



Conservation Commission Meeting

Tuesday, September 24, 2024 at 6:30 PM

Town Hall: Second Floor Meeting Room, 173 Main Street Groton, MA

OPTION TO JOIN REMOTELY

Present: Larry Hurley, Vice Chair; Kim Kuliesis, Clerk; Alison Hamilton, Olin Lathrop, Peter Morrison, John Smigelski

Absent: Bruce Easom, Chair

Others Present: Charlotte Steeves, Conservation Administrator

1. APPOINTMENTS

6:30 PM- Minor Change Request- 342 Main St (Florence Roche) 169-1227

Applicant: Town of Groton Representatives Steve Michener, Studio G, Leena Long, Brian Johnson, Leftfield, and Jeffrey Pilat

C. Steeves informed the Commission that the Town is requesting a minor modification to add an extra lane entering the Florence Roche site to help alleviate traffic on Main Street. M. Haddad explained that for the past two and a half years, two lanes have been used in and out of the site, and the request is to make this a permanent feature. He emphasized that the two lanes allow for safer traffic and stated that the Police Chief has also recommended this change.

S. Michener added that making the temporary lane permanent would benefit both Main Street and the campus by reducing congestion. The new lane would allow traffic entering the site to either head directly to the drop-off area or access the middle school. He mentioned that if there were concerns about the 50-foot buffer zone, they could start the extra lane further from the road, although traffic would not be remediated.

P. Morrison pointed out that the sidewalk, being the closest impervious surface to the wetland, would be replaced regardless since it is pre-existing. He raised concerns about a storm drain located in the middle of the road and questioned how runoff down the hill would be managed. J. Pilat assured the Commission that the catch basin would be modified, or an additional storm drain would be added, and the final plan would be revised and stamped for review.

J. Smigelski mentioned a grass strip being between the sidewalk and the road. S. Michener confirmed that the sidewalk was removed for construction and would be reinstalled in the same location.

K. Kuliesis expressed doubts about the necessity of adding the extra lane.

A. Hamilton commented that the pick-up times for the two adjacent schools differ, so congestion may not be significantly impacted. She also questioned why the grass strip needs to be mowed. S. Michener suggested that a conservation grass mix could be used, similar to other areas on the site.

O. Lathrop raised concerns about the sidewalk encroaching on the 50-foot buffer zone and asked how runoff would be managed with the additional impervious surface. M. Haddad explained the challenges of utilizing the left side of the driveway and curb cutting in that area might require a retaining wall, which would need MassDOT approval. M. Haddad also noted that the temporary lane has not impacted the wetland in the last two years. J. Smigelski reminded the applicant that permission was originally granted only because the lane was temporary. S. Michener acknowledged that the current drawing is not precise, and more accurate plans can be provided.

P. Morrison stated that if the sidewalk's edge does not get any closer to the wetland, and the grass strip is converted to a conservation mix, the plan could be viable. J. Pilat agreed that this could be achieved.

L. Hurley identified three storm drains that could be affected and questioned why a puddle was observed at the end of the driveway. B. Johnson explained that the flooding is an existing condition and would be addressed.

The Commission requested that the applicants return with a revised plan, including details on water management.

6:45 PM- Request for Determination of Applicability- 63 Kemp St

Applicant: Jeffrey & Sarah Gahan

The homeowners were present to propose the removal of an in ground pool.

K. Kuliesis noted that access to the pool would be from the right side of the property, ensuring that all work is kept as far as possible from the wetlands. She also suggested removing invasive species from the site during the process.

O. Lathrop supported the removal of the impervious surface but emphasized the need for erosion controls to be installed. He also requested a more detailed filing outlining the plan.

L. Hurley asked if the fence surrounding the area would also be removed. Upon confirmation, he requested a sketch of the area, including details of the fence and where it would be removed. He recommended temporarily keeping the fence in place to use it as support for installing straw wattles, which would prevent erosion from reaching the wetlands. Once the work is completed, the fence can then be removed. L. Hurley also suggested the sketch include the pool's location, plans for its removal, and the access point for the excavator.

