



**Conservation Commission Meeting**  
Tuesday, February 24, 2026 at 6:30 PM  
Town Hall: Second Floor Meeting Room  
173 Main Street Groton, MA  
**OPTION TO JOIN REMOTELY**



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**Present:** Chair: Bruce Easom, Larry Hurley, Kimberly Kuliesis, Olin Lathrop, 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.

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## **1. APPOINTMENTS AND HEARINGS**

### **6:30 PM: Approve Order of Conditions – 26 Indian Hill Road DEP# 169-1290**

- **Proposal:** Approval of Order of Conditions for the Notice of Intent at 26 Indian Hill Road.
- **Discussion:**
  - A Commissioner identified several issues with the draft special conditions 51 through 54. The abbreviation “GCC” was flagged as undefined and inconsistent with the rest of the document, which uses “Conservation Commission” throughout. It was agreed to spell out “Conservation Commission” in full.
  - Condition 52A was flagged as advisory rather than actionable and proposed to be struck. It was agreed that invasive plant removal language would instead be added to Condition 50 as a new sub-condition reading: invasive plants shall be removed on an annual basis within the two-year monitoring period. Condition 52 was removed.
  - Condition 53 was amended to read: allow the Conservation Commission or its agent to visit the site to inspect the restoration area with adequate notice.
  - Condition 54 was condensed. Rather than restating the legal description of the restoration area boundary, it was agreed to reference the approved plan directly: the restoration area shall be established and maintained in accordance with the approved plans and shall remain in a naturalized state as compensation for the permitted structures within the 50 and 100-foot wetland buffer zones.

- **Motion (Wetlands Protection Act):** A motion was made and seconded to approve the Order of Conditions for DEP# 169-1290 at 26 Indian Hill Road under the Wetlands Protection Act, incorporating boilerplate conditions and special conditions as read into the record, as amended.
- **Vote:** All in favor. Motion carried unanimously.
- **Motion (Groton Wetlands Protection Bylaw):** A motion was made and seconded to approve the Order of Conditions under the Groton Wetlands Protection Bylaw, incorporating bylaw conditions as read into the record, with the same amendments.
- **Vote:** All in favor. Motion carried unanimously.
- **Outcome:** Orders of Conditions issued under both the Wetlands Protection Act and the Groton Wetlands Protection Bylaw.

### **6:40 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:** A Select Board member appeared and provided an update. A public hearing on the dam is scheduled for Tuesday, March 3, 2026 at 7:00 PM at the Senior Center, where studies and engineering assessments will be presented. A town meeting article has been filed to fund repairs to the dam. It was noted that the outcome of that article will largely determine the future direction. If the repair article fails, removal becomes the likely path. The town's website was noted as a resource with detailed documentation on the current state of the dam.
- **Motion:** A motion was made and seconded to continue the public hearing to March 10, 2026.
- **Vote:** All in favor. Motion carried unanimously.
- **Outcome:** The public hearing was continued to March 10, 2026.

### **6:41 PM: Approve Order of Conditions – 70 Dale Lane DEP# 169-1288**

- **Proposal:** Approval of Order of Conditions for the Notice of Intent at 70 Dale Lane.
- **Discussion:**
  - Administrator Steeves noted that the full boilerplate conditions had already been read into the record at the January 27, 2026 meeting and that the only new language consisted of the special conditions regarding the two no-cut areas, snow storage plan, and wildflower mix areas. The Commission agreed to review only the new language.
  - A Commissioner raised an issue with conditions 52 and 53, which required the applicant to maintain a wildflower mix in perpetuity. The Commissioner stated that requiring ongoing maintenance of a wildflower mix in perpetuity is an unreasonable burden and that the applicant should have the option to allow the area to naturalize on its own. The language was amended in both conditions to

read: seeded with a New England wildflower mix and maintained as such or left natural in perpetuity.

