

Conservation Commission Meeting
Tuesday, September 9, 2025 at 6:30 PM
Town Hall: Second Floor Meeting Room, 173 Main Street Groton, MA
OPTION TO JOIN REMOTELY

Present: Chair: Bruce Easom, Vice Chair: Larry Hurley, Clerk: Kim Kuliesis, Olin Lathrop, John Smigelski, Peter Morrison

Others Present: Charlotte Steeves, Conservation Administrator

Easom opened the meeting at 6:30 PM. The meeting was recorded and will be available for viewing on the Groton Channel.

1. APPOINTMENTS AND HEARINGS

6:30 PM: Appoint New Conservation Commission Member

- **Proposal:** Interview and consider recommendation of a candidate for appointment to the Conservation Commission.
- **Presentation:** Ben Wolfe introduced himself: Groton resident since 2018; member of the Invasive Species Committee since 2021; Tufts University biology faculty; landowner with wetland on his property; has filed a Notice of Intent and went through the process, currently a member on the Stewardship committee. He is familiar with core wetland concepts, eager to learn detailed regulations, and comfortable with field work.
- **Discussion/Q&A:**
 - Tree removals in buffer zones and insurance impacts: Wolfe acknowledged trees' ecological value and homeowner risk, emphasized permitting and site-specific evaluation.
 - Herbicide use: Supports as a management tool when appropriate, with licensing, correct formulations for wetlands, and preference for non-chemical methods where feasible. He recognizes necessity for large infestations such as knotweed.
 - Licensing: Not a licensed applicator, but he is aware of and works with licensed applicators on the Invasive Species Committee. He is open to pursuing training.
 - Experience with permit process: Found town website and staff guidance helpful. He suggested improved outreach, so new homeowners learn early about wetlands jurisdiction and when to file RDA/NOI.
 - Chair described appointment path via Select Board, oath at Town Clerk, need to apply facts to law, and importance of stopping meetings to ask about unfamiliar acronyms during the first year.

- Additional applicants: Two other applicants were not present. The commission read one applicant's application statement into the record.
- **Motion:** To recommend Ben Wolfe for appointment as the next member of the Conservation Commission.
- **Vote:** BE, LH, KK, OL, JS, PM: Yes (6-0)
- **Outcome:** The Commission will notify the Town Manager and request placement on the next Select Board agenda.

6:45 PM: Continued Public Hearing – Notice of Intent, 63 Gratuity Road

- **Proposal:** Installation of a water line at 63 Gratuity Road.
- **Presentation:** The public hearing notice was read into the record. Administrator Steeves reported that the applicant's engineer requested a continuance to September 23, 2025. She noted that a site walk had been conducted the prior Friday with representatives from Nitsch Engineering present.
- **Discussion:**
 - Commissioners agreed to continue until September 23, 2025.
 - An abutter requested to comment and introduced himself and his concerns, but The Chair clarified that the only matter before the Commission was whether to continue the hearing, and that all substantive comments would be taken up on September 23.
 - The abutter agreed to defer his input until the continued session.
- **Motion:** A motion was made and seconded to continue the public hearing for 63 Gratuity Road to September 23, 2025.
- **Vote:** BE, LH, KK, OL, JS, PM: Yes (6-0)
- **Outcome:** The motion carried unanimously. The hearing was continued.

7:00 PM: Continued Public Hearing, Notice of Intent – Squannacook River Dam

- **Proposal:** Repairs to the Squannacook River Dam.
- **Presentation:** The public hearing notice was read into the record. The Administrator reported that there was no update at this time.
- **Motion:** To continue the public hearing to September 23, 2025.
- **Vote:** BE, LH, KK, OL, JS, PM: Yes (6-0)
- **Outcome:** The motion carried, and the hearing was continued to September 23, 2025.

7:01 PM: Minor Change Request – Chicopee Row Waterline Project

- **Proposal:** Minor change request for the Chicopee Row Waterline Project involving installation of private property service lines for three properties within buffer zones.

