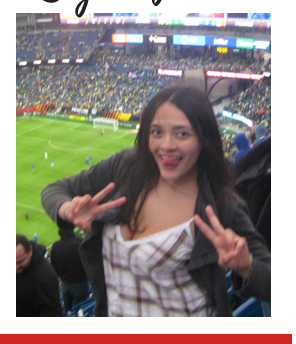
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Signing off!



Notice on golf facility decision amid opposition

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An update on whether the University of Connecticut will assess the environmental impact of a golf facility proposal continues to be delayed after growing opposition over the site location, according to the UConn spokesperson.

An approximate schedule, given at a Jan. 7 public scoping meeting for the facility, said a post-scoping notice would be available in February, announcing whether an Environmental Impact Evaluation is needed. The Connecticut Environmental Policy Act (CEPA) requires proposals by state agencies like UConn that could significantly affect the environment to determine what evaluation steps are needed, according to the Office of Policy and Management.

Stephanie Reitz, the university spokesperson, said the notice will include one of three possible recommendations: for the project to not to go forward, for an Environmental Impact Evaluation to be conducted or to continue pursuing the golf facility without an evaluation. Reitz said in March that the target date for the post-scoping notice was delayed until April as consultants actively worked on it.

May is the new target date for the post-scoping notice announcing UConn's recommendation for the facility, Reitz said.

"Although UConn had targeted the information to be finalized this month, the university needed more time to address the large volume of inquiries received about the proposal and instead expects to finalize and publish it in May," Reitz said.

Inquiries into the project were accepted between Dec. 16, 2025, when the proposal was published in the Connecticut Environmental Monitor, and Jan. 16, 2026. Those opposing the project have organized in various ways since the public comment period ended.

Laura Tordenti, a resident who lives directly across from the proposal, was one of the organizers for a community information meeting on the facility held at the Mansfield Public Library on April 20. The meeting maxed out the library's parking lot capacity and was attended by around 150 of mostly concerned Mansfield residents and UConn students.

Records received by The Daily Campus show that Mansfield residents like Tordenti have been raising concerns about golf facility plans over the UConn Conifer Collection for multiple years. Tordenti was one of the first to be made aware about the scoping notice for the facility after communicating with Laura Cruickshank, the retired associate vice president of university planning, design and construction, about a possible golf facility in July 2023.

"Our office is unaware of any plans or funding to physically develop or alter the property at this time, there has been no change to that status since our meeting with you... last summer," Cruickshank wrote to Tordenti in 2023.

The status changed when UConn's director of site planning, Sean Vasington, reached out to Tordenti on Dec. 15, 2025, one day before the scoping notice was posted to the Connecticut Environmental Monitor.

"I am following up on Laura's last email and our commitment to let you know we are proceeding with a project for the previously developed portion of the property," Vasington wrote, noting how a scoping notice would appear the next morning and that the CEPA comment period would end one month afterward.

Tordenti said during the community information meeting that it wasn't just the plans for the facility that concerned her, but UConn's handling of them too.

"The timing is a bit suspect," Tordenti said during the meeting.



Chris Donnelly for the golf facility story and photos he took during a 2009 maintenance trip to the confier collection. Donnelly is a retired ubran forestry coordinator. PHOTO COURTESY OF CHRIS DONNELLY.

Tordenti expanded on the concern about when the notice was released in a Dec. 16 response to Vasington's update on the project.

"Notifying me... of the University's intentions on December 15, while the community is preoccupied with the holidays and the University is entering a semester break, is troubling," Tordenti wrote. "It only reinforces the perception — of which you are well aware — that the University is, yet again, bulldozing its way through Storrs without regard for the community's needs."

While UConn has yet to release the post-scoping notice, a frequently asked questions portion of the project's webpage on UConn's website mentions meeting with concerned residents and addressing their concerns.

"While funding was not identified until late 2025 to substantiate a project, preplanning activities for identifying potential study sites and completion of a land and tree survey occurred in 2023," the FAQ said. "That effort included a meeting with nearby residents who were concerned about the survey work they viewed near their property lines."

It isn't just residents who are concerned about the proposal.

