



Conservation Commission Meeting
Tuesday, March 10, 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, Ben Wolfe, Peter Morrison

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 – Eagle Scout Project off McLain’s Woods Road

- **Proposal:** Construction of two pedestrian and equestrian bridges off McLain's Woods Road in the McLain's Woods and Fritz and Helen Walker Conservation Areas.
- **Presentation:** The applicant described two bridge sites. Site A addresses an eroding horse crossing at a flowing stream in McLain's Woods, and Site B crosses a brook in the Fritz and Helen Walker Conservation Area that drains from a nearby beaver pond, where horses are currently prohibited due to safety and erosion concerns. The bridges will be four feet wide by eight feet long, constructed of pressure-treated lumber, rebar, and concrete blocks, with geogrid fabric and pea stone ramp approaches.
- **Discussion:**
 - Commissioners expressed support for the project but indicated a preference to visit the sites before approving the RDA, as snow cover prevented a meaningful site walk at the time of the meeting.
 - A Commissioner asked about beam dimensions and suggested increasing the beam depth for additional strength. A Trails Committee member noted the sizing follows a standard chart used for similar bridges.
 - A Commissioner requested that the specific pressure-treatment chemical be identified in the filing, noting that older CCA-treated lumber is environmentally harmful near water bodies.
 - The applicant confirmed that existing stepping stones at the crossings would be removed and that the current erosive horse crossing at Site A would be blocked off by brushing it in.

- **Motion:** A motion was made and seconded to continue the matter to March 24, 2026.
- **Vote:** All in favor. Motion carried unanimously.
- **Outcome:** The matter was continued to March 24, 2026, with a tentative site walk the Saturday prior, weather permitting.

6:45 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:** The Conservation Administrator reported no updates. The DEP file number remains pending. It was noted that a delay on the Shirley side of the filing may have contributed to the holdup, as the applicant attempted to combine two separate required filings into one. The Conservation Administrator was asked to follow up with the town's retained engineer and provide a status update at the next meeting.
- **Motion:** A motion was made and seconded to continue the public hearing to March 24, 2026.
- **Vote:** All in favor. Motion carried unanimously.
- **Outcome:** The public hearing was continued to March 24, 2026.

6:46 PM: Request for Determination of Applicability – Groton Country Club Irrigation System – 94 Lovers Lane

- **Proposal:** Request for Determination of Applicability for the Groton Country Club irrigation system.
- **Presentation:** Administrator Steeves reported that the applicant is requesting a continuance. A site walk planned for the prior Saturday was cancelled due to snow cover.
- **Motion:** A motion was made and seconded to continue the matter to March 24, 2026.
- **Vote:** All in favor. Motion carried unanimously.
- **Outcome:** The matter was continued to March 24, 2026, pending a site walk.

7:00 PM: Continued Public Hearing – Notice of Intent – Hollingsworth & Vose Landfill Closure – DEP#169-1289

- **Proposal:** Landfill closure filed by Hollingsworth & Vose Company.
- **Presentation:** The attorney appeared on behalf of the applicant and asked whether the Commission was in a position to close the public hearing and issue an Order of Conditions, noting that Commissioners had requested additional time at the prior meeting to review the applicant's responses to DEP comments.
- **Discussion:**

- Commissioners reviewed the applicant's responses to the DEP comments. A Commissioner went through the responses and was satisfied, deferring to the Stormwater Committee on stormwater-related items. The Stormwater Committee had reviewed the stormwater system design and had no issues. The prior concern about increased discharge into a downstream system was addressed, and the applicant explained that the system drains through storm drains on Townsend Road to an open area and through a culvert to the river and has not been observed to flood.
- It was noted that the concern about phragmites management was addressed in the DEP response and would be covered under monitoring requirements.
- Commissioners had no further questions and were ready to close.
- **Motion:** A motion was made and seconded to close the public hearing.
- **Vote:** All in favor. Motion carried unanimously.
- **Outcome:** The public hearing was closed.
- **Motion (Wetlands Protection Act):** A motion was made and seconded to approve the Order of Conditions for DEP# 169-1289 under the Wetlands Protection Act, including boilerplate conditions as read into the record, with the following amendments: Condition 5 was amended to add the word "new" before "waste material" to account for the existing landfill, and a duplicate Condition 50 will be renumbered and corrected.
- **Vote:** All in favor. Motion carried unanimously.
- **Motion (Groton Wetlands Protection Bylaw):** A motion was made and seconded to approve the Order of Conditions for DEP# 169-1289 under the Groton Wetlands Protection Bylaw, including bylaw conditions as read into the record.
- **Vote:** All in favor. Motion carried unanimously.
- **Outcome:** Orders of Conditions issued under both the Wetlands Protection Act and the Groton Wetlands Protection Bylaw.