C. Steeves reminded the homeowners to ensure that only clean soil is used when filling in the hole after the pool's removal.

Upon a motion by P. Morrison, seconded by J. Smigelski, it was:
Voted to continue the public hearing to the next scheduled meeting on October 8, 2024.
The motion passed unanimously. 6-0

7:00 PM- Request for Determination of Applicability- 11 Highland Rd

Applicant: William Prest

The homeowner attended the meeting to propose the removal of a tree that had been damaged by a beaver, citing concerns that it posed a threat to nearby powerlines and the dwelling. A professional tree company has been consulted, and recommended first removing the branches and then the trunk, as the area would not accommodate a crane.

K. Kuliesis requested that the stump be left in place to help stabilize the soil. A. Hamilton suggested leaving a portion of the tree as a snag, which could benefit wildlife. W. Prest noted that the beaver had already removed a significant portion of the tree's diameter, and it would eventually rot.

O. Lathrop emphasized that no debris should enter the resource area during the removal process.

George Marsh recommended installing chicken wire around the base of any other trees the landowner wishes to protect from any future beaver activity.

Upon a motion by P. Morrison, seconded by J. Smigelski, it was:
Voted to issue a Negative 3 Determination under the conditions: 1. Keep debris from entering the resource area. 2. Retain the stump. **The**
motion passed unanimously. 6-0

7:15 PM- Request for Certificate of Compliance- 16 Drumlin Hill Rd

C. Steeves informed the Commission that during the sale of the property, it was discovered that a certificate of compliance from 1987 had not been fully issued. The site was supposed to be stabilized, and erosion controls were meant to be removed. However, during a recent site visit, it was found that the work completed did not fully align with the approved plans, although the land had been successfully stabilized.

Upon a motion by A. Hamilton, seconded by P. Morrison, it was: **Voted**
to issue a Certificate of Compliance for 16 Drumlin Hill Road. **The**
motion passed unanimously. 6-0

7:30 PM- Approve Order of Conditions- 282 Farmers Row

Upon a motion by P. Morrison, seconded by J. Smigelski, it was:
Voted to issue the Order of Conditions for 282 Farmers Row, MassDEP#169-1270.

O. Lathrop requested that the language in condition #51. In perpetuity to include that mowing be allowed once a year after October 15th.

The motion passed. J. Smigelski-Abstain 5-1-0

Upon a motion by P. Morrison, seconded by J. Smigelski, it was:
Voted to issue the Orders of Conditions under the Groton Wetlands Protection Bylaw for 282

Farmers Row, MassDEP#169-1270.
motion passed. J. Smigelski-Abstain 5-1-0

The

7:40 PM- Order of Resource Area Delineation Extension Request- 63 Gratuity Rd

Applicant: Deshang Wang

Deshang Wang informed the Commission that during the previous hearing, it was confirmed that the status of the stream has remained unchanged and after reviewing the original ORAD (Order of Resource Area Delineation), he noted that it does not include any language regarding Bordering Land Subject to Flooding. D. Wang assured the Commission that the request for an extension would not result in any changes to the original ORAD.

O. Lathrop confirmed that there were no judgements made on Bordering Land Subject to Flooding.

Upon a motion by O. Lathrop, seconded by P. Morrison, it was:

Voted to extend the ORAD for an additional three years, expiring on September 16, 2027.

The motion passed unanimously. 6-0

2. GENERAL BUSINESS

General Discussions/Announcements

Discussion: Cross Country Track at Florence Roche

Christine Brooks, the Cross Country Coach, and Paul Funch from the Trails Committee, attended the meeting to request the relocation of conservation posts that pose a safety hazard to runners.

A. Hamilton explained that the arrangement between the town and the developers included a conservation restriction (CR) to provide permanent protection for the land, stipulating that there wouldn't be trails in that area. Despite this, the trail has been in place and maintained for over eight years, primarily for running. C. Steeves noted that B. Easom had expressed that he did not see the trail as a major disturbance to the protected area, as it is only maintained for the runners.

