



Conservation Commission Meeting

Tuesday, March 4, 2025 at 6:30 PM

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

OPTION TO JOIN REMOTELY

Present: Bruce Easom, Chair; Kim Kuliesis (via zoom), Clerk; Olin Lathrop, John Smigelski, Peter Morrison

Absent: Alison Hamilton, Larry Hurley, Vice Chair

Others Present: Charlotte Steve's, Conservation Administrator

B. Easom opened the meeting at 6:30 PM.

1. APPOINTMENTS AND HEARINGS

6:30- Public Hearing- Notice of Intent- 16 Moose Trail: DEP# PENDING

Applicant: Thomas Wilson; Representative: Dan Wolfe, David E Ross Associates, Inc.

Dan Wolfe attended on behalf of his client to present a proposal for upgrading the existing septic system. The plan includes installing a 1,500-gallon tank and relocating the leaching trenches to the southerly side of the property. Additionally, the existing well, currently positioned in the center of the property, would be replaced with a new well closer to Moose Trail. The cross-hatched section on the plan represents a deteriorating portion of the house that is proposed to be reconstructed, expanding across the entire rear of the structure. To address the pooling from street runoff in the front of the house, the proposal includes cutting back the embankment and lowering the grade to install a small infiltration trench, allowing water to be absorbed into the ground. Additionally, the retaining wall at the front of the property, which has begun to decompose, would be replaced with a new timber wall to ensure structural stability.

O. Lathrop remarked that he had observed a significant number of trees removed from the site. D. Wolfe informed the Commission that the previous tenant had cleared all vegetation earlier last year, prior to Mr. Wilson, who purchased the property in the fall. O. Lathrop requested that the 100-foot buffer line from the lake be clearly marked on the plan and that proper erosion controls be installed. He also expressed his opposition to expanding the dwelling beyond its original footprint.

P. Morrison acknowledged the proposed improvements; including cutting back the embankment to enhance safety and drainage, as well as installing a Title 5 septic system. He noted that these upgrades would help offset the additional square footage being added to the structure.

K. Kuliesis inquired whether there were any plans for ecological restoration. The homeowner responded that he was open to planting red maples or ornamental trees.

B. Easom asked when the wetland flagging was conducted and emphasized the importance of incorporating vegetation into the plan. D. Wolfe confirmed that the flagging took place last fall. T. Wilson added he intends on laying down loam and seeding the back area.

O. Lathrop requested that the plan identify the native vegetation that will be planted and clearly delineate the buffer zone from the lake.

Upon a motion by P. Morrison, seconded by J. Smigelski, it was:

Voted to continue the public hearing to the next scheduled meeting on March 25, 2025.

The motion passed by a roll call vote. (Yes: KK, OL, PM, JS, BE) 5-0

6:45- Public Hearing- Notice of Intent- Brookfield Commons Condominiums: DEP# PENDING

Applicant: Brookfield Commons Condominium Trust Representative; Representative: Matthew Stangle

Matthew Stangle was present on behalf of his client to propose an upgrade to the septic system. The existing system is partially located underneath the road, necessitating a road closure during excavation. The police and fire departments have requested that a temporary passage be installed for both residents and emergency vehicles during this period. A proposed 18-foot wide gravel access road would be constructed on previously disturbed lawn areas. Surveyors identified two white oak trees that would need to be removed to accommodate the access road. Erosion control measures, including silt fences and straw wattles, would be installed. Once the work is complete, the temporary road would be removed, and the area would be loamed and seeded. The planting plan includes replanting two oak trees. All dewatering from excavation would be directed towards the existing detention basin, with no discharge or erosion directed towards the wetland.

K. Kuliesis asked whether an alternative access road had been considered on the opposite side of the units, running between the two paved spaces behind the rear buildings. This route would minimize disturbance and eliminate the need for tree removal. M. Stangle confirmed that all possible alternatives had been explored, but the fire department rejected this option due to the inability to navigate the sharp turns. K. Kuliesis also advised careful monitoring of any imported loam to prevent the introduction of invasive vegetation.