7:20 PM: Discussion – Cut trees along Nashua River

- This item came up from complaints about tree cutting observed along the Nashua River. Attorney Collins, representing Groton School, addressed the Commission.
- **Discussion:**
 - Attorney Collins stated that Groton School has retained a company to remove debris from the Nashua River on an approximately annual basis for 29 years. He stated the contractor does not step onto the bank or cut trees on the shore, and only removes trees that have already fallen into the river, cutting them only when necessary to move them. He noted that he had called the Conservation Administrator's office to give advance notice of the most recent work but missed the Administrator and spoke with another staff member. He acknowledged that a written notification would have prevented the confusion and offered to resume filing annual RDAs if preferred. He also noted a currently downed tree blocking the river and indicated he would file an RDA for its removal.

- A member of the public participating electronically stated that some recently cut trees appeared to still be connected to the bank and had not fully fallen into the river. He stated that cutting trees within the 200-foot riverfront buffer requires a filing and Order of Conditions, that trees along the river are the property of adjacent landowners, that some trees appeared to be on Conservation Commission land.
- Commissioners noted that the informal process used historically is insufficient and that a more formal framework is needed. Attorney Collins agreed to work with the Conservation Administrator to establish a written protocol for future debris management work and to file an RDA for the downed tree.

7:35 PM: Extension Request Order of Conditions – 6 Wyman Road – DEP# 169-1067

- **Proposal:** Extension of the existing Order of Conditions for 6 Wyman Road.
- **Presentation:** The applicant appeared on behalf of his family and requested an extension. The property has been in the family for approximately 20 years, no work has been done on the lot, the tree line is unchanged, and an approved septic permit and Board of Health documentation are in place. The family hopes to build on the property.
- **Discussion:**
 - Commissioners noted a preference to visit the site during the growing season rather than extending the order in the middle of winter when assessment is not possible. Attorney Collins, who assisted with the original Order of Conditions, noted that the Permit Extension Act may already extend the expiration and suggested a shorter-term extension to expire in the fall.
 - A Commissioner proposed an eight month extension to October 27, 2026, with the intention to conduct a site walk during the growing season and grant a full three year extension at that point if conditions are acceptable. It was noted that wetland flagging must remain in place while the Order of Conditions is open.
- **Motion:** A motion was made and seconded to grant an extension of the Order of Conditions to October 27, 2026.
- **Vote:** All in favor. Motion carried unanimously.
- **Outcome:** The Order of Conditions was extended to October 27, 2026, with a site walk expected during the 2026 growing season.

7:45 PM: Continued Public Hearing- 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 youth 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:** The applicant's representative appeared and provided an update. A DEP file number was received, and DEP issued two comments: the Commission should wait to issue an Order of Conditions until an NHESP response letter is received, and a TSS removal worksheet should be completed for each treatment train, which the applicant said can be easily provided. The Earth Removal and Stormwater Advisory Committee closed its hearing and issued a permit. The applicant confirmed that the 30-day NHESP response period was expiring soon and that she expected a letter confirming the project is a taking requiring a Conservation Management Permit. She also confirmed that Natural Heritage agreed that a parcel could be deeded in fee to the Conservation Commission rather than through a conservation restriction.
- **Discussion:**
 - The applicant proposed a 9:00 PM shutoff for athletic lighting and 9:15 PM for parking lot lighting, consistent with the current Park Commission permit. She noted the control system requires fixed times.
 - A Commissioner raised concern that 9:00 PM is too late given the proximity of vernal pools, noting that in November it is about three and a half hours after sunset. A tiered schedule was suggested: 9:00 PM for about 45 days around the solstice and 8:00 PM the rest of the season. The applicant agreed to work with the control system to implement this, with dates and times to be set in the Order of Conditions.
 - A Commissioner raised concerns about blue light spillover from LED fixtures near wetland edges and asked for baffles or shields and spectral data for review. The applicant noted the lighting is designed to meet Dark Sky athletic standards and that parking lot lighting is being specified at around 2,200K.
 - A Commissioner asked for shields on parking lot fixtures regardless of grade.
 - Several Commissioners wanted to see the NHESP response before closing. It was noted by one Commissioner that because of unresolved issues including light specs, baffle placement, the shutoff schedule, as well as deed details, he could not vote in favor at this meeting.
 - The applicant said her preference is to close and issue an Order of Conditions at the next meeting given the project's bid timeline. Commissioners agreed to work toward that goal at the March 24 meeting, with a draft Order of Conditions to be prepared for review.
- **Motion:** A motion was made and seconded to continue the public hearing to March 24, 2026.
- **Vote:** All in favor. Motion carried unanimously.
- **Outcome:** The public hearing was continued to March 24, 2026, with a draft Order of Conditions to be prepared for review pending receipt of the NHESP response letter.

