less amenable to tree replacement, especially around the septic field. Therefore, this plan focuses on the shrub and herbaceous layers.

(b) Herbaceous Layer

The herbaceous layer will be seeded with a New England Erosion Control/Restoration Mix for Dry Sites and/or a New England Conservation/Wildlife Mix (or approved equal). The performance standard is 100% coverage after two growing seasons, verified prior to the request for a Certificate of Compliance.

(c) Shrub Layer

The shrub layer will be planted at a density of one shrub per 50 square feet (~7-foot on center spacing), totaling approximately 200 shrubs. Plants will be at least 2-gallon container size and consist of native species suitable for dry-site conditions. Shrubs should be evenly distributed throughout both buffer zone areas, with occasional clusters of two to three shrubs for added habitat value. The performance standard is 90% survival after two growing seasons, verified prior to the request for a Certificate of Compliance.

SUMMARY OF RESTORATION AREAS & SHRUB PLANTING REQUIREMENTS

Area Type	Total Altered (sq. ft.)	Proposed Restoration (sq. ft.)	Shrub Density	Approx. Shrubs Required
IVW Buffer	~ 2,500	2,500	1 shrub/50 sqft	~50
BVW Buffer	~22,500	8,000 (~36%)	1 shrub/50 sqft	~150
Total	~ 25,000	10,500 (~42%)	—	~200

The numbers of required shrubs can be calculated using the square-footage of the two affected areas if precise measurements are provided. The figures cited above are approximate estimates. Using a density requirement of one shrub per 50-square feet, approximately 200 shrubs would be needed to restore roughly 25,000 square feet of proposed buffer zone alteration. This alteration accommodates the septic system, lawn, and portions of the building and driveway within what is currently undisturbed buffer zone.

While each project has its unique circumstances, this or similar shrub densities have been used for market-rate homes. For example, Lot 4 of 65 Farm Road incorporated comparable restoration measures.

The Commission recognizes and appreciates that the proposed project does not alter the more critical inner 0-50-foot buffer zone (the designated no-alteration zone). The scale of the proposed restoration plantings could be considered substantial. However, it is important to ensure protection of wetland functions, and the inclusion of conditions related to the Sherborn Wetlands Bylaw by Zoning Board of Appeals would be important. This is particularly relevant given the presence of the Isolated Vegetated Wetland/Vernal Pool Resource, which is not afforded protection under the Massachusetts Wetlands Protection Act.

MANAGEMENT OF THE RESTORATION PLANTING:

The number of shrubs is based on estimated buffer alteration areas and may be adjusted based on more accurate calculations.

- Replacement shrubs must be installed as needed to meet the required performance standards, and additional native plantings may be added.
- Invasive species should be removed manually.
- Once established, the mitigation areas are to remain unmanaged.

PROPOSED LIMIT OF LAWN:

The proposed limit of lawn within Commission jurisdiction is the edge of the Vernal Pool buffer zone and above the 213-foot contour elevation for the BVW buffer zone.

SUGGESTED RELATED CONDITIONS that are outside ConCom jurisdiction:

Although outside of Commission jurisdiction, two conditions are suggested:

1. The small, graded area between the septic field and the proposed trail path (a few hundred square feet) should be restored with the same planting approach, to enhance wildlife habitat and connectivity between buffer zones.
2. Phosphate fertilizer should be prohibited throughout the site. While the Commission already restricts fertilizer use in buffer zones, applying this condition site-wide would further reduce phosphorus runoff into the Charles River watershed. This could also serve as a model for a town-wide standard.

PROPOSED MITIGATION PLANTING SKETCH

8/25/2025

