

The Municipal Council
City of Attleboro

March 24, 2026

Dear City Councilors:

The Board of Directors of the Attleboro Land Trust voted unanimously to endorse the revised city ordinance on wetlands, extending the “no disturb zone” from 25 feet to 50 feet. We consider this a crucial step in reaching a sustainable strategy for balancing development with the protection of natural resources here in Attleboro.

The rapid development of previously undeveloped open spaces has adversely affected the wetlands that are critical to the city’s natural environment. With the construction of new homes, infrastructure, and septic systems, increased pollution and other human impacts may exceed the capability of adjacent wetlands and their buffer zones to attenuate these effects. This presents a risk to water quality, diminishes habitats for wildlife dependent on wetlands, and disrupts the intricate ecosystems unique to these environments.

Wetland buffer zones provide many crucial functions beneficial to Attleboro residents. Vegetated buffer strips function as natural filters for pollutants, thereby protecting water quality in wetlands, rivers, and lakes (critical sources for drinking water recharge). Buffer zones also provide flood storage capacity, promoting infiltration rather than rapid runoff, which reduces the potential for erosion and sedimentation. Buffer strips are crucial habitats for a variety of wildlife, providing places to nest, feed, find cover, and function as wildlife travel corridors within developed areas. Additionally, buffer zones help shield sensitive wetland dependent species from disruptions caused by human activities and as upland habitats become increasingly developed, wetlands and buffer strips have grown in importance even for typically upland species like white-tailed deer.

In February 2013, the Town of Tewksbury Conservation Commission By-Law Subcommittee conducted a thorough review of scientific research called the Review of Wetland Resource Area Buffer Zone Distances. Their findings showed that the most effective vegetated buffers, comparing buffer width to removal of contaminants, are about 25 meters (approximately 75 feet) wide. Beyond this width, adding more width to the buffer brings only minor improvements in sediment removal. For removing both total suspended solids (TSS) and nitrogen, the optimal buffer width is around 60 meters (about 200 feet), while phosphorus removal is most efficient with buffer widths near 75 meters (roughly 250 feet).

Current studies indicate that a 25-foot buffer is too narrow to effectively remove sediment and pollutants or provide adequate wildlife habitat, particularly on steep slopes, in areas with silty/clay soils or a lack of vegetation, or where runoff is highly polluted. Increasing the buffer to 50 feet, as proposed in this ordinance, will most certainly enhance water quality and wildlife habitats in Attleboro's wetlands. Please support this new ordinance that will begin to move Attleboro into a new era of sustainable development.

Thank you for your consideration.

Jason Burby
President