Pre-Application Consultation – 40 Mountain Lakes Trail

- **Proposal:** A property owner at 40 Mountain Lakes Trail participated remotely and requested a pre-application consultation before filing with the Commission.
- **Presentation:** The property owner described a lake cottage that is too small for a growing family and noted a need for a small addition and deck reconstruction. The existing deck is not built to code, and contractors have advised that the retaining wall beneath it needs to be replaced. The property is within the 100-foot buffer zone of the lake.
- **Discussion:**
 - Commissioners provided the following guidance:
 - The Commission's jurisdiction covers all work within 100 feet of the lake. Under the Groton Wetlands Protection Bylaw there is a 50-foot no-touch zone and a 100-foot no-permanent-structure zone. Existing structures are grandfathered, but any expansion of the footprint within the buffer requires a filing and mitigation.
 - The property owner was advised to file one combined application for both the deck and the addition to allow more flexibility in evaluating mitigation.
 - On mitigation, Commissioners noted the Commission looks for things like removing impervious surfaces, converting lawn to native plantings, and getting structures out of the 50-foot zone. Any footprint expansion would need to be balanced by mitigation.
 - A permeable surface under the rebuilt deck would be preferred over a concrete slab.
 - A nearby Groton Conservation Trust parcel was noted as a possible off-site mitigation option, and the property owner was encouraged to explore that.
 - A formal survey is not required by the Commission, though the property owner should check with the building department on their requirements.

2. GENERAL BUSINESS

2.1 GENERAL DISCUSSIONS/ANNOUNCEMENTS

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

- This item was briefly addressed earlier when time was available.
- Administrator Steeves reported that she is working with town staff to prepare a Request for Proposal (RFP) for the OSRP update, which is required before the 2027 plan expires and for eligibility for certain land grants. Draft RFPs are nearly ready and will be published after review. It was noted that the funding source for the update is still to be

determined, and Administrator Steeves will check with the town accountant on how the prior update was funded.

2.2 COMMITTEE UPDATES

- A Commissioner reported that the Community Preservation Committee (CPC) recommended the Cow Pond Brook Playing Fields project to town meeting at its meeting the prior evening.
- The Stewardship Committee is planning a site walk on Saturday, March 14, 2026 at 10:00 AM around Noonan Woods and adjacent parcels, weather and ground conditions permitting.

2.3 LAND MANAGEMENT & ACQUISITION

Review Walker Property Monitoring Report

- Administrator Steeves reported that the site visit has not been possible due to snow. She noted she is working with the Water Department on a related matter but that there has been some staff turnover and things are in progress.

Update: Stewardship Grant for West Groton

- A Commissioner reported that the grant application to the Wild and Scenic Rivers Council has been submitted and that no further update is available until a decision is made.

Review CR Monumentation at Village at Shepley Hills

- A Commissioner reported that the applicant for the Village at Shepley Hill subdivision appeared before the Planning Board the prior Thursday and requested a waiver of the requirement to install granite boundary markers, proposing instead to use steel rods and wooden posts. The Commissioner stated he attended the Planning Board meeting and spoke as an individual, not on behalf of the Commission, to express concern about the proposed waiver. He brought the matter before the Commission to give members an opportunity to weigh in and potentially send a letter to the Planning Board before their Thursday meeting.
- **Discussion:**
 - Commissioners expressed strong support for granite boundary markers, noting that the Commission has spent its own funds to replace iron pins with granite markers on conservation land at approximately \$200 per marker because of their importance to monitoring.

