



Conservation Commission Meeting
Tuesday, January 27, 2026 at 6:30 PM
Town Hall: Second Floor Meeting Room
173 Main Street Groton, MA
OPTION TO JOIN REMOTELY



Present: Chair: Bruce Easom, Larry Hurley, Kimberly Kuliesis, Olin Lathrop, Peter Morrison, Ben Wolfe, John Smigelski

Others Present: Charlotte Steeves, Conservation Administrator

The meeting opened 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: Request for Determination of Applicability – 60 Valley Road RDA

- **Proposal:** Request for Determination of Applicability for a home reconstruction, including addition of a second floor within the existing footprint. The property is located adjacent to Whitney Pond.
- **Presentation:** The applicant appeared electronically and described the project as adding a second floor while keeping the same footprint. The applicant also stated that a decayed shed on the south end of the building would be removed and not replaced. A site walk had been conducted by Commissioners the prior weekend.
- **Discussion:**
 - A Commissioner asked about a deck shown on the plans. The applicant stated that a larger deck had previously existed but was removed by prior owners when it deteriorated, and that the current plans reflect only the remaining small deck. A Commissioner noted that without documentation of the prior deck's size, the Commission could not approve expansion beyond the existing footprint. The applicant agreed to keep the deck at its current size. A Commissioner noted this as a reminder that unpermitted demolition forfeits the Commission's ability to verify and grandfather existing conditions.
 - Commissioners raised concerns about construction debris, particularly during demolition, entering Whitney Pond. A Commissioner recommended that a silt fence and construction snow fence be installed along the pond side of the site prior to any work beginning, subject to pre-approval by Administrator Steeves.

- Administrator Steeves noted that she has encountered recent instances where unlicensed demolition crews working without proper precautions caused materials to enter resource areas, and stated she would conduct a pre-work site inspection.
- **Motion:** A motion was made and seconded to issue a Negative Determination #3, finding that the work is within the buffer zone as defined in regulations but will not alter an area subject to protection under the Act, and therefore does not require the filing of a Notice of Intent, subject to the following conditions: (1) a silt fence and snow fence be placed between the house and the pond, subject to pre-approval by the administrator prior to commencement of demolition; and (2) construction shall remain within the existing footprint of the house and deck.
- **Vote:** All in favor. Motion carried unanimously.
- **Outcome:** A Negative Determination #3 was issued with conditions.

6:40 PM: Continued Notice of Intent – Hollingsworth & Vose Landfill Closure
DEP# PENDING

- **Proposal:** Notice of Intent filed by Hollingsworth & Vose Company for closure of an existing landfill.
- **Presentation:** Administrator Steeves reported that the applicant requested a continuance to the second meeting in February.
- **Motion:** A motion was made and seconded to continue the matter to February 24, 2026.
- **Vote:** All in favor. Motion carried unanimously.
- **Outcome:** The matter was continued to February 24, 2026.

6:41 PM: Continued Public Hearing – Notice of Intent – Squannacook River Dam
DEP# PENDING

- **Proposal:** Notice of Intent filed by Haley and Aldrich, Inc. for repairs to the Squannacook River Dam.
- **Presentation:** Administrator Steeves reported no new information. It was noted that she had emailed the applicant's contact but had not yet received a response.
- **Motion:** A motion was made and seconded to continue the public hearing to February 10, 2026.
- **Vote:** All in favor. Motion carried unanimously.
- **Outcome:** The public hearing was continued to February 10, 2026.

6:42 PM: Continued Public Hearing – 26 Indian Hill Road DEP# PENDING

- **Proposal:** Notice of Intent for modifications to an existing single-family residence including removal of an existing garage, construction of a new garage and addition,

septic system relocation, and associated drainage work. A portion of the proposed work falls within the 50-foot and 100-foot buffer zones and the 200-foot riverfront area.

