

Conservation Commission Meeting
Tuesday, September 23, 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, Olin Lathrop, John Smigelski, Peter Morrison, Ben Wolfe

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: 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 October 14, 2025.
- **Discussion:**
 - Commissioners agreed to continue until October 14, 2025.
- **Motion:** A motion was made and seconded to continue the public hearing for 63 Gratuity Road to October 14, 2025.
- **Vote:** BE, LH, BW, OL, JS, PM: Yes (6-0)
- **Outcome:** The motion carried unanimously. The hearing was continued.

6:32 PM: Continued Public Hearing, Notice of Intent – Off Worthen Drive (Shared Driveway)

- **Proposal:** Construction of two single-family homes and a shared driveway at Off Worthen Drive.
- **Presentation:** The public hearing notice was read into the record. The engineer appeared on behalf of the applicant, and summarized revisions and responses since the 03/22/2025 site walk and the 03/25/2025 hearing. He reported that wetland flagging was reestablished, culverts were verified and added to the plans, and restoration areas within the 100-foot buffer were identified. The shared driveway will be 16 feet wide and

paved. The wetland replication and stormwater management areas were relocated closer to the proposed work and outside the 50-foot buffer. The applicant's attorney is currently reviewing the Chapter 61 status, and the Natural Heritage & Endangered Species Program (NHESP) stated that the project can move forward as long as a Blanding's Turtle Protection Plan is created and followed.

- **Discussion:**
 - Commissioners reviewed the revised plans and discussed the driveway alignment, culverts, and wetland flag verification.
 - They stated that both proposed homes are outside of the 100-foot buffer and that the remaining work within the buffer is limited to the driveway, culvert replacement, and the stormwater area. The engineer confirmed that existing culverts will be replaced and that the stormwater areas have been relocated outside of the 50-foot buffer.
 - Commissioners raised the need to verify the wetland flags along the driveway, and they agreed to schedule a site walk before the next meeting.
 - They also discussed the Area of Critical Environmental Concern (ACEC) limits, and requested clarification from the applicant regarding the Chapter 61 status.
 - The Commission noted that an updated NHESP communication will be required if plans change.
 - No public comments were received.
- **Motion:** A motion was made and seconded to continue the public hearing for Off Worthen Drive to October 14, 2025 and to schedule a site walk to verify flagging.
- **Vote:** BE, LH, BW, OL, JS, PM: Yes (6-0)
- **Outcome:** The motion carried unanimously, and the hearing was continued to October 14, 2025. A site walk will be scheduled to verify flags, and the applicant will provide an update to the Commission.

6:42 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. Administrator Steeves reported that the applicant requested a continuance. It was stated that delays have been related to ownership issues which are requiring court resolution. It was stated that progress may resume soon. The purpose of the filing is to determine repair costs so that Town Meeting can decide whether to maintain or remove the dam, however given the timeline, it seems likely that the matter will move to the spring Town Meeting.
- **Discussion:**
 - Commissioners discussed the project timeline and agreed to continue the matter until ownership is finalized.
 - No public comments were received.

- **Motion:** A motion was made and seconded to continue the public hearing for the Squannacook River Dam to October 14, 2025.
- **Vote:** BE, LH, BW, OL, JS, PM: Yes (6-0)
- **Outcome:** The motion carried unanimously, and the hearing was continued to October 14, 2025.

6:45 PM: Request for Determination of Applicability – 28 Mountain Lakes Trail

- **Proposal:** Removal of several trees.
- **Presentation:** The public hearing notice was read into the record. A representative appeared on behalf of the applicant and stated that the trees proposed for removal are leaning or in poor condition, therefore posing potential safety concerns. She explained that the owner intends to replace the cut down trees in the future, and she stated that the work would be done by a professional tree service and not by the owner himself.
- **Discussion:**
 - Commissioners discussed the proposed tree removal and expressed concern about continuing without a clear development plan for the site.
 - They noted that the lot is currently vacant and that no building permit has been issued.
 - Some commissioners felt that the tree removal should be reviewed once future building proposals were in place. This would be to evaluate which trees pose legitimate risks to structures or utilities.
 - Commissioners also discussed the importance of leaving some snags or habitat trees further from the foundation for wildlife benefit.
 - They requested that the applicant submit a plan or marked map showing which trees are proposed for removal. Also for the applicant to mark the potential replacement species and locations.
 - The Commission agreed that additional information is needed to evaluate the request, and that continuation would allow for the applicant to provide this information.
 - No public comments were received.
- **Motion:** A motion was made and seconded to continue the Request for Determination of Applicability to October 14, 2025, to allow the applicant time to provide a map identifying the trees proposed for removal as well as the replacement details.
- **Vote:** BE, LH, BW, OL, JS, PM: Yes (6-0)
- **Outcome:** The motion carried unanimously, and the hearing was continued to October 14, 2025.

