

# City of Salem

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*In the year Two Thousand and Twenty-Two*

**An Ordinance** to increase protections for wetlands in the City of Salem.

*Be it ordained by the City Council of the City of Salem, as follows:*

## A NEW ORDINANCE TO REPLACE THE EXISTING ORDINANCE, CHAPTER 50 WETLANDS PROTECTION AND CONSERVATION

*Be it ordained by the City Council of Salem, as follows:*

**SECTION 1.** Sections 50-1 through 50-12 of Part III of the City of Salem Code, Ordinances, Chapter 50, Wetlands Protection and Conservation is hereby amending by deleting Sections 50-1 through 50-12 in their entirety and replacing it with the following new Sections 50-1 through 50-18:

### **“Chapter 50 WETLANDS PROTECTION AND CONSERVATION\***

#### **Sec. 50-1. Introduction.**

This Ordinance is intended to utilize the City of Salem’s Home Rule authority to protect additional resource areas, identify additional values, and create additional standards and procedures stricter than those of the Wetlands Protection Act (M.G.L.A. c. 131, § 40; “the WPA”) and Regulations thereunder (310 CMR 10.00).

#### **Sec. 50-2. Purpose.**

The purpose of this Wetlands Protection Ordinance is to protect the wetlands, water resources, and adjoining land areas in Salem by controlling activities deemed by the Conservation Commission likely to have a significant or cumulative effect upon the following resource area values. Those identified with an asterisk\* are in addition to the interests protected by the WPA.

- ☐ public or private water supply
- ☐ ground water supply
- ☐ flood control

- ☐ storm damage prevention
- ☐ prevention of pollution
- ☐ protection of land containing shellfish
- ☐ protection of fisheries
- ☐ protection of wildlife habitat
- ☐ \*climate change adaptation and mitigation,

Collectively, the "resource area values protected by this Ordinance"

### **Sec. 50-3. Jurisdiction.**

Except as permitted by the Conservation Commission, no person shall remove, fill, dredge, discharge into, build upon, degrade, or otherwise alter in or over any of the following resource areas: any freshwater wetland (e.g. wet meadows, bogs, swamps); any coastal wetland (e.g. coastal/barrier beaches, coastal dunes, coastal banks, rocky intertidal shores, land under the ocean, salt marsh, land under salt ponds, land containing shellfish, fish runs, land subject to tidal action); vernal pool; river, stream, pond, reservoir, or lake, or any bank to said waters, or any land under said waters; riverfront area; designated port areas or any land subject to inland and/or coastal flooding or inundation.

Additionally, except as permitted by the Conservation Commission, no person shall remove, fill, dredge, discharge into, build upon, degrade, or otherwise alter in or over land within 100-feet of the above resource areas, hereinafter the "buffer zone". Notwithstanding the foregoing, and in accordance with the WPA, the following resource areas do not have an associated buffer zone: riverfront area, land under waters, land containing shellfish, fish runs, land subject to tidal action, and designated port areas.

### **Sec. 50-4. Exceptions.**

The above prohibitions shall not apply to emergency projects recognized by the WPA so long as the Conservation Commission or its designee certifies the emergency in accordance with the standards under the WPA and implementing regulations at 310 CMR 10.00.

Additionally, the requirements of this Ordinance and its implementing regulations shall not apply to the minor activities and other exemptions recognized by the WPA and its implementing regulations at 310 CMR 10.00 so long as the Conservation Commission is notified of proposed work via certified mail a minimum of 30 days prior to commencement of activities located in areas protected by this Ordinance.

Maintenance (but no further alteration, expansion, or change in character or use) of pre-existing lawfully located uses and structures that were in place on or before the promulgation of the Ordinance are permitted without application for a permit to the Conservation Commission,

provided that notice of such activities is sent via certified mail a minimum of 30 days prior to commencement of work.

#### **Sec. 50-5. Definitions.**

The following words, terms, and phrases, when used in this chapter, shall have the meanings ascribed to them in this section, except where further definition/clarification is provided through regulation. Terms follow the definitions found in the WPA and its implementing regulations at 310 CMR 10.00. To the extent not defined herein, words used in these regulations shall have the definitions contained in the WPA.

**Ancillary Structure** shall mean any structure on the same lot or lots in common ownership as the principal use, and whose purpose is customarily incidental to the main or principal building or use of the land.