P. Morrison added that the conservation markers were installed as part of the deal struck with the town and developers, with the conservation restriction placed as close as possible to the track to mitigate the impact of the track's development. He mentioned that some granite boundary markers were broken and noted that there were clippings in the conservation area. He also pointed out that no one had previously mentioned the existence of this trail during those discussions.

L. Hurley said, after visiting the site, it appeared that the conservation markers might not be placed in the correct locations. He stated that he would not be opposed to moving the one particular marker by 10 feet, although another individual or group would need to cover the cost.

P. Morrison cautioned that if the marker were to be moved, the maps would need to be updated, paperwork revised, and the granite bounds re-surveyed.

C. Steeves noted that B. Easom recommended placing a cone on top of the one current marker as a temporary measure.

O. Lathrop suggested conducting a site walk to assess the situation firsthand. He noted that certain areas of the school development were required to remain natural, and conservation markers were installed to enforce this. While not necessarily being opposed to trails, he emphasized the need for compliance with conservation requirements.

The Commission agreed to leave the cone on the granite marker for the time being.

Discussion: Determination of Applicability- Eagle Scout Project

P. Funch summarized the Commission's suggestion to relocate the trail to higher ground. However, the existing trail, created by foot traffic, runs along the boundary line and encroaches onto private property. A land survey would be necessary to confirm ownership, as no granite markers have been found to delineate the boundaries.

The Commission agreed that the Eagle Scout project's best approach is to go back to their original plan.

Upon a motion by O. Lathrop, seconded by J. Smigelski, it was: Voted
to modify the determination for the Trails Committee regarding the Eagle Scout Project to remove the requirement to reroute the trail. **The**
motion passed unanimously. 6-0

Discussion: 12 Quail Ridge Rd

Brian Houle provided a brief history of his property, explaining that he had inherited it with the lawn already planted and the trees removed. He noted that since receiving notice from the Conservation Administrator, he has complied with the requirements, including removing the swing set and trampoline.

O. Lathrop commended B. Houle for his efforts but reminded him that all mowing on the Conservation land was supposed to stop, and there are granite markers at each corner to confirming the boundaries. B. Houle was unaware of these markers. O. Lathrop added that the Conservation Commission would install permanent markers running along the boundary to clearly delineate the conservation land. The homeowner then requested that trees be planted to help restore the land.

A. Hamilton inquired about the original paperwork from the developer, and B. Houle explained that the trees had been removed after a few houses were developed, possibly around 2013.

The Commission agreed that B. Houle should not bear the cost of the land remediation and discussed the possibility of assisting with planting trees or creating a transitional meadow area that would be both ecologically beneficial and visually appealing.

When B. Houle asked if the markers were necessary, A. Hamilton explained that they serve to mark the boundaries for any future owners.

Discussion: Placement of 'Groton Welcome' Sign

C. Steeves said that Tom Delaney requested permission to install a Welcome Sign in the vicinity of O'Neill Way. The Commission questioned the location and suggested an area closer to the Pepperell Groton line.

Upon a motion by P. Morrison, seconded by J. Smigelski, it was: Voted
to grant Tom Delaney permission to install the Groton Welcome sign on parcel
216-16.

The motion passed. A. Hamilton-Abstain 5-0-1

General Updates from Administrator

Town Meeting- Saturday October 5th

C. Steeves informed the Commission that there are three site walks scheduled for October 5th and that there should be a sufficient amount of time to return for the Town Meeting. C. Steeves said that she would not be available to accompany the site walks. The Commission agreed on starting at an earlier time, potentially at 7:30 am. C. Steeves said she would confirm with the Commission by email after speaking with the landowners.

Committee Updates

Sustainability Presentation- Climate Action Working Group

Charlotte Weigel and Ken Horton, representing the Climate Action Working Group, presented a slideshow discussing the impacts of climate change in central Massachusetts and Groton's role in addressing it. The development of a climate action plan was outlined and the Commission was questioned if the Town of Groton should take action. The working group also plans to reach out to other local groups for support.