6:55 PM: Request for Determination of Applicability – 401 Nashua Road

- **Proposal:** Installation of a holding tank.

- **Presentation:** The public hearing notice was read into the record. An engineer appeared on behalf of the applicant and stated that, although originally described as retroactive, the filing is current and permitted. He explained that the Commission previously approved a similar request in 2018, and that the current application covers a replacement tank located just outside the 100-foot buffer. He stated that erosion controls will be installed parallel to the barn and the driveway, and also that the Board of Health has renewed the holding tank permit. He added that following installation, a certification filing will be made with MassDEP.
- **Discussion:**
 - Commissioners reviewed the plan and noted that most of the proposed work is outside the 100-foot buffer.
 - The engineer stated that the 1,500-gallon tank will be pumped as needed, approximately every couple of years.
 - Commissioners discussed system monitoring and agreed that both the Board of Health and MassDEP will oversee maintenance.
 - They reviewed the special conditions from the 2018 approval, including requirements to report pumping records to the Board of Health.
 - No public comments were received.
- **Motion:** A motion was made and seconded to issue a Negative 3 Determination, stating that the work is within the buffer zone, but that it will not change an area subject to protection.
- **Vote:** BE, LH, BW, OL, JS, PM: Yes (6-0)
- **Outcome:** The motion carried unanimously. A Negative 3 Determination was issued.

7:05 PM: Request for Certificate of Compliance – 26 Indian Hill Road

- **Proposal:** Request for a Certificate of Compliance for construction of a pool, patio, and associated landscaping.
- **Presentation:** The project engineer appeared on behalf of the applicant and explained that the work was completed in accordance with the Order of Conditions issued in 2018. He stated that the project involved construction of a pool, pool decking, and retaining walls designed to prevent grading toward the wetlands. The engineer confirmed that the drainage system and leaching chamber have been installed as designed, that grading remains stable, and that the Board of Health previously renewed all necessary approvals.
- **Discussion:**
 - Commissioners reviewed the plan and site conditions. They noted that all work appeared stable and consistent with the approved design but requested to review the original 2018 plan at the next meeting to confirm the details.
 - Some commissioners questioned whether the bottom of the fence should allow wildlife passage, while others felt the current design is acceptable given the proximity to the pool.
 - It was agreed that reviewing the original plan would clarify what was approved.

- The applicant agreed to provide a copy of the original plan before the next meeting.
- One member of the public commented that excluding wildlife from the pool area is a pro, as it reduces animal drownings.
- **Motion:** A motion was made and seconded to issue a Certificate of Compliance, confirming that the work was completed as approved.
- **Vote:** BE, LH, BW, OL, JS, PM: Yes (6-0)
- **Outcome:** The motion carried unanimously, and a Certificate of Compliance was issued.

7:15 PM: Request for Certificate of Compliance – 55 Wenuchas Trail DEP# 169-1024

- **Proposal:** Request for a Certificate of Compliance for completed work.
- **Presentation:** This filing is related to septic system work associated with the property, and the Commission noted that there were two Certificates of Compliance on the agenda for the same address.
- **Discussion:**
 - Commissioners who attended the site walk reported that all work appeared complete and stable.
 - They noted that the site conditions matched the approved plan and that the restoration area and retaining wall were in good condition.
 - Commissioners praised the stone wall design along the lake, describing it as a strong example for future projects due to its natural appearance and functionality.
 - Commissioners agreed that the project met all requirements and that a Certificate of Compliance was appropriate.
 - No public comments were received.
- **Motion:** A motion was made and seconded to issue a Certificate of Compliance.
- **Vote:** BE, LH, BW, OL, JS, PM: Yes (6-0)
- **Outcome:** The motion carried unanimously, and a Certificate of Compliance was issued.