- **Motion (Wetlands Protection Act):** A motion was made and seconded to approve the Order of Conditions under the Wetlands Protection Act, incorporating the new special conditions as read into the record and amended.
- **Vote:** All in favor. Motion carried unanimously.
- **Motion (Groton Wetlands Protection Bylaw):** A motion was made and seconded to approve the Order of Conditions under the Groton Wetlands Protection Bylaw, incorporating the new bylaw special conditions as read into the record and amended.
- **Vote:** All in favor. Motion carried unanimously.
- **Outcome:** Orders of Conditions issued under both the Wetlands Protection Act and the Groton Wetlands Protection Bylaw.

### **6:50 PM: Notice of Intent – Cow Pond Brook Playing Fields – DEP# PENDING**

- **Proposal:** Notice of Intent filed by the Town of Groton for renovations to Cow Pond Brook Park including parking improvements, accessible pathways, relocation of a baseball field, addition of athletic lighting at one field, and associated stormwater management. Work occurs partially within the 100-foot buffer zone of bordering vegetated wetlands and within the 200-foot riverfront area of Cow Pond Brook.
- **Presentation:** A representative from Activitas appeared electronically as the project engineer and provided an overview of the project. She described the resource areas on site, including bordering vegetated wetlands, vernal pools certified by Natural Heritage, the Cow Pond Brook riverfront, and an ACEC overlay. Some elements of the proposed project include: removal of the existing youth baseball field access road and reseeding it to a naturalized state, construction of three new access drives to the main parking area, relocation of youth baseball field number three to improve programming, ADA-accessible porous asphalt pathways around the site, new athletic lighting at youth baseball field two using a cloud-based controllable system, parking lot lighting, and a stormwater system using infiltration chambers with no direct discharge to wetlands. No bathrooms are proposed as porta-john areas are provided. The project is subject to MEPA review due to ACEC involvement and Natural Heritage coordination. A Streamlined Review has been requested from Natural Heritage, and a take notification is expected due to impacts near vernal pools and potential Blandings turtle habitat.
- **Discussion:**
  - Commissioner expressed concern about any disturbance to endangered species habitat given the density of rare species on site, noting that mitigation in one location is not ecologically equivalent to impacts in another where migration routes are involved. The Commissioner suggested transferring parcel 51 to the Conservation Commission in fee with Article 97 protection rather than a conservation restriction, which would avoid complications of monitoring a town-held CR.

- Concerns were raised about lighting, requesting that limits be set relative to sunset rather than a fixed time, that longer wavelength bulbs be used to minimize disruption to wildlife, that parking lot lighting be kept as dim as practical, and that fixtures include baffles to prevent light spill toward the wetlands. The applicant's representative noted that athletic lighting runs around 5,700K, acknowledged this is on the blue end of the spectrum, and stated the parking lot lighting is being reviewed for a lower color temperature around 2,200K. The system is designed to meet Dark Sky program requirements for athletic lighting.
- It was asked how stormwater from the new parking areas would be managed. The applicant's representative stated that all runoff is captured by infiltration chambers with no discharge to any wetland resource area, as the site sits in a low bowl.
- It was stated that if parcel 51 is transferred to the Conservation Commission, an endowment should accompany it to fund long-term maintenance of the turtle nesting habitat, as vegetation management needs tend to arise after 10-15 years. It was also noted that the nesting habitat area should be located on the accessible north side of the connecting brook to avoid creating a new access road through sensitive areas. The applicant's representative walked through a mitigation calculation table confirming that parcel 51 contains sufficient upland area to satisfy Natural Heritage's two-to-one mitigation ratio, accounting for road restoration, approximately one acre of nesting habitat creation, and conservation protection of the remaining upland.
- **Motion:** A motion was made and seconded to continue the public hearing to March 10, 2026.
- **Vote:** All in favor. Motion carried unanimously.
- **Outcome:** The public hearing was continued to March 10, 2026.