- **Presentation:** Bruce Ringwall of Goldsmith Prest & Ringwall appeared on behalf of the applicant and presented a revised plan. He described the following changes from the prior submission: the building footprint was reduced, eliminating any encroachment into the 50-foot buffer zone and reducing temporary disturbance within that zone from approximately 158 square feet to 65 square feet, the driveway was shifted, drainage structures were relocated under the driveway to reduce vegetation clearing, approximately 1,026 square feet of work was removed from the buffer zone, approximately 780 square feet of paving and landscape pavers were eliminated, and the retaining wall was moved out of the 50-foot buffer. Total permanent structures in the buffer zone were reduced to approximately 2,400 square feet. The applicant proposed renaturalizing approximately 3,000 square feet of lawn area in the back of the property as well. Tim Hass of Studio InSitu Architects appeared electronically. It was noted that a DEP number has not yet been assigned.
- **Discussion:**
 - Commissioners stated that the proposed structure is still a significant presence in the 100-foot buffer zone and expressed continued uncertainty, noting that the bylaw is intended to prevent exactly this type of construction. The Commissioner stated that the proposed mitigation area in the rear of the property, while positive, needed to be substantially larger and more permanently protected to justify the intrusion.
 - Discussion focused on how to permanently memorialize the mitigation area. A Commissioner suggested granite boundary markers sticking at least 12 inches above grade at intervals along the mitigation boundary, noting that flush markers tend to become undetectable over time. The applicant's representative agreed to this and proposed extending the restoration boundary to the 311 contour line.
 - Concerns were raised that the mitigation area, once outside the active jurisdiction of the Commission, could be altered by a future owner without the Commission's knowledge. It was clarified that the mitigation area falls within the 200-foot riverfront, which means any future work there would still require Commission approval. Commissioners agreed this addressed the concern.
 - A Commissioner noted that the proposed mitigation area of approximately 3,000 square feet exceeded the 2,400 square feet of permanent structures in the buffer, and noted this as a net positive. It was also noted that the area where the garage is proposed is currently mostly lawn, and that eliminating that lawn in favor of native plantings represents an ecological improvement.
 - Administrator Steeves suggested monitoring reports at biannual intervals for the first two to three years to verify establishment of the restoration plantings.
- **Motion:** A motion was made and seconded to continue the public hearing to February 10, 2026.
- **Vote:** All in favor. Motion carried unanimously.

- **Outcome:** The public hearing was continued to February 10, 2026. The applicant was asked to return with a revised plan showing the expanded mitigation area to the 311 contour, granite marker locations and spacing, and written language addressing permanent protection of the mitigation area.

6:55 PM: Continued Public Hearing – Notice of Intent – 70 Dale Lane DEP# 169-1288

- **Proposal:** Notice of Intent for construction of a new single-family residence on an undeveloped lot at 70 Dale Lane, including a driveway, detention basin, septic system, and associated site work.
- **Presentation:** A representative for the applicant presented a revised plan incorporating changes discussed at the prior meeting. Revisions included: a wetland seed mix to be planted in the bottom of the detention basin to encourage naturalization, a defined limit of lawn area around the house, with the remaining area to be planted with a New England native wildflower mix, a designated no-tree-cutting area of approximately one acre in the back portion of the property, and a snow storage area designated on the northern part of the lot. The property owners appeared and expressed willingness to work with the Commission on preservation conditions.
- **Discussion:**
 - A Commissioner expressed appreciation for the site walk that had been conducted the prior Saturday despite extremely cold temperatures. The Commissioner noted the area is a wet meadow and that cutting trees to build there was unfortunate, but acknowledged the applicant had done the best possible given the site constraints.
 - It was suggested that the no-cut area be expanded to include the area north of the house connecting to the back acre, in addition to the rear acre already shown. Discussion followed about the extent of this area, and the applicant's representative and property owner agreed to a combined no-cut zone consisting of the rear acre plus the slope area north of the house running up to the northern property boundary. This was marked on the plan in real time.
 - It was agreed that the designated no-cut area, while outside the standard 100-foot buffer zone, falls within the 200-foot riverfront and would therefore still require Commission approval for any future disturbance.
 - A Commissioner suggested planting trees with a maximum height of approximately 30-40 feet in any area cleared for solar access, to establish habitat without interfering with the solar panels planned for the roof.
 - Administrator Steeves confirmed a DEP number has been assigned and that DEP comments, including a comment regarding Natural Heritage and turtles, had been addressed. Natural Heritage indicated no issues as long as the applicant follows to the submitted plan.
- **Motion:** A motion was made and seconded, with the agreement of the applicant, to close the public hearing.