- **Presentation:** The representative explained that the Department of Environmental Protection required certain homes with PFAS-contaminated wells to be connected to town water. He stated that the town and its contractor will install the service lines, but that 3 properties need approval by Commissioners. This line is located close to a wetland resource area, approximately 25 feet from a brook, though the work will occur in a previously disturbed driveway area.
- **Discussion:**
 - Commissioners discussed trenching methods, slope direction, and erosion control measures.
 - The applicant stated that erosion controls such as silt socks, hay bales, or silt fencing would be installed as needed, and that disturbed areas would have seeds put down.
 - Commissioners emphasized the importance of completing each service line in a single day, storing excavated soil on the upland side, and avoiding work during rain.
 - They required that erosion controls remain in place through the winter until vegetation stabilizes in the spring. Conditions also included seeding and mulching disturbed areas.
 - The Commission noted that although the work is close to a resource area, it is necessary for public health and can be completed with limited impact under the proposed safeguards.
 - No public comments were received.
- **Motion:** A motion was made to approve the minor change request with the conditions that each of the three buffer-zone installations be completed within a single day, soil be placed on the upside side of trenches, erosion controls be installed on the downslope side and maintained until spring stabilization, and disturbed areas be seeded and mulched. The motion was seconded.
- **Vote:** BE, LH, KK, OL, JS, PM: Yes (6-0)
- **Outcome:** The motion carried unanimously. The applicant will notify the Administrator before work begins.

7:10 PM: Approve Order of Conditions – 16 West Main Street

- **Proposal:** Request to approve an Order of Conditions for 16 West Main Street.
- **Presentation:** Commissioners reviewed the draft Orders of Conditions prepared for the project. The state Order included the standard boilerplate conditions along with additional requirements for erosion and sedimentation controls, stabilization of disturbed areas, restrictions on stockpiling within 100 feet of resource areas, and submission of an as-built plan and request for a Certificate of Compliance upon completion. The bylaw Order had similar protections and added requirements for recording the Order, prohibiting burial of construction refuse, and documenting wetland boundaries, buffer zones, and setbacks.
- **Discussion:**

- Commissioners agreed that an as-built plan and a request for a Certificate of Compliance would be required upon completion.
- No amendments were proposed.
- No public comments were received.
- **Motion:** A motion was made and seconded to approve the state Order of Conditions under the Wetlands Protection Act for DEP #169-1282, 16 West Main Street.
- **Vote:** BE, LH, KK, OL, JS, PM: Yes (6-0)
- **Outcome:** The motion carried unanimously, and both Orders of Conditions were approved.
- **Motion:** A motion was made and seconded to approve the state Order of Conditions under the local Order of Conditions under the Groton Wetlands Protection Bylaw for DEP #169-1282, 16 West Main Street.
- **Vote:** BE, LH, KK, OL, JS, PM: Yes (6-0)
- **Outcome:** The motion carried unanimously, and both Orders of Conditions were approved.

2. GENERAL BUSINESS

2.1 GENERAL DISCUSSIONS/ANNOUNCEMENTS

Update – 60 Valley Road

- **Proposal:** Restoration of a changed wetland resource area at 60 Valley Road, with the applicant required to work with a wetland scientist and file a Notice of Intent by October 13, 2025.
- **Presentation:** Administrator Steeves reported that the property owner had been referred to Matt Morrow for assistance in preparing the Notice of Intent and restoration plan. She noted that working with an experienced wetlands scientist would be important, given the complexity of both the filing process and the restoration requirements. Additional updates are expected in the coming weeks.
- **Discussion:**
 - Commissioners emphasized the importance of offering more than one professional contact so that the Commission is not seen as endorsing a single consultant.
 - Suggestions included Oxbow Associates, Dillis & Roy, and GPR, all of which have wetland scientists.
 - Commissioners agreed to provide a short list of local consultants.
- **Outcome:** No vote was required. The Commission will await the Notice of Intent filing by October 13 and expects to receive a consultant's restoration plan at that time.

