



Conservation Commission Meeting
Tuesday, October 14, 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, Kimberly Kuliesis, Olin Lathrop, John Smigelski, Ben Wolfe

Others Present: Charlotte Steeves, Conservation Administrator

Chairman 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. It was reported that the applicant requested a continuance. The next meeting is scheduled for October 28, 2025.
- **Discussion:**
 - Commissioners briefly discussed the request. It was noted that the applicant had recently met with the Stormwater Advisory Committee and had no new updates but was continuing to work through remaining items, including ACEC considerations.
- **Motion:** A motion was made and seconded to continue the public hearing for 63 Gratuity Road to October 28, 2025.
- **Vote:** All in favor. Motion carried unanimously.
- **Outcome:** The hearing was continued to October 28, 2025.

2. GENERAL BUSINESS

* The chair noted there was extra time available, and so he began the general discussions, committee updates, and land management and acquisition discussions.

2.1 GENERAL DISCUSSIONS/ANNOUNCEMENTS

Preliminary CPA Application Submission

- **Presentation:** Administrator Steeves reported that the preliminary CPA application was submitted requesting \$300,000 for the upcoming fiscal year for purchasing parcels and CRs.

Administrator Absence – October 28 Meeting

- **Presentation:** Administrator Steeves reminded the Commission that she will not be present at the October 28, 2025 meeting. She stated that the Commission had previously voted to hold the meeting, and noted that she will train Chairman Easom on the setup prior to the meeting.

CPA Application Deadline Reminder

- **Presentation:** Chairman Easom stated that the due date for CPA submissions is 4 p.m. on October 15, 2025. He explained that the application is a two-page form and encouraged anyone interested to submit before the deadline.

2.2 COMMITTEE UPDATES

Stewardship Committee

- **Presentation:** Commissioner Lathrop reported that the Invasive Species Committee completed another round of knotweed treatment at Surrenden Farms and the Campbell Well site. He noted that the team spent more time searching for knotweed than treating it, showing improvement from previous years.
- He added that the previously planted grass and asters planted earlier in the season were growing well, with one former knotweed area now full of pollinators.
- He also reported that additional treatment was performed at the end of Hayden Road to address remaining invasives.

Community Preservation Committee (CPC) Update

- **Presentation:** It was reported that at the Community Preservation Committee meeting, the Town Manager submitted an out-of-cycle application requesting \$115,000 to complete the field design for the Cow Pond Brook project. This additional funding would bring the design to the amount needed to receive federal grant funding.
- The CPC voted to recommend the article to Town Meeting.

- Also as part of this process, a filing will be submitted to the Conservation Commission, as some of the proposed work is within the 100-foot wetland buffer and 200-foot riverfront area.
- Natural Heritage has also been contacted and is in early discussion with the project team.

2.3 LAND MANAGEMENT & ACQUISITION

Trail Easement Granted at 129 Longley Road

- **Presentation:** It was reported that property owner Anna Elliott had previously offered to donate a 25-foot strip of land to serve as a trail easement connecting Longley Road to the Shepley Hill Conservation Trust parcel. The easement has been granted and the deed has been recorded.
- **Discussion:**
 - During the discussion, Commissioners reviewed the easement plan and clarified that the agenda item pertained only to the recorded 25-foot easement connecting Longley Road to Shepley Hill.
 - It was confirmed that no vote was needed, as the easement had already been accepted by the Commission.

Ames Meadow Mowing

- **Presentation:** Chairman Easom reported that Ames Meadow was mowed on Thursday, and noted that the current drought conditions made the work significantly easier as the western side of the parcel was not wet this year. He explained that he was able to mow all the way to the tree line for the first time in several years, clearing saplings and restoring the open field to its original extent. He added that the field is in good condition and that the annual mowing is maintaining a nice open space habitat.

Nipmuc Meadow Update

- **Presentation:** An update was requested on the possible encroachment at Nipmuc Meadow. It was reported that no update is available yet. The Administrator stated that the homeowner has not been contacted and that the draft letter is still being finalized.

