



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



Present: Larry Hurley, Olin Lathrop, Ben Wolfe, Peter Morrison, 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: Discussion – Pool installation at 16 Longley Road

- **Proposal:** Discussion regarding the installation of a 16 by 28 foot in-ground pool at 16 Longley Road.
- **Presentation:** The applicant's representative from the pool company and the homeowners appeared before the Commission. The representative described a proposal to install an in-ground pool in the backyard. The pool would be located outside the 50-foot wetland buffer but within the 100-foot buffer zone. The representative noted that the 50-foot buffer is clearly marked with medallion posts on the property. The homeowners confirmed that the existing backyard area where the pool is proposed is currently maintained with a patio, fire pit, deck, and swing set, all of which would be removed. The area inside the 50-foot buffer is undisturbed.
- **Discussion:**
 - A Commissioner reviewed the GIS mapping and confirmed the pool would be within the 100-foot buffer zone but outside the 50-foot buffer. It was noted that the Groton Wetlands Protection Bylaw includes a 50-foot no-touch zone and a 100-foot no-permanent-structure zone, though existing disturbance may be a factor.
 - A Commissioner asked about fencing around the pool. The representative stated that a fence is planned and would be located outside the 50-foot buffer, with approximately 15 to 20 feet of space between the pool and the buffer line.
 - A Commissioner asked about a retaining wall shown on the plans. The representative confirmed that a retaining wall is proposed to replace an existing rotting retaining wall. The homeowner noted that the replacement wall would help prevent soil from migrating toward the wetland.

- A Commissioner noted that the plans included additional features such as a shed and other structures. The representative clarified that those items are not part of the current proposal and the focus is on the pool and retaining wall.
- Commissioners advised that a Notice of Intent would be required rather than a Request for Determination of Applicability, given the scope of disturbance within the 100-foot buffer zone. The Conservation Administrator offered to assist the applicant with the filing process.
- **Outcome:** No vote was taken. This was an informal pre-application discussion. The applicant was advised to file a Notice of Intent.

6:40 PM: Request for Certificate of Compliance –16 West Main Street DEP# 169-1282

- **Proposal:** Request for Certificate of Compliance for work completed under DEP# 169-1282 at 16 West Main Street.
- **Presentation:** The applicant's representative appeared remotely and presented the as-built plan compared to the approved plan. He reported that the work within the 100-foot buffer zone was completed consistent with the approved plans. He noted that a small area of patio connecting the pool to the hot tub area extended slightly beyond the original approved footprint but was located outside the 100-foot buffer zone. He stated that the buffer zone was voluntarily marked on the plans and that work within it was completed as approved.
- **Discussion:**
 - A Commissioner noted that the ground around the pool area was not yet fully stabilized and would like to see more established ground cover before issuing the Certificate of Compliance.
 - A Commissioner raised concerns about pool fencing, noting that Groton bylaws and 780 CMR require a minimum 48-inch fence with no gaps greater than two inches and ground clearance of no more than two inches. The representative stated that the pool company obtained a waiver but that he was not involved in that aspect of the project.
 - A Commissioner displayed photographs showing significant disturbance in the backyard area behind the pool, near the 50-foot buffer zone, including removal of vegetation, debris storage near the wetland edge, and flattened areas. The Commissioner stated that this issue should be addressed separately at a future meeting but should not delay action on the Certificate of Compliance.
 - The representative agreed to return at the next meeting to address the backyard disturbance issue and to follow up on the fence waiver with the pool company.
- **Motion:** A motion was made and seconded to issue a Certificate of Compliance for DEP# 169-1282.
- **Vote:** Three opposed (PM, JS, LH), two in favor (OL, BW). Motion did not carry.

- **Outcome:** The Certificate of Compliance was not issued. The applicant was asked to return with more established ground cover and information regarding the pool fencing waiver.

