Conservation Commission Meeting
Tuesday, September 22, 2026, at 6:30 PM
Town Hall: Second Floor Meeting Room
173 Main Street Groton, MA
OPTION TO JOIN REMOTELY

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

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.

APPOINTMENTS AND HEARINGS

6:30 PM: Continued Public Hearing- Public Hearing- Notice of Intent- 162 Common Street- DEP# 169-1300

- **Presentation:** The applicant's engineer stated that after the site walk the driveway was moved closer to the east toward the existing cart path since that area is already disturbed. He stated that it was not moved all the way onto the cart path because the original location was further from the wetland, and that everything else on the plan is the same.
- **Discussion:**
  - Commissioner Lathrop shared photos of water flow sent in by a neighbor. He stated that the photos show an area that was already mapped as wetland so they do not add any new information. Chair Smigelski stated that the photos look like normal rainfall to him. Commissioner Lathrop stated that he went out after the rain, and the low area next to the cart path did not flood and that a puddle on the driveway does not make it land subject to flooding.
  - Commissioner Lathrop stated that the paved driveway would be a permanent structure within the 100-foot buffer, which the Commission sometimes allows with mitigation. As mitigation, he asked that no trees be cleared within 50 feet of the road, other than for the driveway itself. The engineer agreed.
  - Commissioner Kuliesis supported keeping the trees, noting they would also give the future homeowner some privacy.
- **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. The order of conditions will be voted on at the next meeting.

COMMITTEE UPDATES

- Administrator Steeves reminded the Commission that the Massachusetts Association of Conservation Commissions conference is the last Saturday in October and that the Commission can reimburse anyone who signs up. Commissioner Lathrop stated that he has already signed up.
- It was reported that the school will be coming out on October 13th for a community service day to help clean up Sargisson Beach, and anyone available is welcome to help.
- Commissioner Lathrop stated that the Stewardship Committee has had trouble getting a quorum with seven members and that they are still trying to recruit more members.
    - **Motion:** A motion was made and seconded to reduce the Stewardship Committee to a five-member committee.
    - **Vote:** All in favor. Motion carried unanimously.
- Commissioner Easom reminded Administrator Steeves that Community Preservation Act applications for fiscal year 2028 funding are due October 1st, and she stated that she would submit one.
- Commissioner Kuliesis stated that she had rescued a Blanding's turtle and asked how to report the location. It was noted that locations of protected species should not be shared in a public meeting, and Administrator Steeves stated that she will coordinate with her by email and report it to the state, which uses those sightings to update its habitat maps.

6:45 PM: Encroachment on Walker Cox Conservation Area

- **Presentation:** The engineer representing the contractor stated that the contractor was using the property as a staging area for the Water Department's waterline work and went past the property line onto the Walker Cox Conservation Area, which he stated was an honest mistake. He stated that the area has now been surveyed, and that the contractor says it was brush with no trees removed. He stated that the mitigation plan is to plant red oaks, red maples, 15 white pines, and mountain laurel so that the area eventually becomes forest like the land next to it.
- **Discussion:**
    - Commissioner Kuliesis stated that the plant choices were great, especially the red oak, and suggested adding more plants like witch hazel, buttonbush, or spicebush.
    - Commissioner Wolfe stated that the mountain laurel and red maple would struggle on such a dry, exposed site and recommended replacing the mountain laurel with sweet fern, which is native and handles dry soil.
    - Commissioner Easom suggested placing the plants more randomly so it looks more natural.