### **7:10 PM: Request for Determination of Applicability – Invasive Species Spraying in West Groton**

- **Proposal:** Request for Determination of Applicability filed by the Groton Stewardship Committee for invasive species management, specifically herbicide application to control Japanese knotweed on the MBTA right-of-way adjacent to Carol Wheeler Park along the Squannacook River, within 100 feet of the river.
- **Presentation:** Commissioner Lathrop presented on behalf of the Stewardship Committee. He described the site, noting a large monoculture of Japanese knotweed on the MBTA right-of-way visible from Carol Wheeler Park. He reported that a vegetation management license has been signed by both the MBTA and the Town of Groton, allowing the Stewardship Committee to proceed with vegetation management on the property. A Select Board member confirmed this and noted that the license was obtained through existing contacts with the MBTA and required notifying the MBTA of the specific treatment method once determined. A separate RDA is not needed for work

in Carol Wheeler Park itself, as an approved management plan is already in place. It was noted that a Wild and Scenic River Grant application has been submitted to help fund insurance coverage for volunteer herbicide applicators working on non-town property.

- **Discussion:**
  - The chair commended the Stewardship Committee and the Select Board member for their efforts in obtaining the MBTA license, noting that initial barriers had been difficult. It was emphasized that care must be taken to bag and contain removed invasive material to prevent spread via the river.
  - It was suggested that the Commission consult the Town Manager to confirm whether existing town insurance coverage may already satisfy MBTA requirements, possibly reducing the need for additional grant-funded insurance.
- **Motion:** A motion was made and seconded to issue a Negative Determination #3, finding that the work described in the request 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 condition that documentation be submitted to the MBTA for the work to be completed.
- **Vote:** All in favor. Motion carried unanimously.
- **Outcome:** A Negative Determination #3 was issued with conditions.

### **7:25 PM: Continued Public Hearing – Notice of Intent – Hollingsworth & Vose Landfill Closure – DEP# 169-1289**

- **Proposal:** Notice of Intent filed by Hollingsworth & Vose Company for closure of an existing landfill.
- **Presentation:** Bob Collins appeared on behalf of the applicant along with Scott Smyers of Oxbow Environmental. Mr. Collins reported that a DEP number has now been assigned and that DEP's wetland section had questions which Oxbow addressed in a letter dated January 29, 2026. He stated that DEP's solid waste section is ready to act on the application pending an Order of Conditions from the Commission. He requested that the Commission close the hearing and issue the Order of Conditions.
- **Discussion:**
  - A Commissioner asked about phragmites observed in basin two. It was stated that an invasive species management plan was submitted as part of the Notice of Intent and includes the ability to use selective herbicide to control phragmites and other species as needed.
  - Commissioners noted that the Oxbow response letter had not been uploaded to the Commission's drive in advance of the meeting and requested the opportunity to review it before acting. Administrator Steeves uploaded the document during the meeting.
  - It was noted that one of the DEP comments raised concerns about increased stormwater discharge into an existing system that already floods and stated he wished to review the response to that comment carefully before voting. He also noted discomfort with the requirement for a plastic liner, citing long-term

microplastic concerns, but acknowledged that DEP is requiring the liner and that the Commission cannot override that requirement.

- The applicant agreed to continue to March 10, 2026 and agreed to have an Order of Conditions ready for consideration at that meeting. It was agreed that the Order of Conditions would include a requirement that copies of periodic surface water quality monitoring reports downstream be provided to the Conservation Commission.
  - **Motion:** A motion was made and seconded to continue the public hearing to March 10, 2026.
  - **Vote:** All in favor. Motion carried unanimously.
  - **Outcome:** The public hearing was continued to March 10, 2026. Administrator Steeves will prepare a draft Order of Conditions for Commission review at that meeting.
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## 2. GENERAL BUSINESS

### 2.1 GENERAL DISCUSSIONS/ANNOUNCEMENTS

#### Discussion: Update to Open Space & Recreation Plan (OSRP) for 2027

- Administrator Steeves reported that the Commission's Open Space & Recreation Plan is expiring and must be updated. An updated OSRP is required to be eligible for certain land grants. It was noted that the previous plan was developed with a consultant and in coordination with the town's master planning process, though the two do not need to be done together.
- **Motion:** A motion was made and seconded to authorize the administrator to request quotes for updating the Open Space & Recreation Plan and bring them to a future meeting for discussion.
- **Vote:** All in favor. Motion carried unanimously.
- **Outcome:** Administrator Steeves will issue a request for quotes.