Potential Donation for Land Acquisition

- **Presentation:** It was reported that a former Commission member, now living in Colorado, reached out expressing interest in making a donation to support future land acquisition. He plans to speak with the Town Accountant to ensure the required documentation is in place for tax purposes.

- Commissioners noted the generosity of the offer and appreciated his continued support despite no longer residing in the area.

Meadow Mowing – Timing Discussion

- **Presentation:** A Commissioner shared that she recently spoke with a meadow specialist about the best timing for meadow maintenance. He recommended spring mowing as the more ecologically appropriate option because it allows habitat to stand through the winter. She added that she will check in with him to see if he has any research or materials the Commission can review.
- **Discussion:**
 - Commissioners talked about the existing constraints, including turtle restrictions and language in the Conservation Restriction that limits mowing before November 1 unless it's done very early.
 - Members agreed that fall mowing is still the most realistic option for this year given access, workload, and timing.
 - It was noted that the Stewardship Committee is still looking at long-term plans and hopes to have recommendations ready next year.

1. APPOINTMENTS AND HEARINGS

*At this time the Commission returned to Appointments and Hearings.

6:45 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, appearing on behalf of the applicant, provided an update following the October 11, 2025 site walk. He reported that the wetland flagging was refreshed as requested and that most of the house and septic system stakes were located during the walk. The second lot was fully staked and visible to the Commission, while portions of the first lot remained difficult to locate due to dense vegetation. He also showed the Commission the revised location of the stormwater basin, which has been moved outside the 50-foot buffer and placed in the outer 50-100 foot buffer. Updated plans have not yet been submitted because the applicant is still working with other boards. He stated that there were no new updates regarding the property's Chapter 61 status.
- **Discussion:**
 - Commissioners stated that the refreshed wetland flags were clear and helpful during the site walk, and that it was nice to see the site conditions this time of

year. They confirmed that the proposed homes and permanent structures are located outside the 100-foot buffer.

- They asked for clarification regarding where wetland filling will occur. The applicant confirmed that approximately 444 square feet will be altered along the sides of the driveway due to widening.
- Commissioners discussed whether the project will need to be filed as a limited project, noting that the roadway widening likely requires that designation under the ACEC regulations. It was reported that they are still evaluating this and do not have an answer at this time.
- The Commission also discussed culvert conditions and recent growth around the second culvert.
- Commissioners asked for confirmation that NHESP had received the latest plan revision, and it was reported that this will be followed up on.
- A Commissioner asked if fill could be sourced from the site to avoid importing soil that may contain invasive species. The applicant noted that the erosion control notes include requirements for contractor cleaning and measures to prevent transport of invasive plants.
- No public comments were received.

- **Motion:** A motion was made and seconded to continue the public hearing for Off Worthen Drive to October 28, 2025.
- **Vote:** All in favor. Motion carried unanimously.
- **Outcome:** The hearing was continued to October 28, 2025.

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. It was reported that no updates had been received.
- **Discussion:**
 - It was noted that while there had been earlier hope for the project to reach Fall Town Meeting, this is no longer feasible and the timeline will need to be adjusted.
 - No public comments were received.
- **Motion:** A motion was made and seconded to continue the public hearing for the Squannacook River Dam to October 28, 2025.
- **Vote:** All in favor. Motion carried unanimously.
- **Outcome:** The hearing was continued to October 28, 2025.