- A Commissioner stated he would accept a compromise limited to requiring granite bounds only at points abutting conservation restriction land, though his preference would be granite markers at all boundary points. Another Commissioner disagreed, noting that GPS reference points are taken from markers throughout the subdivision, not just at conservation boundaries, and that all markers should be granite.
- It was noted that the conservation area boundary in the proposed subdivision plan is highly irregular in shape, with numerous indentations along the edges of private lots, making precise monitoring especially difficult without permanent markers.
- The applicant's arguments before the Planning Board were described: that a magnetic detector could be used to locate steel rods and that the homeowners association would be conscientious about protecting the conservation parcel. Commissioners were not persuaded, noting that the Commission does not have specialized detection tools and that homeowners associations change over time.
- A Commissioner noted that granite markers have proven essential in past monitoring disputes, citing specific instances where markers prevented or resolved boundary conflicts with abutting property owners.
- A Commissioner stated that the waiver request amounts to cutting corners and that doing so reduces habitat protection and creates problems for future monitoring.
- **Motion:** A motion was made and seconded to send a letter to the Planning Board stating that the Conservation Commission requires granite bounds at every point bordering the conservation restriction in order to accept the conservation restriction at the Village at Shepley Hill, and strongly recommends that the requirement for granite bounds not be waived for the remainder of the subdivision.
- **Vote:** All in favor. Motion carried unanimously.

Wyman Road Subdivision

- A Commissioner spoke about a proposed subdivision plan for a parcel on Wyman Road owned by James Casella, which abuts the Commission's Casella Preserve.
- **Discussion:**
 - Two development options were described: a conventional plan filling the parcel with houses, and a cluster development that would consolidate the house lots and convey approximately 15 acres of open space to the Conservation Commission, connecting to the 119-acre Casella Preserve with trail access through easements.
 - The Commissioner stated the cluster development is a better outcome for the Commission and for the town, but noted that the Planning Board appeared to be leaning away from the cluster option. He recommended the Commission weigh in by sending a letter or authorizing a representative to speak at the Planning Board meeting on Thursday.

- Commissioners raised concern about the width of the proposed trail easement connecting the house lots to the open space parcel. Measurements from the subdivision plan suggested the corridor may be as narrow as 10 to 17 feet in places, which Commissioners noted could make monitoring difficult and prevent access for maintenance equipment or emergency vehicles.
- A Commissioner noted that if any wetland feature or obstruction exists within the narrow corridor, there would be no room to route around it, therefore cutting off access to the back parcel.
- It was asked why the Planning Board might prefer the conventional plan, noting that the Commission may be missing context. Commissioners agreed to advocate for the cluster plan while acknowledging possible unknown considerations.
- It was agreed that a Commissioner would attend the Planning Board meeting on Thursday to speak on behalf of the Commission in favor of the cluster development and to advocate for adequate trail easement width, with a minimum of approximately 20 feet to allow for tractor and emergency vehicle access. No formal letter was deemed necessary, as the representative would speak with the authority of the Commission.
- **Motion:** A motion was made and seconded to authorize a Commissioner to attend the Thursday Planning Board meeting and speak on behalf of the Commission in favor of the cluster development for the Wyman Road parcel.
- **Vote:** All in favor. Motion carried unanimously.

Additional Land Management Items

- A Commissioner asked if plantings at 28 Boathouse Road are being tracked, and it was confirmed that this item is on the ongoing issues list.
- A Commissioner asked if the Groton Hill Music Center stone wall required wildlife passage has been constructed. It was reported that no work has been done. Commissioners directed that this item be added to the ongoing issues list to ensure follow-up.
- A Commissioner proposed that the Commission discuss plowing a small number of conservation area parking lots for winter access to support snowshoeing, cross-country skiing, and other winter recreation. A Commissioner noted that a subcontractor already plows the Wharton Plantation lot voluntarily. Commissioners agreed to refer the discussion to the Stewardship Committee for the next agenda, with the goal of identifying a few priority sites and exploring volunteer plowing arrangements.

2.4 APPROVE MEETING MINUTES

- **Motion:** A motion was made and seconded to approve the minutes from December 23, 2025, as amended.
- **Vote:** All in favor. Motion carried unanimously.

2.5 APPROVE INVOICE

- **Motion:** A motion was made and seconded to authorize the Conservation Administrator to pay the Groton Herald for two invoices in the amounts of \$127.50 and \$62.50.
 - **Vote:** All in favor. Motion carried unanimously.
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ADJOURNMENT

- A motion was made and seconded to adjourn open session. All in favor. Motion carried unanimously. The meeting was adjourned.

APPROVED: 4/28/2026