**Alter** includes, without limitation, the following actions when undertaken in areas subject to this chapter: (1) Removal, placement, excavation or dredging of soil, sand, gravel, or aggregate material of any kind. (2) Changing drainage characteristics, flushing characteristics, salinity distribution, sedimentation patterns, flow patterns and flood retention characteristics. (3) Drainage or other disturbance of the water level or water table. (4) Dumping, discharging or filling with any material. (5) Driving of piles, erection of buildings or structures of any kind. (6) Placing of obstructions, whether or not they interfere with the flow of water. (7) Destruction of plant life, including cutting of trees, but excluding maintenance of landscape areas (provided that no unauthorized expansion of landscaping occurs) that were in place as of the original Ordinance adoption (DATE). (8) Changing of water temperature, biochemical oxygen demand or other physical or chemical characteristics of the water.

**Banks** means that part of land adjoining any body of water which confines the water. Bank is associated with all intermittent streams shown on the USGS Map and display riverine characteristics, even those upgradient of other wetland resource areas in cases where a defined channel with evidence of flow is observed.

**Climate Change Adaptation and Mitigation** are measures designed or intended to protect resource areas from the impacts of climate change and to protect the ability of resource areas to mitigate the impacts of climate change with consideration of the resource area values protected by the Ordinance.

**Climate Change Impacts** include without limitation: extreme heat; the timing, frequency, intensity, and amount of precipitation, storm surges, and rising water levels; increased intensity or frequency of storm events or extreme weather events; and frequency, intensity, and duration of droughts.

**Coastal Wetland** means any bank, marsh, swamp, meadow, flat or other lowland subject to tidal action or coastal storm flowage.

**Freshwater Wetland** is an area where soils are saturated and/or inundated such that they support wetland indicator plants. The ground water and surface water hydrological regime, soils, and the vegetational community which occur in a freshwater wetland, are defined under this Ordinance based on the definition of "Bordering Vegetated Wetland" at 310 CMR 10.00. The term freshwater wetland shall include isolated vegetated wetlands which are at least 750 square feet in size as defined herein.

**Green infrastructure/Nature-based solutions** means projects and practices incorporating the natural environment, supplement natural processes, or work in concert with natural systems to provide flood, fire, or drought risk reduction, or clean water or air benefits. Green infrastructure practices protect, restore, augment, or mimic ecological processes.

**Isolated Vegetated Wetland (IVW)** shall include wetlands which meet the MassDEP manual entitled "Delineating Bordering Vegetated Wetlands Under the Massachusetts Wetlands Protection Act" (1995 and as may be amended from time to time) with respect to the delineation standards for soils, hydrology, and vegetation, are at least 750 square feet in size or greater, but that do not require connectivity to surface waters. The Conservation Commission may, through written determination, exclude areas from being considered IVW if compelling evidence is presented that the IVW exists as a result of stormwater infrastructure or other human-induced disturbance/activity. Additionally, the Conservation Commission may find that areas that would otherwise qualify as IVW, but that are dominated by a prevalence of invasive and/or non-native plant species, are non-jurisdictional.

**Passive Passage** means any pedestrian activity which does not involve the disturbance of the substrate or existing vegetative conditions.

**Person** includes any individual, groups of individuals, association, partnership, corporation, company, business organization, trust, estate, the Commonwealth, or political subdivisions thereof to the extent subject to city ordinances, administrative agencies, public or quasi-public corporations or bodies, the city, and any other legal entity, its legal representatives, agents or assigns.

**Previously Disturbed or Degraded** means areas which previously or currently lawfully contain(ed) impervious areas such as buildings, roadways, parking lots, or that were graded or altered by direct human activities not associated with natural resource or land management activities such that their present character is notably different than it would be had it not been altered. Previously Disturbed or Degraded areas may be partially vegetated provided there is a notable absence of topsoil (e.g., O or A Soil Horizon) or other compelling anthropogenic factor which documents the historic land use therein. An Applicant carries the burden of proof to demonstrate that land is Previously Disturbed or Degraded. Previously Disturbed or Degraded areas must have been the result of a lawful use/activity in order to be considered as such.