7:01 PM: Request for Determination of Applicability – 25 Whitney Pond Road

- **Proposal:** Replacement of the existing stairway and expansion of the lower stair section leading from the driveway to the home.
- **Presentation:** The public hearing notice was read into the record. The applicant explained that the proposal involves removing the upper set of stairs and expanding the lower stairs so that access would run directly from the driveway to the house. She noted that the existing concrete in several areas is compromised and needs repair, which is what prompted the project. The expanded stairs would then align with the width of the existing deck which will remain in place. The applicant stated that additional details about construction methods would need to be confirmed with the contractor.
- **Discussion:**
 - Commissioners discussed how the project would increase the permanent structure within the 100-foot buffer, an area where new construction wouldn't be allowed under current standards. Members explained that even though the home is grandfathered, any expansion should be balanced with some type of environmental benefit.
 - Commissioners referenced what they saw during the site visit, including cracked concrete, the steep hillside, and the lack of vegetation. They agreed that the area could easily become prone to erosion, especially once digging begins for the new stair layout.
 - Members stated that a restoration and planting plan would help to offset the additional encroachment, and could also strengthen the slope long-term. They encouraged the applicant to look at native shrubs and groundcovers that are appropriate for the site.
 - Commissioners suggested using available native plant lists and working with the Commission members to narrow down species that will stabilize the hillside, help with erosion, and provide habitat benefits.
 - They asked that the applicant show the planting area, erosion controls, and any stabilization work clearly on a sketch plan, similar to the drawing submitted for the stairs.
 - Several Commissioners said they are comfortable with the stair expansion as long as a thoughtful planting and restoration plan is included, since that would help to balance the additional disturbance within the buffer.
 - No public comments were received.
- **Motion:** A motion was made and seconded to continue the Request for Determination of Applicability for 25 Whitney Pond Road to October 28, 2025, to allow time for the applicant to prepare a restoration and planting plan.
- **Vote:** All in favor. Motion carried unanimously.
- **Outcome:** The hearing was continued to October 28, 2025.

7:10 PM: Request for Determination of Applicability – 352 Nashua Road

- **Proposal:** Construction of a shed within the 200 foot buffer.

- **Presentation:** The public hearing notice was read into the record. The applicants explained that they recently moved to Groton and are proposing to build a shed for storing lawn equipment, bicycles, and seasonal items, as their garage has very limited space. They stated that they met with staff in advance because they wanted to be sure they followed all requirements. Staff initially believed the shed would be outside jurisdiction based on GIS mapping, but the submitted plan indicated that the structure may fall within the 200-foot Riverfront Area associated with a nearby stream. Commissioners noted that the applicants are near or at the edge of the 200-foot limit.
- **Discussion:**
 - Commissioners discussed that the property falls within the 200-foot Riverfront Area and reviewed the plan submitted. Members confirmed that the shed, as proposed, appears to fall within that buffer based on the delineation shown.
 - In talking with the applicants, the Commissioners explained the difference between the 100-foot wetland buffer and the 200-foot Riverfront Area and noted that riverfront rules allow up to 5,000 square feet of disturbance without triggering additional requirements, provided the work stays within that limit.
 - Several Commissioners suggested that the applicants could relocate the shed slightly farther out of the Riverfront Area, in which case no filing with the Commission would be needed.
 - It was confirmed that the project, as drawn, fits within the allowable disturbance threshold and could be approved if the applicants prefer to keep the shed in the proposed location.
 - Commissioners clarified that as long as the shed is built within the blue rectangle shown on the plan and no additional disturbance occurs elsewhere on the property, the project is approvable under a Negative Determination.
 - No public comments were received.
- **Motion:** A motion was made and seconded to issue a Negative 3 Determination, with the condition that all work be limited to the blue rectangle shown on the plan presented at the meeting.
- **Vote:** All in favor. Motion carried unanimously.
- **Outcome:** A Negative 3 Determination was issued with the noted condition. The applicants may proceed with the project as proposed.

7:20 PM: Request for Certificate of Compliance – 28 Boathouse Road

- **Proposal:** Request for Certificate of Compliance for work previously permitted under the original Order of Conditions.
- **Presentation:** The applicant was present and explained that he was seeking a Certificate of Compliance for work completed years ago under the Order of Conditions. Commissioners who attended the site walk reported that the silt fence remained in place and was partially buried, indicating that it had never been removed as required. They also noted a significant amount of trash on the property. The applicant stated he

was willing to remove the silt fence and clean up the property but stated concern about potential erosion when the fence is pulled, given how long it has been in the ground.