O. Lathrop expressed concern about planting white pines too close to the structures and recommended using multiple smaller trees instead. He also requested that the edge of the tree line, as noted on the plan, be restored to a wooded area. M. Stangle agreed and stated he had no objections to restoring the area to its original condition.

Upon a motion by P. Morrison, seconded by K. Kuliesis, it was:

Voted to continue the public hearing to the next scheduled meeting on March 25, 2025.

The motion passed by a roll call vote. (Yes: KK, PM, OL, JS, BE) 5-0

Approve Order of Conditions- 84 Maplewood Ave- DEP# 169-1274

Upon a motion by P. Morrison, seconded by J. Smigelski, it was:
Voted to issue the Order of Conditions for 84 Maplewood Ave, MassDEP#169-1274.
The motion passed by a roll call vote. (Yes: KK, JS, PM, OL, BE) 5-0

B. Easom raised concerns about whether the language in Condition #43 was sufficiently clear and precise. The Commission agreed that the language should be revised to ensure that all discharge from dewatering activities must be removed off-site by a vacuum truck.

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 84 Maplewood Ave, MassDEP#169-1274.
The motion passed by a roll call vote. (Yes: KK, PM, OL, JS, BE) 5-0

Approve Order of Conditions 116 Shelters Road- DEP# 169-1275

Upon a motion by P. Morrison, seconded by J. Smigelski, it was:
Voted to issue the Order of Conditions for 116 Shelters Road, MassDEP#169-1275.
The motion passed by a roll call vote. (Yes: KK, JS, OL, PM, BE) 5-0

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 116 Shelters Road, MassDEP#169-1275.
The motion passed by a roll call vote. (Yes: KK, JS, PM, OL, BE) 5-0

2. GENERAL BUSINESS

2.1. General Discussions/Announcements

MACC Conference Follow-Up

B. Easom, O. Lathrop, and K. Kuliesis attended the MACC conference. O. Lathrop shared that he participated in discussions on biodiversity, highlighting that the governor recently signed an executive order; however, he noted that its ramifications are still under consideration, and it remains a work in progress. Both B. Easom and O. Lathrop attended a session on ticketing and fines. A key takeaway was that when issuing a fine, it must be documented on a specific form, with each violation requiring a separate ticket. Four copies need to be made and one copy is sent to the district court within 15 days of issuance, and the tickets are tracked. B. Easom pointed out that if the violator requests a hearing for each individual ticket, the fines can be bundled together.

The conference also covered updates on legal developments over the last 18 months. The discussion emphasized strengthening local bylaws related to the wetland protection acts. O. Lathrop expressed interest in making changes to the town's local bylaws.

Another session focused on pollinators, where it was noted that bees create nesting areas. One simple technique for creating these areas involves scraping away the top four inches of soil and mixing it with sand. Techniques like solarizing with black

plastic or using herbicide in late December were discussed as well; native plants are dormant at that time, making it an ideal time to target invasive vegetation.

B. Easom also referenced Scott Jackson of UMass Amherst, who spoke about reconnecting fragmented environmental habitats caused by road networks. He emphasized that some species require up to 1,500 acres to thrive, and creating safe passages for animals to cross these barriers is essential for their survival. This insight helps prioritize funding for infrastructure that supports both water flow and wildlife movement.

K. Kuliesis mentioned attending two fundamental sessions: Unit 103, which covered "Plan Review & Site Visit Procedures," and Unit 105, which focused on "Writing Effective Orders of Conditions." During Unit 103, groups analyzed symbols, notes, and legends on maps, while Unit 105 emphasized the importance of creating a detailed and well-documented record that can withstand legal scrutiny. A key takeaway from the latter session was the critical role of date-stamping in maintaining accurate records.

Sustainability Committee

Charlotte Weigel and Ken Horton from the Sustainability Committee were present to discuss a Climate Resolution that would be introduced at the Spring Town Meeting. The resolution aims to develop a municipal decarbonization plan and set a Net Zero goal for the town by 2025. This initiative is a key step in the town's effort to become a recognized Climate Leader Community, which would allow the town to access additional state and federal funding.

