

Conroy: Conservation for the Common Good
Wayland & Sudbury Town Crier
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Our natural environment is a precious and finite resource. It is the foundation of our quality of life and of our capacity to pursue the common good. Protecting our environment, therefore, should be a top priority on our public policy agenda.

Unfortunately, too often this is not the case for our government and industry leaders, in part because it is a challenging, or "inconvenient" issue, as Al Gore calls it. Yet almost everyone agrees that we must safeguard our parks, fields, open spaces, marshes and waterways and conserve natural resources in ways that protect our environment, create new jobs, and ultimately enhance our national security.

The challenge of preserving the environment is often inconvenient because it requires thinking beyond the short term, and because it involves so many powerful stakeholders - municipalities, states, nations and major industries, including housing, water distribution, manufacturing, automobiles, oil and gas, fishing, electrical power generation, mining and lumber, among others. Our environment is clearly the underdog when it comes to the influence of such mighty and important interests. This is why support from citizens at the grassroots level and from local public officials is so important to environmental conservation.

Locally, preserving the environment can mean prudent zoning policies and practices. The conservation commissions in Lincoln, Sudbury and Wayland perform admirable services on behalf of our towns by utilizing the Wetlands and Water Resources Bylaws to protect our water supply, wildlife and natural habitat. With the Wayland Town Center project, we have both a responsibility and opportunity to promote "green" development, ensuring that natural materials are used as much as possible, stormwater runoff is minimized, and the architectural character of the development is in keeping with Wayland's environmental ethos. The developer might even find it advantageous to explore a partnership with Russell's Garden Center across the street that sets a new standard for environmentally sound development.

Within our towns of Lincoln, Sudbury and Wayland, it is also important to preserve open space. To this end, the Sudbury Valley Trustees and the Lincoln Land Conservation Trust have purchased or protected thousands of acres of land so that we, our children, and our children's children can enjoy them. In fact, towns like ours that are interested in balancing development with open space preservation could use more extensive or creative financing at the state level to continue to purchase undeveloped land. Were I elected state representative, I would explore new financing mechanisms for open space land purchase that would reap long-term benefits for the common good.

We should also be good stewards of our natural resources. Lake Cochituate and Dudley Pond milfoil cleanup efforts could be designed in accordance with best practices that are developed at the state level, which has access to what 300 towns in the commonwealth are doing to eradicate the milfoil weed. The Raytheon cleanup should be actively managed to ensure it occurs on time and appropriately. This could be an opportunity for a state representative to demonstrate leadership and pro-activity. And we should prevent the problem from recurring by ensuring that hazardous materials are never again produced in our communities.

Preserving our environment also means making smart and ecologically sound investment decisions. At the state level, we should invest in renewable energy sources and clean power generation. Massachusetts has a great opportunity - with our scientists, entrepreneurs, private capital and natural resources - to be a leader in the

development of clean energy. We should explore public-private partnerships - working with all those industries that have a stake in the environment - to create a statewide competitive advantage that accrues economic and environmental benefits to all of us in the commonwealth. Investments in new wind and solar technologies can create new jobs and new sources of energy for our businesses and our homes. Indeed, Massachusetts can be a leader in helping our nation shift from using coal and oil to cleaner fuel production, which would reduce our dependence on fossil fuels and thereby enhance our national security.

One of the great attributes of this commonwealth and this country is our knack for leading innovation and change. If we challenge our scientists, engineers and business leaders to use their creativity and resourcefulness to pioneer environmentally sound ways to grow our economy and create jobs, the opportunity for advancement and progress is boundless. And, as the economies of other countries grow around the world, they will demand the expertise that we have developed and our environmentally sound technologies and approaches. The result could be a stronger economy here and a cleaner, safer environment throughout the world. Massachusetts should be in the forefront of such innovation, harnessing new ideas with public and private sector leadership and investment.

As individuals, we must lead by example through simple, yet important activities - buying hybrid and fuel-efficient cars, diligently recycling plastic and paper goods, conserving water, using natural instead of chemical lawn fertilizers, and building houses with "green" materials and features.

In small ways, as a group of citizens at the grassroots level, we can make a big difference in preserving our environment. Let's demand more from our elected officials and from the businesses at which we work, and push an "inconvenient" topic toward the top of our public policy agenda. If elected, conservation for the common good will be one of my top priorities. Our towns, our environment and our children deserve it.

Tom Conroy, who has worked in the both the public and the private sectors, is running as a Democrat for state representative in the Thirteenth Middlesex District, which includes Lincoln, Sudbury and Wayland.