    - Commissioner Lathrop stated that he was concerned about invasive plants until the new plantings provide enough cover, and asked that the contractor be responsible for monitoring and removing invasives for at least five growing seasons. The engineer asked for two, and Chair Smigelski suggested three, which the engineer agreed to.
    - A trustee of the Groton Conservation Trust stated that the topsoil was scraped away and the subsoil was compacted by machinery, so the soil needs to be restored before anything is planted. The engineer stated that the soil would be machine tilled. Commissioner Kuliesis stated that tilling alone will not fix compaction and recommended adding as much clean compost as possible, at least three inches, from a local source to avoid bringing in invasive seeds.
    - An abutter asked about piles of material on their property. The engineer stated that material scraped off the conservation land will be put back and the rest will stay on the abutter's property.
- **Motion:** A motion was made and seconded to accept the mitigation plan with the following changes: mountain laurel replaced with sweet fern, plantings placed more randomly, monitoring for invasive species for three growing seasons, and soil restoration by machine tilling and adding clean compost at a minimum of three inches.
- **Vote:** All in favor. Motion carried unanimously.
- **Outcome:** Mitigation plan accepted with changes.

7:00 PM: Continued Public Hearing- Request for Determination of Applicability- Trail Work at 245 Lowell Road

- **Presentation:** Administrator Steeves stated that the Commission is still waiting on the Natural Heritage and Endangered Species Program determination.
- **Motion:** A motion was made and seconded to continue the hearing to October 13, 2026.
- **Vote:** All in favor. Motion carried unanimously.
- **Outcome:** Continued to October 13, 2026.

Land Management & Acquisition: RFPs for Baby Beach Road parcel

- Administrator Steeves stated that she has not yet sent out the requests for proposals for the survey but hopes to have them for the next meeting.

Land Management & Acquisition: Lawrence Homestead Parcels

- **Presentation:** A representative for the property owners stated that two lots on Long Hill Road, created about 47 years ago and classified under Chapter 61A, are being sold. He stated that the Select Board is looking for the Commission's comments on the town's right of first refusal before its meeting next Monday and recommended that the Commission not buy them. He also stated that the owners would like to add a 1.88 acre corner at Farmers Row and Long Hill Road to the existing conservation restriction on the back field. He stated that the corner is part of a historic landscape designed by Frederick

Law Olmsted that the owners plan to restore. He stated that the draft restriction allows for both farming and restoration, with an unrestricted area in the middle for a future detached accessory dwelling unit, and asked for comments within about a month.

- **Discussion:**
  - Commissioner Morrison stated that he had no interest in the two lots. Commissioner Easom asked about their value, and the representative stated that they are under contract for $500,000 each.
  - Commissioner Lathrop stated that monitoring the conservation restriction could be tricky since the area is meant to be kept as a garden. He asked why the accessory dwelling unit could not be moved to the top boundary to avoid a utility easement and the representative stated that it would disturb part of the historic landscape. Commissioner Lathrop stated that the restriction is worth pursuing since it would prevent another house lot at no cost to the town, but that he would like to see the property on a site walk first.
  - Commissioner Easom asked if the corner would otherwise be a building lot, and the representative stated that it would and that he would confirm the frontage. Commissioner Kuliesis and Commissioner Easom stated that they would also like to see it on a site walk.
  - Commissioner Kuliesis asked if the Commission was declining the lots because of the price. Chair Smigelski stated that it was because of the price and because the lots have little conservation value.
- **Motion:** A motion was made and seconded to decline the Chapter 61A option for Lots 1 and 2 on Long Hill Road.
- **Vote:** All in favor. Motion carried unanimously.
- **Outcome:** The Commission declined to purchase the two lots. A site walk of the 1.88 acre corner will be scheduled for the Saturday before the October 13th meeting.

7:10 PM: Discussion- Renaming Hayes Woods Conservation Area

- **Presentation:** Administrator Steeves stated that the Trails Committee representative pointed out that a Groton Conservation Trust property and a Commission property next to each other are both called Hayes Woods, and suggested renaming the Commission's parcel the Wrangling Brook Conservation Area.
- **Discussion:**
  - Commissioner Lathrop stated that renaming makes sense since having two properties with the same name is confusing, and noted that the Commission did the same thing with a parcel at Baddacook Pond. He stated that he did not like Wrangling Brook since the brook runs through many other places, and suggested the Maple Avenue Conservation Area. He noted that the Commission's land was donated by the developer, not the Hayes family, who donated the Trust's parcel.
  - Chair Smigelski suggested using Mr. and Mrs. Hayes' first names, and Administrator Steeves suggested shortening it to the Maple Conservation Area.