6:45 PM: Request for Determination of Applicability – Eagle Scout Project off McLain’s Woods Road

- **Proposal:** Request for Determination of Applicability filed by the applicant for the 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 appeared before the Commission with a representative from the Trails Committee. The applicant described two bridge sites. Site A is located in McLain's Woods at a flowing stream crossing used by horses and pedestrians. Site B is located in the Fritz and Helen Walker Conservation Area at a brook that has been a problem crossing for years. The applicant reported that the bridge at Site B has been revised from eight feet to twelve feet in length based on feedback from the Commission at the prior meeting. The bridges would be constructed of pressure-treated lumber using MCA (micronized copper azole) treatment. The applicant presented an updated materials list and construction drawings.
- **Discussion:**
 - A Commissioner raised concerns about the proposed gravel ramp approaches, noting that loose gravel would slough off quickly and become flat. He suggested using flat stream bed rocks available on site as stepping surfaces instead, or accepting a few inches of step at the bridge ends.
 - The Trails Committee representative stated that the gravel ramp approach using geogrid fabric and crushed stone has been used successfully at five other bridge sites and has not washed away. He offered to take Commissioners on a site walk to view existing bridges.
 - A Commissioner recommended using three quarter inch graded base (dense grade) instead of three eighths inch gravel, noting that it packs solidly and will not shift. He recommended the bridges be six feet wide rather than four feet, citing emergency vehicle access and safety for leading horses across on foot.
 - Another Commissioner supported the six-foot width recommendation, citing personal experience with a trail emergency where narrow trails prevented vehicle access to an injured rider.
 - The Trails Committee representative stated that previous bridges were built at four feet wide and that increasing to six feet for both bridges may exceed the scope of a single Eagle Scout project. He noted the applicant could reduce the project to one bridge if necessary. A Commissioner suggested the applicant could get additional volunteer labor from Bay State Trail Riders for materials and assistance.
 - The applicant confirmed willingness to build both bridges at six feet wide if possible.

- **Motion:** A motion was made and seconded to issue a Negative 3 Determination of Applicability, finding that the work described is within the buffer zone as defined in the regulations but will not alter an area subject to protection under the Act. The work does not require the filing of a Notice of Intent, subject to the following conditions: both bridges shall be six feet wide, graded base material shall be used for the ramp approaches, and MCA pressure-treated lumber shall be used.
- **Vote:** All in favor. Motion carried unanimously.
- **Outcome:** Negative 3 Determination of Applicability issued with conditions.

6:55 PM: Request for Determination of Applicability – Groton School Arborist Work Along Nashua River

- **Proposal:** Request for Determination of Applicability filed by the Groton School for arborist work along the Nashua River.
- **Presentation:** Attorney Collins appeared on behalf of the Groton School. He stated that Groton School has periodically managed fallen trees in the Nashua River since 1885, using a contractor for approximately 20 years. He described the process: when a tree has fallen fully into the river, the contractor cuts the trunk six to eight feet from the shore while working from a barge, then winches the tree back along the shoreline where it is stabilized and left in place to create habitat. The root ball remains on the shore. Branches that become detached are collected along the bank edge. The attorney stated he had confirmed with the Army Corps of Engineers that no federal permit is required so long as the work does not interfere with navigability or wetland areas. He submitted a scope of work document and photographs. He offered to have the contractor appear before the Commission during the summer dry period for a more detailed discussion.
- **Discussion:**
 - Commissioners requested that an annual report with photographs be submitted before and after each season's work, documenting the number and location of trees managed.
 - A Commissioner raised several concerns: he wanted to understand how the trees are anchored to the bank and what effect that has on the ecosystem, he wanted to hear from the Wild and Scenic Rivers program and from Natural Heritage or Fish and Wildlife regarding the biological impact of the work, and he noted that the Nashua River is now a Wild and Scenic River, which may change the regulatory landscape from when the original RDA was filed nearly 30 years ago.
 - It was noted that a photograph shown at the prior meeting (March 10) appeared to show a tree tied to the bank with a thin rope around a pine tree, which could cause damage. The attorney stated that photograph was not from work done by the Groton School's contractor, suggesting a third party may also be doing work on the river.
 - A member of the public participating electronically stated that he had documented trees along the river that appeared to have been cut while still

rooted to the bank, not fully fallen into the water. He stated that cutting trees within the 200-foot riverfront area requires a filing and Order of Conditions, that the trees are the property of adjacent landowners, and that cutting trees on private land without permission constitutes vandalism or theft under Massachusetts law. He also stated that placing cut trees in the water constitutes fill of waters of the U.S. and is subject to a Section 404 permit under the Clean Water Act. He stated that the Nashua River is not classified as a navigable river under federal law.

