



At our meeting in September, members asked for more information about the Lake Waramaug Association's approach to land use matters. We welcome this opportunity to share more details about how we fulfill our longstanding mission.

Since its founding nearly 100 years ago, the Lake Waramaug Association (LWA) has sought to preserve and protect Lake Waramaug, and involvement with matters of land use around the Lake has been a key part of our work. Our corporate charter defines our mission "to preserve Lake Waramaug and its environs" by "expressing concern for the ecology of the lake and its environs," "promoting uniform zoning, health, sanitation and other executive or administrative regulations and standards of the towns bordering the lake," and "promoting the enforcement of State and local regulations and water safety standards."

The three towns surrounding the Lake have adopted zoning and wetlands regulations (within the general regulatory framework established by the State of Connecticut) to ensure appropriate land use in this sensitive area. LWA's mission is to do our best to ensure that these public regulations are applied in as clear, rule-based, and predictable a manner as possible. A consistent public regulatory process is the most effective way to ensure that the towns' land use decisions are fair and effective.

Much of the recent activity around the Lake has involved the redevelopment of relatively small pre-existing lots to install larger, new houses in difficult locations. This activity has greatly increased the complexity of the towns' land use review processes, especially given the concentration and cumulative impacts of so many new projects within the area directly surrounding the Lake.

The clustering of construction activity around the Lake increases the potential for adverse impacts from land disturbance and construction. Many of the towns' regulations – for example those that relate to building setbacks, wetlands, impermeable surfaces, and limitations on non-conforming properties – are particularly critical to the preservation of environmental and scenic values here. These impacts can be particularly acute for non-conforming properties when owners seek to replace or expand pre-existing buildings. In many cases, the enlargement of these older buildings is not permitted under the protections now specified in the towns' regulations. While the regulations affirm owners' right to enjoy and maintain such non-conforming properties, they also state that if these older buildings are ever modified, any additional construction must conform to the regulations' current standards.

In the past, LWA's land use consultant, Tom McGowan, along with other members of the LWA Board, reviewed all applications for development around the Lake and either appeared at the public meetings or submitted written comments to the various town commissions on behalf of LWA. However, at a November 2014 meeting of LWA's Board of Directors, Tom urged the Board to hire professionals to

evaluate land use applications. He advised us that the issues raised by certain applications were becoming more numerous and complex. In order to comment effectively on these applications, he said that it is important for LWA to offer the comments of qualified professional advisors to address the plans presented by the applicants' own engineers and attorneys. This approach is respectful both to the applicants and to the commissioners and, consistent with LWA's charter, helps to support the towns' public regulatory processes. It is our hope that these informed professional comments can help to clarify the issues both for the homeowners and the commissioners. It is important to remember that the commissioners who serve our towns are volunteers and, although they are dedicated, diligent, and experienced in their roles, they are not themselves professional engineers or attorneys.

When property owners have approached LWA prior to submitting their applications to the towns, we have shared our comments prior to the start of formal public meetings. However, this can be difficult because land use applications are often filed at the last minute, so that there is not time to do so prior to the meeting. As you may have heard, the Lake Waramaug Task Force has recently initiated a plan to offer a free consultation with Sean Hayden of the Northwest Conservation District to anyone planning to undertake a construction or landscape project around the Lake. Sean is well-versed in conservation design options and we hope that applicants will take advantage of this service so as to incorporate best practices in their thinking prior to formulating plans with their engineers.

With the unprecedented number of construction projects around Lake Waramaug, it is now more important than ever that we all work together to ensure that all projects are in compliance with the towns' regulations and that they present no threat to the Lake and its surroundings.

Please feel free to contact us at lakewaramaugassociation@gmail.com if you have any questions, or refer to the [Building and Landscape section](#) here.