- **Vote:** All in favor. Motion carried unanimously.
- **Outcome:** The public hearing was closed. Order of Conditions to be issued incorporating the agreed-upon conditions, including the designated snow storage area, the native wildflower planting plan, the wetland seed mix in the detention basin, and the permanent no-cut designation for the rear acre and the northern slope area as marked on the plan.

7:15 PM: Request for Determination of Applicability – 716 Martins Pond Road

- **Proposal:** Request for Determination of Applicability for deck replacement at 716 Martins Pond Road.
 - **Presentation:** The applicant appeared electronically and stated that the project involves replacing an existing deck while keeping the same footprint. A representative for the applicant also appeared electronically and clarified the structural details: the upper deck is being rebuilt and a lower deck, which had been removed by prior owners years ago, is being added back. Because the lower deck had been removed before the current owner's involvement, new footings were placed in a slightly different location. A family member of the property owner appeared electronically and provided background, noting the property has been in the family since 1971 and the existing upper deck was removed due to safety concerns for the 103 year-old resident.
 - **Discussion:**
 - A Commissioner raised concern that the new footings for the lower deck appear to be closer to the pond than the original footings, potentially representing an expansion into the 50-foot buffer zone. The Commissioner stated that because the lower deck was demolished without a permit, there is no documentation of its prior footprint, and that the Commission cannot approve expansion beyond the original extent.
 - Discussion followed regarding if the new footings might still fall within the original deck's outer edge. A Commissioner noted that if the old deck extended out beyond its footings, the new footings could be in the same or smaller overall footprint even if they appear to be in a different location.
 - The applicant's representative stated that pre-demolition photographs exist showing the upper deck overhanging the existing footings and agreed to submit them to Administrator Steeves for review.
 - **Motion:** A motion was made and seconded to continue the matter to February 10, 2026.
 - **Vote:** All in favor. Motion carried unanimously.
 - **Outcome:** The matter was continued to February 10, 2026. The applicant was asked to submit photographs documenting the prior deck footprint to Administrator Steeves before the next meeting.
-

2. GENERAL BUSINESS

2.1 GENERAL DISCUSSIONS/ANNOUNCEMENTS

7:30 PM: Discussion: Groton Sustainability Commission – Specialized Stretch Code

- Members of the Groton Sustainability Commission appeared to present on two topics: the Climate Leaders Program and the Specialized Stretch Energy Code. The Sustainability Commission had posted this as a joint meeting.
- It was reported that Groton became a Green Community in 2019 and has since received approximately \$280,000 in grant funding for municipal energy improvements. The state has introduced an elevated program called the Climate Leaders Program, which qualifies municipalities for up to \$1 million in decarbonization grants. To qualify, Groton must meet additional requirements, including adoption of the Specialized Stretch Energy Code.
- It was explained that the Specialized Stretch Energy Code applies only to new construction, not renovations. It does not ban fossil fuels but requires pre-wiring for electrification and installation of solar panels for mixed-fuel homes under 4,000 square feet, and a zero-energy pathway for larger homes. All-electric new construction under 4,000 square feet faces no additional requirements beyond the current stretch code. The code was described as trying to incentivize, not mandate.
- It was noted that approximately 56 communities have adopted the Specialized Stretch Code and that recent data shows no reduction in new home construction rates in those communities. The Groton substation was described as having capacity to handle approximately double the current load.
- Commissioners asked questions and shared comments. Several Commissioners expressed general support for the direction. Concerns were raised about long-term grid capacity and the cost of electricity for lower-income residents, particularly as demand increases. It was noted that aging gas infrastructure may also create cost pressures as fewer customers remain on gas systems. The presenter acknowledged these concerns and noted that the town would vote on the Specialized Stretch Code at the Spring 2026 Town Meeting, with a proposed effective date of January 1, 2027 if adopted.
- The Sustainability Commission was thanked for the presentation.

Letters of Support CPC

- Administrator Steeves reported that she is collecting letters of support for the Commission's own CPC application for FY2027 and has received three letters, with one more pending.
- Administrator Steeves also reported that the Sustainability Commission requested a letter of support for their CPC application for a project to improve accessibility of the

Pollinator Pathway by adding crushed stone or stone dust to allow access for people of all abilities. Administrator Steeves read a draft letter into the record.

