



TOWN OF GROTON
Conservation Commission
173 Main Street
Groton, MA 01450
(978) 448-1106
Fax: 978-448-1113
ngualco@townofgroton.org



Groton Conservation Commission
Meeting Minutes – July 9, 2019

Groton Electric Light Department Meeting Room (21 Station Ave, Groton, Massachusetts)

Present: Laurence J. Hurley, Vice Chair; Eileen McHugh, Clerk; Bruce Easom; Peter Morrison, Olin Lathrop; Marshall Giguere

Not present: John Smigelski, Chairman

Others present: Nikolis Gualco, Conservation Administrator, Town of Groton.

6:30 PM Vice Chairman Hurley called the meeting to order.

The Commission began with item **1.1 RDA, Parcel 12-162, Baby Beach Road**. The Application, David Jones, presented his project, which involves the installation of a seasonal roll-out dock. O. Lathrop asked what the dock will sit on to which D. Jones replied it will sit directly on the ground (sand) on a flat support. M. Giguere about the Chapter 91 implications of the project. N. Gualco stated that because the proposed dock would be seasonal, the Town's harbor master would need to approve the dock placement. A discussion ensued where exactly on the property the dock will be located. D. Jones sketched on a photograph he provided the approx. location of the dock. At this time, N. Gualco listed several other considerations, which included Natural Heritage, Zoning Board of Appeals, Board of Health. The Commission discussed this for several minutes. N. Gualco stated he would put D. Jones in touch with the appropriate review biologists at Natural Heritage. The Commission then asked D. Jones for permission to continue the meeting to allow time for Natural Heritage to weigh in on any requirements under the Mass. Endangered Species Act (MESA).

Upon a motion by E. McHugh, seconded by P. Morrison, it was:

VOTED: to continue the meeting until July 23, 2019 to allow time for Natural Heritage to review the project. The motion passed by a unanimous vote.

The Commission then moved to item **1.2 Discussion with Diana Mendel**. D. Mendel provided a proposal explaining her plans to install a bat box on one of three conservation properties (Shattuck Homestead, Surrenden Farm, Sargisson Beach). She stated that this would be her capstone project for a Girl Scout Gold Award. The project, Mendel continued, was inspired by research white nose syndrome and the role bats play in the ecosystem. M. Giguere asked about her intended methods for fastening the bat boxes to the tree. E. McHugh said she supported the project but wanted to see more details in writing presented at a future meeting regarding where/how the box would be installed. P. Morrison stated that he would require the use of aluminum nails. D. Mendel agreed to provide more details about her project for the next meeting on July 23, 2019.

The Commission then moved to item **1.3 NOI (cont.), 19 Baby Beach Road**. The Applicant, Scott Dean, provided an update on the status of the NOI. E. McHugh asked if the applicant was able to find evidence of the historic location of the lower retaining wall. S. Dean stated he did not find anything and reminded the Commission that he has only lived in the house for a little over one year. B. Easom stated that he wanted to see a larger site plan. N. Gualco commented that he has a full-size plan for the property for a previous NOI filing (the installation of the tight tank). At this time, a discussion ensued about how the applicant could memorialize/document the new wall using on-site fixed locations, specifically using the septic tank cover and a nearby utility pole with a survey nail. E. McHugh summarized that at the next meeting the Commission would like to see measurements from the septic cover and utility pole as discussed to specific points on the lower retaining wall. E. McHugh drew a sketch describing the required measurements and provided it to S. Dean. N. Gualco stated he would bring the full-size site-plan to the next meeting for review.

Upon a motion by E. McHugh, seconded by P. Morrison, it was:

VOTED: to continue the meeting until July 23, 2019 to allow time for the applicant to take measurements requested by the Commission.

The Commission then moved to 2.0 General Business, item **2.1.1 Land Management – Shattuck Homestead**. N. Gualco shared that members of the Commission and members of the public had successfully conducted a wildlife sweep ahead of mower. O. Lathrop shared a few highlights of the morning and N. Gualco provided a few photos of post-mowing conditions. The plan is to treat the black swallow-wort re-growth later this summer/early fall utilizing a boom sprayer.

The Commission then moved to item **2.1.2 Land Management – Other Land Management Business** and discussed mowing needs of the Eliades Conservation Area. The Pacer Way field needs to be mowed after September 15 as approved in the NHESP approved management plan. The Smith Street field is mowed annually and the commission inquired why. A discussion ensued about requirements for mowing the field and N. Gualco said he would research the file for management requirements.

The Commission then moved to item **2.2.1 Enforcement & Violation, 10 Rustic Trail**. N. Gualco shared that the homeowner has requested an extension from July 8 to July 22 for the Notice of Intent he is required by the recently issued Enforcement Order to file. He stated reason was a previously scheduled vacation around the week of July 4, which did not give him the time he needed to adequately complete the NOI application.