J. Smigelski commented on the increasing naming of storms and asked what caused temperature increases in the 1920s. It was noted that storms today are slower, hold more water, and that rising temperatures are inevitable. K. Horton acknowledged natural variations in weather.

A. Hamilton expressed her concern, highlighting the impacts of climate change observed in coastal villages affected by rising sea levels. She emphasized Groton's responsibility to protect green spaces.

O. Lathrop stated that while human activity has been proven to contribute to climate change, with evidence such as CO2 levels and ice core measurements, he supports measures to reduce pollution but not specifically for climate change. K. Kuliesis agreed, suggesting a shift in terminology.

L. Hurley noted the rapid climate changes observed within his lifetime.

C. Weigel outlined a three-step action plan: the first step being a Spring 2025 town meeting to vote on a climate resolution that sets a goal of reducing emissions to Net Zero by 2050. The second step would involve creating the action plan, followed by the third step, which would be its implementation.

J. Smigelski raised concerns about the challenges faced by residents when state regulations may be financially burdensome. K. Horton emphasized the importance of education in this process, noting that part of the plan involves informing consumers about more energy-efficient options that could ultimately lower operational costs.

L. Hurley stressed the need for a comprehensive plan before supporting the Climate Action Plan Group. O. Lathrop questioned the feasibility of the 2050 goal if a plan were to be implemented. C. Weigel explained that the aim is to set a benchmark for the state to demonstrate Groton's commitment, which is necessary to unlock funding.

The Commission ultimately decided against voting at this time, expressing uncertainty about whether the 2050 timeline is realistic.

Land Management & Acquisition

Spraying at Nipmuc Meadows

C. Steeves informed the Commission that the property was treated for a total of \$900.00.

Lot 1 Sand Hill Road

C. Steeves informed the Commission that a 2.59-acre lot, which includes a vernal pool, is being listed for \$260,000. Attorney Kyle Croteau, representing the Wheatleys, stated that the property is currently under agreement and the Town has the opportunity to purchase the land for a matching price. However, the Select Board would need the Conservation Commission's approval to move forward with the purchase.

After discussion, the Commission agreed that they did not wish to purchase the land but emphasized the importance of ensuring that the vernal pool remains protected.

Upon a motion by J. Smigelski, seconded by O. Lathrop, it was: Voted
to recommend that the Select Board defer from acquiring lot 1 on Sand Hill Road.

The

motion passed unanimously. 6-0

O. Lathrop noted during the Stewardship Committee site walk there was a significant amount of Japanese Barberry found in the Hemlock Grove area. He suggested that this could be a great opportunity for Groton School students who need to complete community service. He suggested with the assistance of the Invasive Species Committee the students could remove the invasive vegetation.

Upon a motion by A. Hamilton, seconded by O. Lathrop, it was: Voted
to grant permission to the Groton School students to work along with the Invasive Species

Committee in removing the Japanese Barberry in the Hemlock Park area.
motion passed unanimously. 6-0

The

Meeting Minutes

There were no meeting minutes available for the Commission to review.

Invoices

Upon a motion by P. Morrison, seconded by J. Smigelski, it was: Voted
to approve and pay the invoice from H. Anderson Real Estate in the amount of \$3,500.

The motion passed unanimously. 6-0

Upon a motion by P. Morrison, seconded by J. Smigelski, it was:
Voted to approve and pay the invoice from Bay State Forestry in the amount of \$900.00.

The motion passed unanimously. 6-0

3. **Open Session for topics not reasonably anticipated 48 hours in advance of meeting***
4. **Executive Session pursuant to MGL Ch. 30A, Sec. 21(6): * “To consider the purchase, exchange, lease, or value of real estate, if the chair declares that an open meeting may have a detrimental effect on the negotiating position of the public body.”**

Unnecessary

5. Adjournment

9:45 PM

Upon a motion by P. Morrison, seconded by J. Smigelski, it was: Voted
to adjourn the meeting. **The**

motion passed unanimously. 6-0

APPROVED: October 22nd, 2024