**Stream** means a body of running water that moves in a definite channel in the ground due to a hydraulic gradient. Such a waterway is a stream regardless of its relationship to other resource areas. Streams do not include manmade channels unless such channels represent channelization or redirection of historically naturally occurring streams, or were created for the purpose of functioning as a stream (such as may be done for ecological projects, or replication/mitigation).

**Structures** include, but are not limited to, commercial and industrial buildings, single family houses, multifamily dwellings, porches, decks, additions, sheds, outbuildings, pools, docks, pile supported features, septic systems and any of their components, underground storage tanks, roadways, fencing which functions as a barrier to wildlife habitat (excluding perimeter sediment controls and snow fencing), driveways, and retaining walls supporting more than a 4-foot height of fill. Stormwater management infrastructure and other utilities shall be excluded from the definition of structure.

**Vernal Pool** shall mean an area that provides breeding habitat for species that depend on ephemeral bodies of water for breeding and other life stages. To be considered vernal pools such areas must meet certification criteria as defined by the MA Natural Heritage and Endangered Species Program (NHESP). Certain areas that have been extensively altered by human activities as of the effective date of this Ordinance amendment and maintained as such continuously are not regulated as vernal pools. Such disturbed areas may include, for example, the built and utilized footprints of: paved and graveled areas, golf courses, cemeteries, playgrounds, landfills, fairgrounds, quarries, gravel pits, buildings, lawns, gardens, roadways (including median strips, areas enclosed within highway interchanges, shoulders, and embankments), railroad tracks (including ballast and embankments), and similar areas. Areas mapped by NHESP as potential vernal pools are considered vernal pools under this Ordinance unless the project proponent demonstrates to the Conservation Commission that said area is not certifiable per NHESP criteria. In evaluating the information presented to demonstrate that an area is not a vernal pool, the Commission shall consider appropriate factors, including the extent of the investigations conducted and drought/rainfall conditions, for example.

**Wildlife Habitat** means important food, shelter, migratory or overwintering areas, or breeding areas for wildlife. Certain areas that have been extensively altered by human activities as of the effective date of this Ordinance amendment and maintained as such continuously are not important wildlife habitat. Such disturbed areas may include, for example, the built and utilized footprints of: paved and graveled areas, golf courses, cemeteries, playgrounds, landfills, fairgrounds, quarries, gravel pits, buildings, lawns, gardens, roadways (including median strips, areas enclosed within highway interchanges, shoulders, and embankments), railroad tracks (including ballast and embankments), and similar areas. The Commission may, on a case-by-case basis, include some areas of human disturbance to be considered wildlife habitat if the subject area is demonstrated to be such by a competent source.

The Conservation Commission may, through its implementing regulations, expand upon or add additional definitions in order to protect the resource area values established by this Ordinance.

#### **Sec. 50-6. Conservation Commission Filing.**

No person shall remove, fill, dredge, alter or build upon, over, or within areas subject to the Conservation Commission's jurisdiction without filing a written application for a permit including such plans as may be necessary to describe such proposed activity and its effect on the environment, and receiving and complying with a permit issued pursuant to this chapter. Such application must be identical in form to a Notice of Intent or Request for Determination of

Applicability as described in M.G.L.A. c. 131, § 40 and the implementing regulations at 310 CMR 10.00. The Conservation Commission may establish a filing fee schedule for such applications.

Notwithstanding the above, activities located solely within the 100-foot Buffer Zone to inland or coastal land subject to flooding or inundation may be reviewed by the Conservation Agent to determine whether a filing is required. In such cases, the Conservation Agent's administrative determination as to whether or not to require a filing shall be based upon a review of whether the project location is so topographically separated from the flood zone that the Ordinance values do not apply and that the proposed work qualifies as a minor activity as enumerated in 310 CMR 10.02(2)(b)2.

**Sec. 50-7. Hearing on Permit Application; Access to Property.** Notice of the time and place of the hearing shall be provided by the Applicant, using a legal notice document to be provided by the Conservation Office, not less than five days prior to the hearing, by publication in a newspaper of general circulation in the City. The Conservation Office may establish submission requirements, including required notifications to other City Departments, for example. The applicant shall provide notice to all abutters in the same form as detailed in M.G.L.A. c. 131, § 40 and the implementing regulations at 310 CMR 10.00. Notwithstanding the foregoing, abutter notification is not required for Request for Determination of Applicability filings.