A brief history of the initiative was provided, explaining that M. Haddad established a Climate Action Group last June. The working group reached out to the community by gathering over 300 completed Climate Surveys from residents and holding meetings with town committees. The results showed that 84% of respondents supported the town taking action on climate change, and 85% expressed willingness to vote in favor of a town resolution action plan. Town departments also expressed support for the resolution and recommended moving forward to let the residents vote at Town Meeting.

C. Weigel mentioned that the town would align with the state resolution to eliminate the burning of fossil fuels. However, J. Smigelski voiced concerns about the potential impact on farmers, explaining that as a farmer, heavy machinery is essential to his operations, and the transition to electric equipment could threaten his livelihood. K. Horton reassured the group that no mandates would be imposed on residents, and the resolution would primarily apply to municipalities.

The Conservation Commission expressed support for the initiative but raised concerns about setting a specific date for achieving the Net Zero goal, given uncertainties about whether it is attainable. B. Easom clarified that the objective is to

reach Net Zero, allowing for carbon emissions as long as they are offset in other ways.

O. Lathrop explained that the resolution applies to municipal equipment, not private vehicles, and explained that an 8,500 lbs. exemption currently exists. He acknowledged that the technology to support heavy vehicles is not yet fully developed but noted that advancements in battery technology would make these solutions much more viable in the near future. He emphasized that the goal aligns with the state's objectives and would also provide funding opportunities, while reiterating that the resolution does not impose any mandates.

Upon a motion by O. Lathrop, seconded by P. Morrison, it was:
Voted that the Conservation Commission endorse the decarbonization article presented by the Sustainability Commission at the Spring Town Meeting.

J. Smigelski expressed a lack of trust in the state and questioned the proposed financial implications of the plan. K. Kuliesis also shared her concerns, feeling uneasy about the Commission supporting something that is not clearly defined. While she expressed support for the overall efforts, she raised questions about the affordability of the plan and whether all the answers for residents have been addressed. It was clarified that Groton is committed to evaluating and considering decarbonization options, but if these options prove financially unfeasible, they may not be pursued. B. Easom emphasized that climate change directly affects everyone and stressed the importance of the Conservation Commission supporting this resolution.

The motion passed by a roll call vote. (Yes: OL, PM, BE /No: JS) K. Kuliesis Abstain 3-1-1

B. Easom referenced the issue of acid rain, noting how people once argued that addressing it would cost billions of dollars and take years to resolve. However, he pointed out that today it is no longer a major concern. He explained that, similarly, the idea behind emissions reductions is not that every power plant must eliminate all emissions, but rather, that they can reduce emissions in more manageable ways.

2.2. General Updates from Administrator

None

2.3. Committee Updates

None

2.4. Land Management & Acquisition

Official Name and Survey for Noonan Parcel

O. Lathrop reported that he had contacted Joseph Noonan regarding the naming of the newly acquired Conservation property, and Noonan was pleased with the suggested name, "Noonan Woods."

Upon a motion by O. Lathrop, seconded by P. Morrison, it was:
Voted to name parcel 213-84 "Noonan Woods."

The motion passed unanimously by roll call vote. (Yes: KK, OL, JS, PM, BE) 5-0

O. Lathrop also informed the Commission of his intent to strengthen local wetland protection bylaws protecting vernal pools and proposed drafting an article for inclusion in the warrant for the Town Fall Meeting. He noted that the Department of Environmental Protection (DEP) provides minimal regulations on this matter. The Conservation Administrator was asked to add this topic to a future agenda.

B. Easom requested that the Conservation Administrator contact the Fire Department about scheduling another controlled burn at Nipmuc Meadows.

K. Kuliesis asked the Conservation Administrator to reach out to Tom Orcutt to ensure that all contractors working on the water main project are not parking their vehicles within resource areas.

2.5. Approve Meeting Minutes

There were no meeting minutes available for approval.

2.6. Approve Invoice

None

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

8:20 PM

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

The motion passed by a roll call vote. (Yes: KK, JS, OL, PM, BE) 5-0

APPROVED: March 25th, 2025