7:20 PM: Request for Certificate of Compliance – 55 Wenuchas Trail DEP# 169-923

- **Proposal:** Request for a Certificate of Compliance for completed work.
- **Presentation:** The public hearing notice was read into the record. The Commission noted that this was the second Certificate of Compliance request for the property and that all work had been reviewed during the prior discussion.
- **Discussion:**
 - Commissioners confirmed that both filings were observed during the same site visit and that all work appeared complete, stable, and in compliance with the approved plans.

- No public comments were received.
- **Motion:** A motion was made and seconded to issue a Certificate of Compliance.
- **Vote:** BE, LH, BW, OL, JS, PM: Yes (6-0)
- **Outcome:** The motion carried unanimously, and a Certificate of Compliance was issued.

2. GENERAL BUSINESS

2.1 GENERAL DISCUSSIONS/ANNOUNCEMENTS

Discussion: SGARs Information Webpage

- **Proposal:** Discussion regarding posting public information on Second-Generation Anticoagulant Rodenticides (SGARs) to the Commission's website.
- **Presentation:** Commissioner Olin reported that he had prepared a document summarizing information on SGARs and their impacts on wildlife. He stated that the intent was to finalize the document, make minor modifications if needed, and post it on the town's website as an official resource.
- **Discussion:**
 - Commissioners agreed that the information is valuable to the public and that the document should be published.
 - No public comments were received.
- **Motion:** A motion was made and seconded to authorize Commissioner Olin to post the SGAR information on the Conservation Commission's webpage.
- **Vote:** BE, LH, BW, OL, JS, PM: Yes (6-0)
- **Outcome:** The motion carried unanimously.

FY27 CPC Funding

- **Proposal:** Discussion regarding the FY2027 Community Preservation Committee (CPC) funding application for the Conservation Fund.
- **Presentation:** The Chair explained that the Community Preservation Committee will soon release the FY2025-2026 Community Preservation Plan, which includes guidance for funding applications. It was noted that the Conservation Commission typically submits a yearly request for additional transfers into the Conservation Fund and invited discussion on the appropriate amount to request this cycle.
- **Discussion:**
 - Commissioners reviewed the current Conservation Fund balance, which was approximately \$1.3 million as of August 11, 2025.

- They discussed maintaining the fund within the 2% limit of the town's overall fiscal budget while keeping flexibility for potential land sales. Members noted that it is important to have the ability to act quickly if opportunities arise.
- The Commission discussed prior funding levels, stating that in earlier years the request had been \$400,000, but that it was reduced to \$200,000 during an oversubscribed funding cycle.
- After some discussion, members agreed that \$300,000 would be a reasonable request to ensure continued readiness without exceeding the 2% threshold.
- **Motion:** A motion was made and seconded to direct Administrator Steeves to prepare a two-page CPC funding application requesting approximately \$300,000 for transfer into the Conservation Fund.
- **Vote:** BE, LH, BW, OL, JS, PM: Yes (6-0)
- **Outcome:** The motion carried unanimously.

2.2 COMMITTEE UPDATES

Stewardship Committee

- **Proposal:** Update from the Stewardship Committee regarding boundary review at Nipmuc Meadows.
- **Presentation:** Commissioner Olin presented a summary of the recent site walk at Nipmuc Meadows. He displayed a map showing the GPS track of the walk overlaid with the town's GIS property boundaries. He noted that there appeared to be possible clearing or activity near the boundary that could indicate encroachment, though he emphasized that the accuracy of the GIS and GPS data needed to be verified. Olin stated that before pursuing any formal action, it would be best to have an initial, friendly conversation with the abutting homeowner to confirm property boundaries and avoid assumptions.
- **Discussion:**
 - Commissioners reviewed the presented map and photos, noting visible cleared areas and vehicles near the property edge.
 - The Commission agreed that the next step should be a courteous conversation with the abutter to clarify boundary understanding and to assess whether any encroachment exists.
- **Motion:** A motion was made and seconded to direct the Administrator to contact the abutting landowner at Nipmuc Meadows to discuss possible boundary concerns and to report back to the Commission.
- **Vote:** BE, LH, BW, OL, JS, PM: Yes (6-0)
- **Outcome:** The motion carried unanimously.