- Commissioners discussed the appropriate ways of approval, noting that an RDA provides only a three year approval. A Commissioner suggested approving the RDA for a limited period to allow time for the Commission to gather additional information from Wild and Scenic, Natural Heritage, and the contractor. A two-year term was proposed and agreed upon.
- **Motion:** A motion was made and seconded to issue a Negative 2 Determination of Applicability. The work described is within an area subject to protection under the Act but will not remove, fill, dredge, or change the area. The work does not require the filing of a Notice of Intent, subject to the following conditions: the applicant should provide annual photographs, a written report, and a letter to the Commission documenting the work performed. The determination is approved for a period of two years.
- **Vote:** Motion carried with one recusal (JS).
- **Outcome:** Negative 2 Determination of Applicability issued for two years with conditions.

Clarification of Order of Conditions - Hollingsworth & Vose Landfill Closure - DEP# 169-1289

- **Proposal:** The attorney representing Hollingsworth & Vose requested clarification of General Condition 51 under the Massachusetts Wetlands Protection Act and Bylaw Special Condition 9 in the Order of Conditions for DEP# 169-1289. He stated that the existing language is overly broad and would result in the Commission receiving large volumes of factory reports unrelated to the landfill closure. He submitted proposed clarifying language specifying that the applicant shall provide the Commission with copies of the solid waste closure report and the solid waste post-closure monitoring reports as required by and provided to the Massachusetts Department of Environmental Protection during the post-closure period.
- **Motion:** A motion was made and seconded to adopt the clarifying language as stated in the attorney's letter dated March 20, 2026, for DEP# 169-1289.
- **Vote:** All in favor. Motion carried unanimously.
- **Outcome:** The clarification was adopted and will be appended to the Order of Conditions.

7:10 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 at 94 Lovers Lane.
- **Motion:** A motion was made and seconded to continue the matter to April 14, 2026.
- **Vote:** All in favor. Motion carried unanimously.
- **Outcome:** The matter was continued to April 14, 2026.

7:15 PM: Request for Determination of Applicability – 436 Main Street

- **Proposal:** Request for Determination of Applicability filed by the property owner for tree removal at 436 Main Street.
- **Presentation:** The property owner appeared before the Commission. She stated that she moved into the property approximately two weeks ago. She described two groups of trees near a brook that are within the buffer zone. The first group includes trees leaning toward the house, which was built in 1750, including one overhanging the bedroom of a child. The second group includes dead or vine-covered trees near power lines. She stated that she has retained a licensed and insured tree company. She requested permission to remove the trees posing a risk to the house and structures.
- **Discussion:**
 - A Commissioner confirmed that the filing addressed one tree but the property owner was now requesting removal of additional trees. The property owner identified two trees leaning toward the house and one tree leaning toward the workshop.
 - A Commissioner suggested leaving snags (standing dead wood) at a height less than the distance to the nearest structure, noting that dead wood provides important habitat for woodpeckers. The property owner agreed to this as a condition.
 - Regarding the trees near power lines, Commissioners advised the property owner to contact the electric utility company, GELD, which would assess and handle trees near power lines at no cost to the homeowner. The tree company would not want to work near power lines independently.
- **Motion:** A motion was made and seconded to issue a Negative 3 Determination of Applicability, finding that the work described is within the buffer zone as defined in the regulations but will not alter an area subject to protection under the Act. The work does not require the filing of a Notice of Intent, subject to the following condition: where possible, snags should be left at a height less than the distance to the nearest house or structure.
- **Vote:** All in favor. Motion carried unanimously.
- **Outcome:** Negative 3 Determination of Applicability issued with conditions.

7:25 PM: Request for Determination of Applicability – Waterline Expansion Project