For the purposes of reviewing an application for permit, the Conservation Commission, its agents, officers, and employees may enter upon privately owned land for the purpose of performing their duties under this chapter.

#### **Sec. 50-8. Buffer Zone and Setbacks**

In reviewing activities within the buffer zone, the Conservation Commission shall presume the buffer zone is important to the protection of its subject resource area because activities undertaken in close proximity have been shown to have a high likelihood of adverse impact, either immediately, as a consequence of construction, or over time, as a consequence of daily operation or existence of the activities.

Adverse impacts to wetland resource areas from construction and use within their related buffer zone can include, without limitation, erosion, siltation, loss of groundwater recharge, poor water quality, loss of trees and other vegetation, and degradation of wildlife habitat. Therefore, this Ordinance gives the Commission broad discretion to permit, condition, and prohibit work within the buffer zone as the specific situation warrants.

This Ordinance further establishes the following areas within the 100-foot buffer zone, which are subject to specific requirements and greater scrutiny:

□ **25-foot No Disturbance Zone** – the first 25-feet within the buffer zone extending from an applicable resource area in which virtually no activities or work, other than passive passage, stormwater outfall components, and utilities, are permitted. No vegetation may be disturbed, leaf litter and woody debris remains in place, etc. The No Disturbance Zone shall remain unchanged



from its pre-development project state when considering both the construction period and the long-term use of the project site. The land use restrictions within the No Disturbance Zone are to be further tabulated in the implementing regulations.

□ **50-foot Mitigation Zone** – the first 50-feet within the buffer zone extending from an applicable resource area in which disturbance is prohibited without adequate mitigation as determined by the Conservation Commission. The Mitigation Zone overlaps the No Disturbance Zone detailed above and wetland resource areas defined herein.

Beyond the above-described zones, the Conservation Commission shall consider proposals for work in the buffer zone in terms of broad forms of disturbance areas. This approach is intended to allow flexibility for property use while maintaining adequate levels of wetland resource area protection. Additional buffer zone disturbance setbacks may be enumerated through implementing regulations.

In considering the types of work and activities allowable within the overall 100-foot buffer zone, and conditions to apply, the Conservation Commission shall consider the following,

1. **Values and Functions of the Resource Area.** The quantity and quality of resource values and functions should be considered explicitly in placing conditions on buffer zone work.
2. **Pre-Project Characteristics of the Site.** Ground slope, soil conditions, vegetation, and prior disturbance are some of the site-specific characteristics that shall be considered in setting conditions for work in the buffer zone.
3. **The nature of the activities proposed and their potential likelihood of impacting the Ordinance values.**
4. **The Project's implementation of climate change adaptation measures.**

As appropriate to protect the Ordinance values, the Conservation Commission may expand the minimum setbacks indicated herein or in implementing regulations.

The Applicant shall carry the burden of proof for demonstrating to the Commission's satisfaction that the proposed work or activities in the buffer zone are necessary, and that reasonable alternatives do not exist. Said demonstration may take the form of a written narrative or report with accompanying exhibits as appropriate.

Applicants wishing to rebut the presumptions set forth above shall provide the Commission with a written waiver request in accordance with Section 50-10 herein.

Notwithstanding the above, the Conservation Commission may, without requiring a formal waiver request, reduce the setbacks for:

1. Redevelopment of sites that contain previously disturbed or degraded areas regardless of whether such areas are within the relevant setback, so long as work results in an overall improvement to the applicable setback in terms of the ability of the associated resource area to protect the values of this Ordinance.

2. Projects involving work necessary to access buildable upland (including access roads, driveways, and utilities) as long as there is no other means of accessing said buildable upland, and said work meets all the other requirements of the WPA and this Ordinance.
3. If in its judgment such a reduction is necessary to accommodate a project that will have an overall benefit to the public and to the environment (such as a project addressing sewer inflow and infiltration, or an environmental enhancement project).
4. If in its judgment such a reduction is necessary to accommodate reasonable recreational access and connectivity by path, including paved or other surface multiuse paths or other least intrusive means of access, to other portions of a property or the shoreline, as long as there is no other alternative means of accessing the other portions of the property, and that such alteration does not exceed the minimum path necessary to be compliant with state and federal accessibility requirements. Such paths are to include elevated boardwalks as appropriate to minimize impacts. Such alterations may require wetlands replication.
5. Ancillary Structures associated with single-family dwellings constructed prior to the adoption of this Ordinance.