Discussion: Mechanical Treatment of Invasive Plants – Meadowbrook Conservation Area

- **Presentation:** Authorization for a resident abutting Meadowbrook Conservation Area to conduct mechanical removal of invasive plants on conservation land immediately behind the property.
- **Discussion:**
 - Commissioners noted that recent volunteer work with the Invasive Species Committee addressed heavy bittersweet in this location. The resident requested permission to continue removal using hand tools only, with no herbicides.
 - Members agreed that homeowner assistance can be valuable but should be formally authorized to avoid setting informal patterns.
 - Commissioners highlighted that work must be limited to species on the Massachusetts Invasive Plant Advisory Group list and that removal must be mechanical only (no pesticides).
 - Members discussed proper handling/disposal to prevent re-sprouting, the need to avoid cutting native species, and public perception if similar requests arise.
 - A defined term and status reporting were favored so the Commission can monitor results and decide on any future renewal.
- **Motion:** To authorize a resident to perform mechanical (non-chemical) cutting of invasive plant species listed on the Massachusetts Invasive Plant Advisory Group list within the Meadowbrook Conservation Area immediately behind his property through December 31, 2026, with written status reports due in January 2026 (covering 2025 work) and January 2027 (covering 2026 work).
- **Vote:** BE, LH, KK, OL, JS, PM: Yes (6-0)
- **Outcome:** Motion carried. Staff will notify the resident of the authorization and reporting requirements.

Discussion: SGARs Information Webpage

- **Proposal:** Development of a Conservation Commission informational webpage on second-generation anticoagulant rodenticides (SGARs).
- **Presentation:** Commissioner Olin explained that SGARs are a newer class of rodenticides that remain active in rodents for days, allowing them to consume lethal doses before dying. Predators such as owls, coyotes, or cats that eat these poisoned rodents can also be harmed. Olin reported that he had drafted a concise summary document with curated links to accessible resources and scientific studies. The intent is for the Commission to adopt the material as an official information page on the Town website.
- **Discussion:**
 - Commissioners agreed the issue is significant and supported making information available to the public.

- Several members emphasized the need to review the draft carefully before formally adopting it, with suggestions that it could also serve as the basis for a short article in the local newspaper.
- Commissioners noted that the page should be presented as informational, not as a formal recommendation, and highlighted the importance of including reliable sources.
- A printed copy will be provided for those unable to access the webpage version.
- **Outcome:** The Commission agreed to review the draft webpage and provide feedback at the September 23, 2025 meeting, with the goal of finalizing the material for posting on the Town's website.

October Conservation Schedule

- **Presentation:** Administrator Steeves noted a scheduling conflict on October 28, 2025, and asked whether the Commission could shift its meeting schedule to October 7 and 21 or October 14 and 21 instead of the usual 14 and 28.
- **Discussion:**
 - Commissioners reviewed availability. Some members had conflicts on the 21st, while others expressed a preference to keep to the regular pattern.
 - Commissioners discussed whether the Commission could still meet on the 28th if Charlotte was unavailable, with members noting they could manage Zoom setup and logistics if necessary.
- **Outcome:** The Commission confirmed that October meetings will remain scheduled for October 14 and October 28, 2025. Staff will provide Zoom credentials to allow the meeting to proceed even if Charlotte cannot be present.

Authorize Chair to discuss Enforcement Order at 54 Hill Road with Department of Environmental Protection

- **Presentation:** The Chair reminded the Commission that an enforcement order and cease-and-desist had been issued for 54 Hill Road, but follow-up support from the Department of Environmental Protection (DEP) had been limited. The Chair suggested that a face-to-face meeting with DEP officials was necessary to ensure the matter received proper attention, emphasizing that he wished to attend on behalf of the Commission rather than as a private individual.
- **Discussion:**
 - Commissioners agreed DEP's involvement appeared to have stalled, despite initial indications that the agency might take up the matter.
 - Members noted that staffing changes may have contributed to delays.
 - Several commissioners supported escalating the issue directly to decision-makers at DEP.
 - Commissioners emphasized the need to demonstrate persistence and authority on this case.

- **Motion:** A motion was made and seconded to authorize the Chair to represent the Conservation Commission in direct discussions with DEP officials regarding 54 Hill Road.
- **Vote:** KK: Recused, OL: Yes, PM: Yes, JS: Yes, LH: Yes, BE: Yes (5-0-1)
- **Outcome:** The motion carried. The Chair will schedule a meeting with DEP, pursue escalation as needed, and report back to the Commission.