- **Proposal:** Request for Determination of Applicability filed by the Town of Groton for water system expansion along Reedy Meadow Road, Raddin Road, Hawtree Way, North Street, and Chicopee Road.
- **Presentation:** The project engineer appeared remotely on behalf of the Town. He described the proposed extension of the water system, including approximately 3,700 linear feet on North Street, 1,900 linear feet on Reedy Meadow Road, 3,600 linear feet on Raddin Road, and an extension on Hawtree Way. All work in the roadway would be installed underneath the road surface. The project contacts the 100-foot wetland buffer in various locations, but all work remains within the roadway right of way. Erosion controls including filter sock and catch basin protection (silt sacks) would be installed where work is within the buffer zone. The project includes six properties where the water service would be extended from the street to the structure, with work within the front yard in previously disturbed areas. The project serves 78 properties total. The Conservation Administrator confirmed receipt of the MEPA Environmental Notification Form approval.
- **Discussion:**
 - A member of the public asked if all homes with PFAS detections would receive waterline service. The engineer confirmed that the project provides free service to properties with PFAS detected above the proposed threshold. The Conservation Administrator noted that only properties where the work falls within a wetland buffer zone required a filing with the Commission.
 - The member of the public stated that her property on Raddin Road may have wetlands near the front of the property and requested that someone physically inspect the site. A Commissioner agreed. The engineer took the resident's contact information for follow-up.
 - Commissioners thanked the engineer for the thoroughness of the filing and had no further questions.
- **Motion:** A motion was made and seconded to issue a Negative 3 Determination of Applicability, finding that the work described is within the buffer zone as defined in the regulations but will not alter an area subject to protection under the Act. The work does not require the filing of a Notice of Intent.
- **Vote:** All in favor. Motion carried unanimously.
- **Outcome:** Negative 3 Determination of Applicability issued.

7:40 PM: Continued Public Hearing – Cow Pond Brook Playing Fields – 169-1291

- **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:** A representative appeared and provided updates on two topics: the Natural Heritage and Endangered Species Program (NHESP) response and the lighting design.
 - Natural Heritage Update: The representative reported that the NHESP response letter was received the day after the last meeting. NHESP found that the project will not adversely affect the endangered species relative to wetlands protection areas, but confirmed the project will require a Conservation Management Permit (CMP). The representative stated this was expected, as the applicant has been working with NHESP since August 2025.
 - The representative presented a revised mitigation plan for Parcel 51, which would be deeded in fee to the Conservation Commission. The plan includes approximately one acre of cleared and prepared turtle nesting habitat with imported sand, a migratory route cleared of debris to allow turtles to move from vernal pools to the nesting area, some tree canopy removal in an adjacent area to allow natural light to reach the nesting habitat, granite boundary markers obtained from DPW, and 10 to 12 signs delineating the nesting site. The existing cart path would be used for construction and maintenance access.
 - It was stated that a turtle protection plan, a habitat management plan, and a long-term management and monitoring plan are being prepared for submission with the CMP application. An escrow account for long-term maintenance funding would be established. A meeting with the Conservation Administrator and DPW was scheduled for Thursday to finalize management arrangements.
- **Discussion:**
 - A Commissioner asked about long-term maintenance responsibility and if the Commission would be left with the obligation. The representative stated that DPW would be responsible for maintenance, working with the Conservation Commission.
 - A Commissioner recommended a gate be installed at the access road to prevent unauthorized access by dirt bikes and vehicles. The representative agreed.
 - The Conservation Administrator presented a draft letter to NHESP confirming the Commission's willingness to accept Parcel 51 in fee. A Commissioner noted two corrections: a phrasing issue and a parcel number that should be corrected.
- **Motion (NHESP Letter):** A motion was made and seconded to authorize the Conservation Administrator to send the letter to NHESP as amended.
- **Vote:** All in favor. Motion carried unanimously.
 - **Lighting Presentation:** The representative presented a review of the proposed athletic lighting for Field 2, comparing it to the existing metal lighting at Field 4. She described the design standards (IES recommended practice and Dark Sky athletic lighting policy) and showed that the LED fixtures direct light without external reflection, resulting in rapid falloff. At 150 feet from the light poles, foot-candle levels drop to approximately 0.1, and the nearest wetland is approximately 250 feet from Field 4. She showed a photograph from a similar installation in Lexington showing the sharp cutoff between illuminated and dark areas.