The setback requirements shall not apply to:

1. Projects requiring Chapter 91 Licenses pursuant to the water-dependent use provisions, repairs of existing Chapter 91 Licensed structures, or other coastal engineering structures deemed by the Conservation Commission to be necessary to protect the interests of the WPA and this Ordinance.
2. Projects involving the maintenance and repair, but not expansion of or change in character or use of, existing and lawfully located buildings and structures, including roads, culverts, utilities, septic systems, or storm water drainage structures.
3. Remediation activities performed under the Massachusetts Contingency Plan, provided that the activities comply with all other applicable state and local regulations.

#### **Sec. 50-9. Climate Change Resiliency.**

Climate change is an overriding public interest. Consideration of the effects of climate change on the City's wetlands resource areas is necessary to maintain the values of the Ordinance into the future. Additionally, appropriate protection of wetlands resource areas and their values will facilitate the City's climate change preparedness and resilience.

The Applicant shall, to the maximum extent practicable, integrate considerations of adaptation planning into their project to promote climate change resilience so as to protect and promote resource area values into the future. The Applicant shall consider the resource area's ability to be resilient to the effects of climate change and protect the values of the Ordinance. These considerations are especially important in Land Subject to Flooding and Coastal Storm Flowage (100-year floodplain), coastal wetlands, and other resource areas which protect the interest of Flood Control and Storm Damage Prevention, including the associated buffer zones. Resource areas may be directly impacted by extreme weather events expected to be more prevalent or



more intense due to climate change, in surface runoff of pollutants, and in wildlife habitat due to changes in temperature.

In reviewing project climate change resiliency information, the Conservation Commission shall give consideration as to the size and scale of the project and the extent to which resource area impacts are avoided, minimized, and mitigated. Green infrastructure/nature-based solutions are preferred to demonstrate compliance with the climate change adaptation and mitigation resource area value.

The Conservation Commission may, through implementing regulations, adopt additional provisions and mapping related to resource area values respective of climate change in accordance with best available science. Mapping adopted by the Conservation Commission may include, without limitation, projections of Sea Level Rise and future storm events/flood zones for project proponents to consider in applications for work submitted to the Conservation Commission.

### **Sea Level Rise Considerations**

The City of Salem recognizes the relative rise in elevation of the sea surface over time. Those portions of coastal floodplains which are immediately landward of salt marshes, coastal beaches, barrier beaches, coastal dunes or coastal banks require special protection as they are likely to be in a state of transition as the entire complex of coastal wetland resources gradually moves landward due to rising relative sea levels.

Development activities carried out within the transitional areas of coastal floodplains will be subject to increased storm damage and may interfere with the natural landward migration of the adjacent coastal resource areas. Therefore, the Salem Conservation Commission may adopt, through implementing regulations, performance standards for coastal resource areas with respect to Sea Level Rise.

### **Sec. 50-10. Waiver Criteria.**

An Applicant may seek relief from the standards of the Ordinance and any implementing regulation by requesting a waiver to the applicable standards. The Commission may, at its discretion, grant a waiver to the standards of the Ordinance and regulations based on the Applicant's clear and convincing demonstration of the following:

1. The proposed land-use activity(ies) conforms with the goals and statutory interests of the Ordinance and regulations adopted thereunder, and the activity(ies), including proposed mitigation measures, will have an insignificant impact on the values protected by this Ordinance;
2. The relief requested by the project proponent is the minimum waiver necessary to achieve the project goals and to allow for reasonable use of the property;
3. The requested waiver is not the result of any prior action of the project proponent or any predecessor in title (i.e., the Applicant must document that the waiver is not the result of a self-created or self-imposed hardship);

4. The granting of the waiver will not hinder the ability of wetland resource areas or buffer zones to provide climate mitigation or protect the adjacent landscape from storm surge as anticipated based on best available information;

5. Where applicable, work within required setbacks noted herein shall not result in adverse impacts to the resource area values. Project proponents shall provide clear documentation to the Conservation Commission as to the means and methods for avoiding construction-phase impacts and impacts from the future existence of the project within setbacks; and

6. The Applicant shall demonstrate that all other feasible project alternatives to avoid or minimize impacts have been exhausted, including seeking relief from municipal zoning provisions as applicable.