Great Ponds Advisory Committee and Harvester Committee

- **Proposal:** Update on Great Ponds Advisory Committee and Harvester Committee activities.
- **Presentation:** Commissioner Larry reported that the Great Ponds Advisory Committee recently met and discussed ongoing concerns about security at Sargisson Beach. He stated that residents have requested the parking lot be limited to local access only, noting that the beach area itself is not classified as a Great Pond and therefore could potentially have restricted access. He added that the Committee has asked Administrator Steeves to consult with town counsel regarding whether the parking area can be designated for residents only.
- **Discussion:**
 - Commissioners agreed that addressing parking and access concerns could improve conditions at Sargisson Beach and reduce unauthorized use.
 - It was also reported that the Harvester Committee has completed this season's work and successfully removed the weed harvester from Ayer's Pond for storage following the end of harvesting operations.
 - There was no further discussion or public comment.
- **Outcome:** The Commission noted both updates for the record.

2.3 LAND MANAGEMENT & ACQUISITION

Paquawket Path

- **Proposal:** Update and direction regarding the subdivision right-of-way through the Covenant connecting Paquawket Path to a Conservation parcel near the Nashua River Rail Trail.
- **Presentation:** The Chair summarized a site meeting and reviewed subdivision records from 1979-1987 showing a right-of-way across the covenant area. He noted that the recorded restrictive covenant allows the Conservation Commission inspection/enforcement access, but that it may not specifically grant public access.
- **Discussion:**
 - Commissioners reviewed registry documents, prior town counsel opinions, and testimony from abutters that all could be seen as describing the strip as a shared private driveway.
 - Commissioners agreed the matter exceeds the Commission's authority and that it should be determined by the Town Manager and Planning Board to establish clear, recorded rights and responsibilities. It was also discussed that it would be beneficial to utilize the Land Court in this clarification.
 - Commissioners also noted that trail signage and town mapping should show whatever final determination is made to avoid further confusion.
- **Motion:** A motion was made and seconded to authorize the Chair to communicate on the Commission's behalf with the Town Manager requesting that the Planning Board and/or Select Board discuss a resolution.
- **Vote:** BE, LH, BW, OL, JS, PM: Yes (6-0)

- **Outcome:** The motion carried unanimously. The Chair will discuss with the Town Manager and report back with next steps.

Ames Meadow Access

- **Proposal:** Discussion regarding motorized access through the Town Forest to reach the Ames Meadow Conservation Area for mowing.
- **Presentation:** The Commission requested authorization to use a motorized vehicle to access Ames Meadow through the Town Forest for maintenance purposes. It was explained that access is needed to complete the mowing, and also that it would be beneficial to formalize this arrangement with the Town Forest Committee, so that they no longer needed to require separate permission every year.
- **Discussion:**
 - Commissioners agreed that coordinating with the Town Forest Committee to establish a standing agreement would simplify ongoing maintenance.
 - They discussed pursuing a memorandum of understanding (MOU), granting long-term access for conservation maintenance along the existing road or trail connection.
 - It was noted that the work occurs only once per year and that care will continue to be taken to minimize disturbance.
 - Commissioners agreed that formal approval from the Town Forest Committee is needed before proceeding.
- **Outcome:** The Administrator agreed to contact the Town Forest Committee to request permission for motorized access to Ames Meadow, and to also explore establishing a memorandum of understanding in order to continue the granted access.

2.4 APPROVE MEETING MINUTES

- **Motion:** A motion was made and seconded to approve the September 9, 2025, minutes as amended.
- **Vote:** BE, LH, BW, OL, JS, PM: Yes (6-0)
Outcome: The motion carried unanimously.

2.5 APPROVE INVOICES

- **Motion:** A motion was made and seconded to authorize payment of \$62.50 to the Groton Herald.
- **Vote:** BE, LH, BW, OL, JS, PM: Yes (6-0)
- **Outcome:** The motion carried. Payment will be issued.
- **Motion:** A motion was made and seconded to authorize payment to Great Road Farm and Garden in the amount of \$243.74.
- **Vote:** BE, LH, BW, OL, JS, PM: Yes (6-0)

- **Outcome:** The motion carried. Payment will be issued.

APPROVED: 10/28/2025