#### Nipmuc Nation – Land Acknowledgement Discussion

- The chair shared a letter received from Select Board member Becky Pine inviting a Commission representative to participate in a small group discussion on a land acknowledgement statement, to be held on Wednesday, April 8, 2026 from 5:30 to 6:30 PM at the Senior Center. A public presentation by cultural educator and Nipmuc tribe member Larry Spotted Crow Mann is scheduled for 7:00 PM the same evening.
- Commissioners expressed interest but noted the Commission's connection to the Nipmuc Meadows conservation area as a relevant tie. It was agreed that the chair would speak with the Select Board member before the next meeting to better understand the

nature of the discussion before committing, and the matter would be revisited at the next meeting. The RSVP deadline is April 3, 2026.

### **Squannacook River Dam – Public Information Meeting**

- It was noted that a public information meeting on the dam is scheduled for Tuesday, March 3, 2026 at the Senior Center. The town’s website contains detailed documentation on engineering assessments and studies. Commissioners were encouraged to attend.

## **2.2 COMMITTEE UPDATES**

- The CPC meeting to vote on recommended projects for town meeting was postponed due to the recent snowstorm and will be rescheduled. It was noted that the Cow Pond Brook Playing Fields project, previewed earlier in the meeting, may be among the items considered.
- The Stewardship Committee is planning a site walk on Saturday, March 14, 2026 at 10:00 AM to explore the area around Noonan Woods and Farmers & Mechanics, weather and ground conditions permitting.

## **2.3 LAND MANAGEMENT & ACQUISITION**

### **Review & Sign Conservation Agreement – Village at Shepley Hill**

- A Commissioner reported that he had spoken with the developer’s attorney and determined that the Commission had previously given informal approval of the agreement years ago via email from a prior administrator. Due to this, the Commissioner recommended moving forward with signing, with one amendment.
- The one amendment made was to strike the word “nuisance” from the permitted uses language regarding removal of invasive and nuisance species, as “nuisance” was considered too vague and subject to future dispute. Each commissioner initialed the change on page four of the agreement.
- It was also agreed that the map attached to the agreement must be replaced with a higher-resolution version before the document is recorded at the Registry of Deeds, to ensure clarity for future reference.
- The agreement was signed by the commissioners present.

### **Review Walker Property Monitoring Report**

- Administrator Steeves indicated the Walker property monitoring report would be deferred again as the ground remains snow-covered and a site visit is not yet possible. It was noted that the Administrator would follow up with the Water Department regarding the property.

## 2.4 APPROVE MEETING MINUTES

- **Motion:** A motion was made and seconded to approve the minutes from February 10, 2026, as amended.
- **Vote:** All in favor. Motion carried unanimously.

## 2.5 APPROVE INVOICE

- **Motion:** A motion was made and seconded to authorize the administrator to pay the Groton Herald in the amount of \$62.50.
- **Vote:** All in favor. Motion carried unanimously.

## 2.6 ONGOING ISSUES

- Administrator Steeves reported no significant changes to the ongoing issues list since the last meeting. The ongoing issues spreadsheet will be moved to a standing folder so it is accessible at every meeting regardless of date.
- It was noted that 60 Valley Road has been updated: the house has been taken down.

### Drafted Letter – Tree Cutting Violation at 309 Boston Road

- The Commission reviewed a draft enforcement letter which had been reviewed by town counsel. The following edits were discussed and agreed upon: the letter date to be February 24, 2026, a blank date field referencing when the Commission ceased issuing fines to be filled in with the date the last fine payment was received, language regarding the required plan was revised so that the plan needs to show the number, size, and location of the trees cut, a paragraph was removed in favor of town counsel's suggested language, the Zoom attendance sentence was revised to read: Zoom links are available on each agenda which are on the town's website, and the closing paragraph was simplified.
- It was agreed that the letter would be sent as a physical letter signed by the chair, with the town hall mailing address as the return address. Administrator Steeves will not be the point of contact for this correspondence.

- **Motion:** A motion was made and seconded to authorize the chair to send the letter as reviewed and amended.
  - **Vote:** All in favor. Motion carried unanimously.
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## **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**