Upon a motion by O. Lathrop, seconded by E. McHugh, it was:

VOTED: to extent the NOI deadline from July 8 to July 22 for the Enforcement Order issued to 10 Rustic Trail. The vote passed by a majority vote only with M. Giguere ‘NAY.’”

The Commission then moved to item **2.3.1 Land Acquisition, Trimper parcel acquisition (Planning Board & LAND Grant updates)**. N. Gualco reported that as of July 8, the LAND Grant Application had been submitted to the Division of Conservation Services.

The Commission then moved to item **2.3.2 Land Acquisition, MassWildlife Habitat Grant**. N. Gualco presented a brief summary of the grant and encouraged discussion about whether the Commission should

apply this year. At this time the Commission discussed several possible projects and the possibility of forming a working group to pursue this and similar grants. B. Eason offered to take the lead on the wildlife grant.

The Commission then moved to item **2.4.1 Gibbet Hill Trail Bridge, MassDEP#169-1136**. N. Gualco reported that he spoke with the MassDEP Circuit Rider who suggested that the Town should re-apply for the now expired Order of Conditions. N. Gualco offered to get the NOI filed as soon as possible.

The Commission then moved to item **2.4.2 Exercise on ‘the State of the Commission’**. Prior to the meeting, N. Gualco distributed a four-question survey to each Commissioner. He instructed them that the questions were based on discussions he had had with various Commissioners over the past two-years and it was his intent that this discussion serve as a mini “check-in” on the state of things. Below, please find a brief summary of this discussion:

1. *Do you believe that some of the important work of the Conservation Commission is being neglected due to time constraints?*

P. Morrison commented that he believed this to be so. M. Giguere agreed and referenced the difficulty in managing volunteer-led monitoring of conservation restrictions and Commission-controlled properties. He continued by recounting his experience supervising past stewardship activities. He concluded and stated that in his experience volunteers were usually eager to monitor conservation properties near their homes, but were not as eager to help on tasks such as grant writing. E. McHugh commented that we may want to re-think the approach and pointed out that most of the described stewardship activities could be described as solo-work and suggested that some volunteers may prefer group-work. The topic of the Associate Members of the Commission was referenced – a group that has mostly been dormant for a few years – and how this group could be re-shaped from “Jr. Commissioners” to more of a “friends-of group” to support the Commission with specific targeted tasks (i.e., grant writing).

2. *Do you believe the current Cons. Comm. is implementing the Wetlands Protection Act and the Bylaw consistently?*

E. McHugh referenced the recent RDA application for 19 Baby Beach Road where the Commission vote was split and questioned why (using this as a case study) it was so difficult to come to an agreement on. B. Eason commented that he believes that any work within a resource area necessitates the filing of a Notice of Intent. O. Lathrop opined that in cases with the Commission are split he is content with the process, even if he ends up on the losing side, if everyone gets a chance to share their perspectives. B. Eason commented that the Commission could benefit from a review of the Town’s Wetlands Bylaw and suggested adding this type of review to future agenda dates. A discussion then ensued about a means of documenting impacts permitted to the buffer zone using a tracking system utilizing the following categories: area of impact (square footage); whether the impact is a permanent

structure, grading, clearing, etc.; and an explanation on why the impact was allowed. E. McHugh concurred with the idea of tracking impacts and suggested that for larger projects, such as NOIs, the Commission could require shapefiles for engineered plans to maintain a database on projects as well as the ‘nibbling’ of buffer zone over time.

3. *What do you believe is the overall impression the town should have of the Conservation Commission?*

The Commission discussed this and overall believed that the impression of the Commission is good and in much better shape than the days of ‘midnight septic system.’

4. *Are there steps we could be taking towards our vision of ourselves and the public perception?*

O. Lathrop stated that he wants the Commission to be known as people who are working to conserve Groton’s wild places. E. McHugh commented that the Commission needs to be aware of the perspective some residents hold that the Commission spends too much money on buying lands. A discussion ensued on this topic. B. Easom referenced a recent study UMass Amherst conducted that evaluated the cost of community services in four communities across the state. He continued and stated that he takes a big picture view of Groton and believes that the Commission should work to preserve land until either the last parcel is developed or conserved. E. McHugh shared that the Commission needs to also balance needed management and referenced sites infested with invasive species that are highly visible (e.g., William’s Land, off Chicopee Row). She continued by stating that in general the Commission could benefit from more public relation work.

2.4.3 Open Space & Recreation Plan. N. Gualco commented that he had still not heard back from Roberta Cameron (Community Opportunities Group) about her contract and the continued work of updating the OSRP.

2.5 Committee Updates/Announcements, Sargisson Beach Committee. L. Hurley shared that the beach committee has prepared a description of work for the road improvement project.

9:20 PM E. McHugh made a motion, seconded by M. Giguere, to adjourn the public meeting. The motion passed by a unanimous voice.

Minutes approved: August 27, 2019

Minutes respectfully submitted by Nikolis Gualco.