2.2 COMMITTEE UPDATES

Stewardship Addition

- **Presentation:** Olin reported that Adam Burnett, a retired forestry professional, had expressed interest in assisting with baseline forestry work and stewardship planning.
- **Discussion:**
 - Commissioners agreed this work would be best pursued through the Stewardship Committee.
 - Adam introduced himself and confirmed his willingness to volunteer, noting that the work would also support his goal of obtaining state forester licensure.
- **Motion:** A motion was made and seconded to appoint Adam Burnett to the Stewardship Committee.
- **Vote:** BE, LH, KK, OL, JS, PM: Yes (6-0)
- **Outcome:** The motion carried. Mr. Burnett will be sworn in by the Town Clerk following notification of his appointment.

Invasive Species Committee

- **Discussion:**
 - Herbicide treatments targeting phragmites are scheduled in the coming weeks at the Eliades property and Priest driveway, where progress has been significant.

Conservation Signage

- **Presentation:** It was reported that the Commission is running low on sign blanks. The last sheet of sign material only four strips remaining and two signs pending installation, an additional sheet is needed.
- **Discussion:**
 - Commissioners noted that costs may have increased since the last purchase and suggested authorizing a higher spending limit to ensure coverage.
 - Estimates ranged from \$800–\$1,000 to account for inflation and delivery.
- **Motion:** A motion was made and seconded to authorize the expenditure of up to \$1,000 for the purchase and delivery of one 4x8 sheet of sign material, cut into strips, to Town Hall.
- **Vote:** BE, LH, KK, OL, JS, PM: Yes (6-0)

- **Outcome:** The motion carried. The Commission will proceed with the purchase.

Sargisson Beach

- **Discussion:**
 - Commission reported limited activity, noting that discussions on restricting parking to residents only had not advanced. Electronic surveillance is expected to be operational by the next beach season.

2.3 LAND MANAGEMENT & ACQUISITION

Paquawket Path

- **Discussion:**
 - The Chair reported that he will meet offline with Mr. Bascom, whose property abuts the Paquawket Path easement, to discuss long-standing disputes over access rights.
 - Mr. Bascom attended via Zoom and confirmed his interest in an in-person discussion, noting that the matter dates back to 1985 and involves multiple documents and disputes.
 - The Chair reiterated that this meeting will be a private discussion representing the Commission, with no other members present, and will report back afterward.

Nipmuc Meadows

- **Discussion:**
 - Spraying was completed last week.
 - Commissioners debated whether mowing should occur this fall. Decided to delay mowing until next year to maximize herbicide effectiveness and reduce the spread of seed pods.
 - The Stewardship Committee will conduct a site walk on September 13 to evaluate conditions.

Shirley Road Access Easement

- **Discussion:**
 - The Chair reported that a rope blocking the easement had been removed by DPW, but Commissioners noted it has since been replaced.
 - The matter has been escalated to the Town Manager.
 - Commissioners reiterated that the easement must remain open for public access under its terms.

2.4 APPROVE MEETING MINUTES

- **Motion:** A motion was made and seconded to approve the August 26, 2025, minutes as amended.
Vote: OL, KK, JH, PM, LH, BE: Yes (6-0)
Outcome: Motion carried.

2.5 APPROVE INVOICES

- **Motion:** A motion was made and seconded to authorize reimbursement of \$150 to Olin for registration at the MACC Fall Conference.
- **Vote:** OL: Recused, KK: Yes, PM: Yes, JS: Yes, LH: Yes, BE: Yes (5-0-1)
- **Outcome:** The motion carried. Reimbursement will be issued.
- **Motion:** A motion was made and seconded to authorize payment of \$900 to Bay State Forestry Service for herbicide spraying at Nipmuc Meadows.
- **Vote:** BE, LH, KK, OL, JS, PM: Yes (6-0)
- **Outcome:** The motion carried. Payment will be issued.

Approved: 9/23/25