- **Discussion:**
 - Commissioners praised the thoroughness of the lighting presentation. It was noted that the presentation set a high bar for future applicants.
 - A Commissioner raised concerns about the LED color temperature of 4,500 Kelvin, stating that it is in the blue-white range and that shorter wavelengths are known to affect amphibians. He requested spectral data and asked the applicant to explore lower color temperatures. The representative stated that 4,500K is the minimum the manufacturer offers for athletic lighting, down from the original 5,700K specification.
 - A Commissioner requested that NHESP specifically address the lighting wavelength issue as part of the Conservation Management Permit review, stating that if a state biologist confirms the lighting is acceptable, that would go a long way toward addressing his concerns.
 - Commissioners discussed the proposed shutoff schedule. It was agreed that lights should shut off at 9:00 PM during the period around the summer solstice and at 8:00 PM or earlier during shoulder seasons, specifically in April during amphibian migration. Specific dates and times remain to be finalized, possibly as part of the NHESP review.
 - The applicant requested that the Commission close the public hearing and issue an Order of Conditions, citing the project's bid timeline and upcoming town meeting on May 2. A Commissioner stated that he considered it premature to close before receiving NHESP's response to the CMP application, especially regarding lighting and the turtle nesting habitat details. Other Commissioners noted that the applicant would not begin construction until August and that waiting for NHESP input would not substantially delay the project.
- **Motion:** A motion was made and seconded to continue the public hearing to April 14, 2026.
- **Vote:** All in favor. Motion carried unanimously.
- **Outcome:** The public hearing was continued to April 14, 2026. The applicant agreed to submit questions to NHESP regarding lighting wavelength and shutoff schedule as part of the Conservation Management Permit process.

7:55 PM: Continued Public Hearing – Notice of Intent – Squannacook River Dam
DEP# PENDING

- **Motion:** A motion was made and seconded to continue the public hearing to April 14, 2026.
 - **Vote:** All in favor. Motion carried unanimously.
 - **Outcome:** The public hearing was continued to April 14, 2026.
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2. GENERAL BUSINESS

2.1 GENERAL DISCUSSIONS/ANNOUNCEMENTS

Conservation Forum

- It was reported that the Conservation Forum is scheduled for Thursday, March 26, at the Community Center. The Conservation Commission is hosting the event this year on a rotating basis with the Groton Conservation Trust and the Trails Committee. The featured presentation will begin at 7:00 PM. Commissioners were asked to bring light refreshments.

Planning Board Updates

- A Commissioner reported on the Planning Board meeting following the March 10 Conservation Commission meeting. Regarding the Casella subdivision on Wyman Road, the abutters spoke in favor of the cluster development, and a majority of the Planning Board appeared to support it. Regarding the granite boundary markers at the Village at Shepley Hill, the Commissioner spoke at the Planning Board meeting on the importance of granite markers, but the Planning Board did not appear to be persuaded.

2.2 COMMITTEE UPDATES

Stewardship Committee

- It was reported that the stewardship grant from the Wild and Scenic Rivers Council has been awarded.
- The Stewardship Committee conducted an inspection of the Eliades field on Smith Street and is evaluating whether to continue annual mowing. Dumping was found at the Eliades field and across from it at another field. The Committee may have identified a surviving ash tree, to be confirmed when it leafs out.
- A site walk at Noonan Woods is scheduled for Saturday, March 28, at 10:00 AM.

Snowmobile Club Discussion

- It was reported that a resident has expressed interest in restarting a snowmobile club in Groton. He noted that a member of the Lunenburg Conservation Commission serves as an officer in the Lunenburg snowmobile club. He stated that snowmobile clubs provide volunteer trail maintenance, including bridge work, and can receive state funding for trail upkeep. Clubs also help manage unauthorized snowmobile activity.

- It was noted that the Commission previously banned all motorized vehicles from conservation land and it was suggested to revisit that policy. The resident will be invited to present to the Commission at a future meeting, along with a representative from the Lunenburg club. The Conservation Administrator will coordinate scheduling.

2.3 LAND MANAGEMENT & ACQUISITION

Ralph Smith Property

- It was reported that multiple phone calls to the attorney have gone unanswered. The Conservation Administrator sent a letter by certified mail and is waiting for the return receipt to confirm delivery.

2.4 APPROVE MEETING MINUTES

- No meeting minutes were presented.

2.5 APPROVE INVOICE

- No invoices were presented.

2.6 ONGOING ISSUES

- A Commissioner and the Conservation Administrator reported checking a property abutting the Cox Walker conservation area across from Williams Barn, where a large stockpile may be stored within the buffer zone to a resource area. The contractors have been made aware and the matter is being monitored.
- It was agreed to add 16 West Main Street to the ongoing issues list to track the backyard disturbance behind the pool.

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