Among the student attendees of the community information meeting was Julia Talbert-Slagle, who said she was inspired by everyone at the library to help organize a campus protest opposing the development over the UConn Conifer Collection. The protest was held at 11 a.m. on Wednesday outside of the Student Union on Fairfield Way and involved chants about water quality impacts and drawing trees with chalk on the walkway.

The crowd drew a similar mixed array of around 100 students, alumni and Mansfield residents who had shown up to the community information meeting. One of them was Amy Marwood, an alumnus from 1984 who said the location has more potential than UConn acknowledged.

"You can do so much with it besides say it's a mess and cut it down," Marwood said about the UConn Conifer Collection.

> **"The university, quite honestly, has abandoned their land grant mission."**
> **ROBERT ESELBY**

UConn's FAQ said that operating Waxman's nursery wasn't as attainable since his passing.

"[O]perations could not be sustained at the property long after his passing, and it has not been an active research site for more than a decade," the FAQ said.

A retired urban forestry coordinator of the Connecticut Department of Energy and Environmental Protection, Chris Donnelly, mentioned that he had previously organized a workday to maintain the site.

"During this workday, a couple dozen arborists and others volunteered their time to prune trees, remove vines and address other management and maintenance needs within the Conifer Collection. I have also visited the Collection on several other occasions and so am familiar with its extent and importance," Donnelly wrote.

Donnelly said that while he isn't aware of the current health and status of the collection, if it was a matter of clearing vines and removing dead wood, he said it could be done.

"It would be good for the university's sake in terms of its [land grant] mission to take this very seriously," Donnelly said.

Robert Eselby, a 2025 UConn graduate pursuing a master's in plant breeding and molecular genetics at the University of Minnesota, said he thinks the project doesn't align with UConn's status as a land grant university.

"The university, quite honestly, has abandoned their land grant mission," Eselby said, adding that the UConn Conifer Collection has the largest collection of dwarf conifers in the world.

Eselby said the conifers have "extreme ornamental value" which could be used to help future researchers. He challenged some of the claims in the FAQ about the current conditions.

"His dwarf conifers are still in excellent condition, they're absolutely beautiful," Eselby said, noting how in recent site visits he's found metal tags of named specimens.

One of the reasons UConn has given support to development over the unmaintained UConn Conifer Collection is the fact that Waxman's specimens are also displayed at the New York Botanical Garden and Bartlett Arboretum.

Joshua Appel, an employee at Bartlett Arboretum, said that four of the 12 Waxman specimens given to the arboretum are still alive with three of them being in good condition and one being "mixed."

He said that recently the museum spent a couple thousand dollars relocating a small tree by a greenhouse they were renovating and speculated that it would cost a lot to relocate any of Waxman's other specimens.

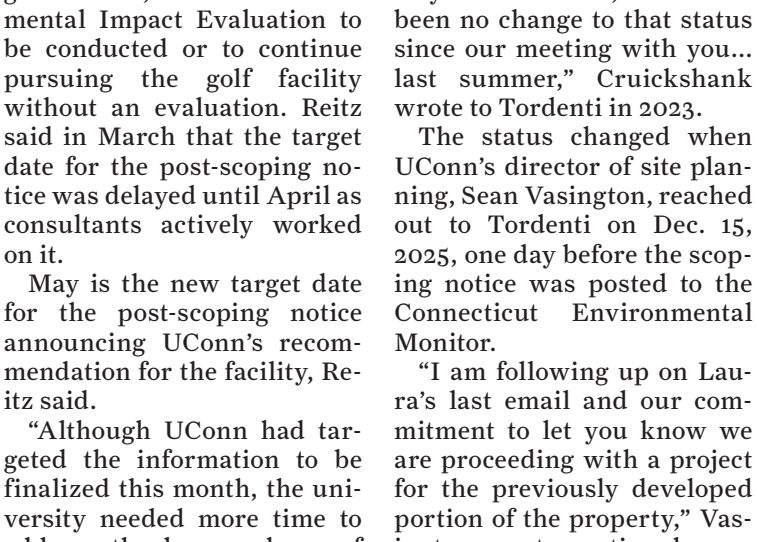


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