

Orford Conservation Commission
Special working session on High Bridge Road bridge project
Meeting Minutes January 6, 2026
Meeting held in-person in Niles Room at the Town Offices

Present: Commissioners: Bob Hedges (Chair), Ted Cooley (Vice-Chair), Dave Hubbard, Harry Pease, Adair Mulligan; Alternates: Emily Bryant, Fran Plaisted, John Miller. Selectboard representative: Kevin Follensbee;

Meeting called to order: 7:02 PM. Emily Bryant and John Miller were seated as Commissioners.

Before the meeting, Bob, Harry, and David had drafted and distributed to the commissioners a draft warrant article for 2026 Town meeting about replacing the High Bridge road bridge with a pedestrian bridge.

1. Schedule for the warrant article:

- a. 1/9 (Fri): Submit warrant article to Selectboard.
- b. 1/14 (Wed): Selectboard reviews the article and votes whether to accept the article and whether to support it. If they don't accept it, it could still go on the warrant if it is petitioned. Emily and Ted will attend the meeting.
- c. 1/27 (Tues): public hearing on warrant.
- d. 2/3 (Tues) Deadline to submit a petitioned article.
- e. 3/10 (Tues): Town Meeting 2. Discussion:
 - a. It was noted that construction might have to extend into 2027, given the time frame for getting grants.
 - b. To make the process of using the grant funds simpler, the funds should be designated as a donation to the Conservation Fund.
 - c. There was discussion of what number to put in as the approximate cost and it was noted that this number can be adjusted before the warrant goes to the printer or at Town Meeting.
 - d. Kevin noted that the budget committee will add a sentence to each warrant saying whether that article affects the 2026 (or future) tax rates. This article would not affect the tax rate since fund will come from the Conservation Fund, grants, and donations.

3. The Proposed Warrant article:

To see if the Town will vote to authorize the Selectboard, with the Orford Conservation Commission acting as its agent, to renovate the closed High Bridge Road bridge and replace it with a pedestrian bridge at the Archertown Brook gorge that supports recreational use and preserves the historic character of the existing stone abutments. The existing bridge has been red listed by the State of New Hampshire and closed to vehicular traffic since 2015. This article is in accordance with the amendment to Article 10 adopted at the 2025 Orford Town Meeting. The estimated cost in 2025 to replace the bridge for vehicular use was approximately \$1,500,000, with the Town responsible for 20 percent of that cost (\$300,000). The current estimated cost to remove the

damaged elements of the existing bridge and to design and construct a pedestrian bridge on its historic abutments is approximately \$100,000. The required project funding would come from the Orford Conservation Fund (up to 20 percent, or approximately \$20,000) and from foundation grants and private donations (approximately \$80,000). By relying on foundation grants and private donations, no new Town taxpayer funding would be required. The proposed pedestrian bridge would become a valuable recreational and historic asset for the Town of Orford.

Motion: John moved to accept the language of the draft warrant article. Harry seconded. The motion passed.

Motion: Harry moved to adjourn the meeting. Adair seconded. The motion passed. The meeting was adjourned at 7:28.

Minutes taken by Emily Bryant