- **Discussion:**

- Commissioners explained that removal of the silt fence was required when the original project was completed and emphasized that the fencing must be removed carefully to avoid causing erosion into the wetland.
- Members suggested spreading mulch hay after removal to help stabilize the disturbed soil and diffuse rainwater. The applicant agreed to this.
- Commissioners clarified that the hay bales previously used on site have already decomposed and do not need to be removed, but that the remaining issue is the buried silt fence.
- During the site walk, Commissioners also observed a deck on the side of the house that does not appear on the permitted plans. A plan from 2004 was located showing an existing front porch, but nothing documenting the additional side deck. Commissioners stated that the deck issue is separate from the Certificate of Compliance and may require an after-the-fact filing if no building permit is found.
- Commissioners agreed that the COC should address only the work shown on the original permitted plan: removal of the silt fence and cleanup of trash.
- The applicant asked whether removing the deck would resolve the concern, and Commissioners advised him not to remove the deck while explaining that deck permitting must be confirmed through the building department first.
- Commissioners reiterated that the deck question will be dealt with at a later date, after staff checks town records.
- No public comments were received.

- **Motion:** A motion was made and seconded to issue a Certificate of Compliance for 28 Boathouse Road, pending removal of the silt fence, cleanup of all trash on site, and stabilization with mulch hay. There will be a site walk conducted to confirm completion.
- **Vote:** All in favor. Motion carried unanimously.
- **Outcome:** A Certificate of Compliance was approved for the work shown on the original plans, pending verification that the silt fence has been removed and the site has been cleaned. The issue of the unpermitted deck will be addressed at a later meeting once permitting records are reviewed.

7:30 PM: Discussion: Wetland Crossing to Access Upland at 162 Common Street

- **Proposal:** Discussion regarding a temporary wetland crossing to access upland areas for soil testing.
- **Presentation:** A representative appeared on behalf of a potential buyer for two parcels on Common Street. He explained that the buyer's offer is contingent on due diligence, including soil testing for possible future septic placement. Wetlands have been delineated, and one of the potential test locations can only be accessed by crossing a narrow finger of wetlands. The representative stated that an existing cart path runs

through the proposed crossing area, and the plan is to use a track excavator already on-site for other testing. The request was for a single in-and-out crossing, completed in about half a day.

- **Discussion:**

- Commissioners confirmed that the request was solely for temporary access to conduct soil testing and that any future development would require a separate filing and a full review.
- Members reviewed site photos and discussed the narrow wetland finger, nearby culvert, and topography. They noted that the cart path appears to have been used and looks to withstand a limited crossing.
- Commissioners emphasized the importance of ensuring the excavator is no wider than the existing cart path and that disturbance be kept to a minimum.
- Members noted that none of the test holes are within the 100-foot buffer, and they agreed that early delineation of the wetlands was helpful.
- Commissioners discussed the timing, stating that the Administrator should confirm conditions on the day of the work to avoid crossing during or immediately after rain.
- A question was raised about potential turtle habitat in the area. Commissioners agreed that, because the access is brief and limited to a single day, a formal turtle sweep was not necessary.
- Commissioners agreed that soil testing does not typically require a filing, and that this request could proceed using the existing cart path as long as it is limited to one crossing in and one crossing out.
- No public comments were received.

- **Outcome:** The Commission agreed that a filing was not required for temporary soil testing access. The applicant may proceed with one-time use of the existing cart path, with the conditions that: the Administrator is notified beforehand and confirms that conditions are appropriate on the day of work, only one in-and-out crossing is conducted using equipment no wider than the existing cart path, and that any disturbance beyond normal cart-path conditions will be addressed in coordination with staff.

7:40 PM: Minor Change Request – Groton School Lower Playing Fields

- **Proposal:** Request for a minor change to allow construction of a bathroom and shelter building within the lower playing fields area at Groton School.
- **Presentation:** It was explained that while preparing to close out several active Orders of Conditions for previous field work, the school identified the need for a small shelter and bathroom building serving players and spectators. The proposed building would be centrally located between six athletic fields. Portions of the project fall within the 100-foot buffer, but the area is maintained lawn that has been disturbed due to previous permitted work. The project includes removal of three trees, installation of pervious paver patio and stormwater controls. The engineer noted that runoff from the structure

would be collected and directed into the previously installed drainage system. Erosion controls would also be installed around the work area.