Relief in the form of a waiver to a provision of the Ordinance does not remove the Applicant's responsibility for compliance with all other requirements of the Ordinance.

#### **Sec. 50-11. Severability.**

The invalidity of any section or provision of this Ordinance shall not invalidate any other section or provision thereof, nor shall it invalidate any permit, approval or determination which previously has been issued.

#### **Sec. 50-12. Relationship to State Statute.**

The Conservation Commission shall not impose additional or more stringent conditions pursuant to M.G.L.A. c. 131, § 40 than it imposes pursuant to this chapter, nor shall it require an applicant filing a notice of intention pursuant to M.G.L.A. c. 131, § 40 to provide materials or data in addition to those required pursuant to this chapter.

**Restoration of land in violation.** Consistent with M.G.L.A. c. 131, § 40, any person who purchases, inherits or otherwise acquires real estate upon which work has been done in violation of this chapter or in violation of any permit issued pursuant to this chapter shall forthwith comply with any such order or restore such land to its conditions prior to any such violation; provided, however, that no action, civil or criminal, shall be brought against such person unless commenced within three years following the date of acquisition of the real estate by such person.

#### **Sec. 50-13. Promulgation of Regulations.**

After due notice and public hearing, the Conservation Commission may promulgate rules and regulations to effectuate the purposes of this chapter. Failure by the Conservation Commission to promulgate such rules and regulations or a legal declaration of their invalidity by a court of law shall not act to suspend or invalidate the effect of this chapter.

#### **Sec. 50-14. Burden of Proof.**

The Applicant shall have the burden of proving by a preponderance of the credible evidence that the work proposed in the application for the permit required by this chapter will not harm the interests protected by this chapter. Failure to provide adequate evidence to the Conservation

Commission supporting a determination that the proposed work will not harm the values protected by this chapter shall be sufficient cause for the Conservation Commission to deny a permit or to grant a permit with conditions or, in the Conservation Commission's discretion, to continue the hearing to another date to enable the Applicant or others to present additional evidence.

#### **Sec. 50-15. Security.**

The Conservation Commission may require, as a permit condition, that the performance and observance of other conditions be secured by one or both of the following methods:

1. A bond or deposit of money or negotiable securities in an amount determined by the Conservation Commission to be sufficient and payable to the Conservation Commission upon default.
2. A conservation restriction, easement or other covenant running with the land, executed and properly recorded or registered, in the case of registered land, with the Essex South District of Registry of Deeds.

#### **Sec. 50-16. Appeal.**

A decision of the Conservation Commission shall be reviewable in the Superior Court in accordance with M.G.L.A. c. 249, § 4.

#### **Sec. 50-17. Enforcement.**

Any person who violates any section of this chapter or any condition of a permit issued pursuant to this chapter shall be punished by fines as provided in Section 1-10 (c) – Noncriminal disposition of ordinance violations.. Each day or portion thereof during which a violation continues shall constitute a separate offense; if more than one, each condition violated shall constitute a separate offense. Upon request of the Conservation Commission or of the City Council, the Mayor, and City Solicitor shall take such legal action as may be necessary to enforce this chapter and permits issued pursuant to this chapter.

#### **Sec. 50-18. Effective Date.**

This Ordinance Amendment becomes effective upon final passage and signature of the Mayor and shall apply to all Notices of Intent filed on or after that date and any subsequent procedures related to such filings made on or after that date. This Ordinance Amendment shall not apply to projects for which a Notice of Intent was filed (and for which an Order of Conditions remains valid) prior to the effective date."

**Section 2.** This Ordinance shall take effect as provided by the City Charter.

In City Council January 27, 2022

Referred to the Committee on Ordinances, Licenses and Legal Affairs co-posted with the Committee of the Whole

In City Council March 10, 2022

Adopted for first passage by roll call vote of 11 yeas, 0 nays and 0 absent

In City Council March 24, 2022

Adopted for second passage by roll call vote of 11 yeas, 0 nays, and 0 absent

Approved by the Mayor on March 28, 2022

ATTEST:

  
ILENE SIMONS  
CITY CLERK