- **Motion:** A motion was made and seconded to send a letter of support to the CPC for the Sustainability Commission's Pollinator Pathway accessibility project.
- **Vote:** All in favor. Motion carried unanimously.
- **Outcome:** Letter approved. Commissioners signed the letter.

Discussion: Cut trees along Nashua River

- Administrator Steeves reported receiving an email and photographs documenting trees that had been cut along the Nashua River, observed within the prior few months. This had also occurred previously and the Commission had asked to be notified if it happened again.
- Discussion followed about the possible cause and if the cutting could be related to navigation clearance for rowing crews. It was noted that the cutting appears to have occurred on both banks, suggesting someone with a boat is traveling the river and performing the work.
- It was agreed that Administrator Steeves would reach out to the Nashua River Paddlers and the Groton School rowing program to ask if they have observed anything, and would consider placing a notice in the local paper. It was also noted that the matter could be reported to the Environmental Police.

2.2 COMMITTEE UPDATES

- It was reported that the Stewardship Committee plans to file an RDA for invasive species management work at Carol Wheeler Park and on the adjacent MBTA right-of-way, which contains a significant amount of Japanese knotweed. The work falls within 100 feet of the river and therefore requires an RDA. The filing missed the deadline for the next meeting and will be submitted for the following meeting.
- It was reported that Peter Cunningham has had the MBTA fee waived and continues to work on obtaining formal permission from the MBTA real estate office to perform invasive management on their property.

2.3 LAND MANAGEMENT & ACQUISITION

Review and Sign Conservation Agreement – Village at Shepley Hill

- A resident of the Village at Shepley Hill appeared as a representative of the development's homeowners association board, which recently took over from the developer. He introduced himself and stated he attended to understand the

Commission's expectations regarding the conservation restriction on a portion of the property.

- The Commission reviewed a draft conservation agreement submitted by the developer. Administrator Steeves confirmed that the Select Board has given preliminary approval contingent on the Conservation Commission's sign-off, and that the Commission is the party negotiating the final language.
- A Commissioner identified the following items in the draft requiring revision: the definition of invasive species was considered too vague, and the Commissioner proposed replacing it with a restriction on non-native species only. Language allowing motorized vehicles for persons with mobility impairments was flagged as potentially broader than intended and in need of rewording, and the map attached to the agreement was a low-resolution scan and needs to be replaced with a better version. It was also noted that Commissioner Wolfe's name was absent from the document, as it predates his appointment.
- It was agreed that a Commissioner would draft revised language for the flagged provisions before the next meeting. All commissioners were encouraged to review the permitted and prohibited uses sections and submit any additional comments.
- Administrator Steeves emailed the draft to the representative so that the homeowners association and their attorney could also review it and provide comments.
- The matter was tabled to a future meeting for further review and a vote.

Review Walker Property Monitoring Report

- It was indicated that this item would be deferred to a future meeting.

MACC Spring Meeting

- It was noted that the MACC Annual Environmental Conference is scheduled for Saturday, February 28, 2026. Commissioners were reminded to register before the deadline.

2.4 APPROVE MEETING MINUTES

- **Motion:** A motion was made and seconded to approve the minutes from October 28, 2025, as edited.
- **Vote:** All in favor. Motion carried unanimously.

2.5 APPROVE INVOICE

- **Motion:** A motion was made and seconded to authorize reimbursement to Bruce Easom in the amount of \$108.87 for diesel fuel.
- **Vote:** All in favor. Motion carried unanimously.

- **Motion:** A motion was made and seconded to authorize payment to the Groton Herald in the amount of \$60.00.
- **Vote:** All in favor. Motion carried unanimously.

2.6 ONGOING ISSUES

- Administrator Steeves reported briefly on the ongoing issues list. She confirmed that 54 Hill Road had been added as requested, that a letter regarding snow plowing onto conservation land was sent to property owners near 100 North Woods Road, and that 309 Boston Road would also be added to the list. It was noted that a letter to 309 Boston Road with a compliance deadline is being drafted for the next meeting.

ADJOURNMENT

- A motion was made and seconded to adjourn. All in favor. Motion carried unanimously. The meeting was adjourned. No executive session was held.

APPROVED: 4/14/2026