- **Discussion:**

- Commissioners noted that several of the trees proposed for removal have habitat value, and they requested that the school plant replacement native trees nearby.
- Commissioners discussed if this could reasonably be treated as a minor change, and several members shared that the size of the structure, the added impervious area, and the amount of work inside the 100-foot buffer made it hard to see it that way.
- There was some discussion about whether the building could be rotated or shifted closer to the gravel drive to pull more of it out of the buffer. Snow storage and circulation were raised as concerns, and the representative explained that the area is very tight, which limits the options.
- Commissioners reiterated that permanent structures in the 100-foot buffer normally require mitigation to balance the impact, and that wasn't part of the proposal as submitted.
- The applicant stated that he could come back with a mitigation proposal that might address the Commission's concerns and asked to continue the discussion.
- Members agreed that while the site has been disturbed for years and the school typically does high-quality work, the request goes beyond what they would consider a minor change without additional detail and mitigation.
- No public comments were received.

- **Motion:** A motion was made and seconded to continue the minor change request for the Groton School lower playing fields to October 28, 2025.

- **Vote:** All in favor. Motion carried unanimously.

- **Outcome:** The request was continued to October 28, 2025.

2. GENERAL BUSINESS

2.1 GENERAL DISCUSSIONS/ANNOUNCEMENTS

22 Mountain Lakes Trail (Fire Damage Site Walk)

- **Discussion:**

- Commissioners discussed observations from the site walk at 22 Mountain Lakes Trail following the recent house fire. Members noted burn damage, but stated that very little debris appeared to have entered the lake at this point. DEP had reportedly been on site shortly after the incident, but the Commission had no information yet about what actions they took or what concerns they may have flagged.

- Commissioners agreed that although the immediate impact to the lake appeared minimal, that there is a concern about future runoff, especially given the amount of ash, exposed soil, and charred material. Members discussed whether erosion controls such as silt fence or hay bales should be installed as a precaution.
- Several Commissioners emphasized the need to balance environmental protection with sensitivity to the homeowner who is dealing with a major loss. Even so, members agreed that protecting the lake remains necessary.
- Commissioners noted that the lawn between the house and the lake is relatively flat, with a wall at the shoreline which may help reduce immediate migration of debris. However, members pointed out that a significant rain event could still move ash and debris.
- There was agreement that reaching out to DEP for clarification on their visit would be helpful, as they may have already given direction to the homeowner or insurance company.
- Commissioners discussed the best approach for contacting the responsible party. The homeowner is believed to be out of state. Members agreed that the Administrator should determine the correct point of contact and coordinate from there.
- **Motion:** A motion was made and seconded for the Administrator to contact DEP for information and to also reach out to the appropriate party to request installation of basic erosion controls (such as hay bales or silt fence) to prevent ash and debris from washing into the lake.
- **Vote:** All in favor. Motion carried unanimously.
- **Outcome:** The Administrator will follow up with DEP and the property's representative.

2.4 APPROVE INVOICES

- **Motion:** A motion was made and seconded to authorize reimbursement of \$150 to Commissioner Ben for registration to the MACC Fall Conference.
- **Vote:** All in favor. Motion carried unanimously.
- **Outcome:** The reimbursement will be issued.
- **Motion:** A motion was made and seconded to authorize payment of \$118.75 to the Groton Herald for conservation notices.
- **Vote:** All in favor. Motion carried unanimously.
- **Outcome:** Payment will be issued.

ADJOURNMENT

- **Motion:** A motion was made and seconded to adjourn the meeting.

- **Vote:** All in favor. Motion carried unanimously.
- **Outcome:** The meeting adjourned.

Approved: 11/12/2025