    - Commissioner Easom asked if the name has to be recorded on a deed. Commissioner Lathrop stated that it does not, and that it is only what the Commission calls it, so it can be changed at any time.
- **Outcome:** Commissioners will think about a name and revisit it at the next meeting.

7:15 PM: Discussion- Moulton Turtle Nesting Site & Cardinal Lane

- **Presentation:** Administrator Steeves stated that she was not sure if the Commission reached a conclusion on either item at the last meeting.
- **Discussion:**
    - Commissioner Easom stated that he rewatched the last meeting and that the Commission had not decided anything about the Cardinal Lane parcel, which the Audubon Society may also be interested in. Commissioner Easom and Commissioner Lathrop stated that the Commission does not need to own the land if the Audubon Society wants it, and that it is up to the representative to ask them.
    - For the Moulton turtle nesting site, Commissioner Lathrop stated that the Commission had planned to wait until it knew the cost of the turtle nesting areas at Academy Hill before deciding how much money is needed in escrow.
    - Administrator Steeves stated that the letter to the Academy Hill homeowners association is written but that she is still trying to figure out where to send it, since the association is managed by an outside firm.
- **Outcome:** Administrator Steeves will let the representative know the Commission is not interested in the Cardinal Lane parcel, and the Moulton turtle nesting escrow will be revisited once the Academy Hill costs are known.

7:25 PM: Continued Public Hearing- Notice of Intent- 60 Valley Road- DEP# PENDING

- **Presentation:** Administrator Steeves stated that the applicant's representative found the engineer's plan to be inadequate and will be working with the engineer directly. She also stated that the first report on the separate restoration work, which already has an order of conditions, should be ready for the next meeting. She added that the vegetation is coming in very well.
- **Motion:** A motion was made and seconded to continue the hearing to October 13, 2026.
- **Vote:** All in favor. Motion carried unanimously.
- **Outcome:** Continued to October 13, 2026.

Land Management & Acquisition: Expand Scope of RFP for Parcel 247-42 to Include More Bounds

- **Presentation:** Administrator Steeves stated that this is the parcel near Island Pond Road, and that she would like to expand the survey request because more possible encroachments were found. Commissioner Lathrop stated that the Stewardship

Committee found possible encroachment during its monthly monitoring walk. He stated that the current request covers the corners near the house with the unpermitted deck, and that the nearby lots were confirmed to belong to the Commission. He stated that Parcel 247-42 is less clear since it is owned by the town through a tax taking and it is not known if it is under the Commission's control.

- **Discussion:**
  - Commissioner Morrison stated that the Commission should not spend conservation money surveying land it does not own, and that the Select Board would only need to transfer the parcel to the Commission.
  - Chair Smigelski asked if the parcel could be considered a buildable lot. Commissioner Easom stated that it may be, especially with recent state changes to zoning for housing, so the Commission should ask for it if it wants it. Commissioner Lathrop noted that the Affordable Housing Trust may also want it and that the Commission might be able to work with them on limited development.
  - The Commission agreed to move forward now with the survey request for the six points on land it already owns without waiting on Parcel 247-42.
- **Motion:** A motion was made and seconded to authorize the Administrator to request the transfer of Parcel 247-42 to the Groton Conservation Commission.
- **Vote:** All in favor. Motion carried unanimously.
- **Outcome:** Administrator Steeves will ask the Select Board to transfer Parcel 247-42 to the Commission and send out the request for proposals for the six survey points.

7:35 PM: Continued Public Hearing- Notice of Intent- 28 Mountain Lakes Trail- DEP# 169-1299

- **Presentation:** No applicant was present.
- **Motion:** A motion was made and seconded to continue the hearing to October 13, 2026.
- **Vote:** All in favor. Motion carried unanimously.
- **Outcome:** Continued to October 13, 2026.

Public Meeting to Discuss Right of First Refusal on Worthen Drive- September 24th, 2026

- Administrator Steeves announced a special meeting on Thursday, September 24th, at 6:00 PM held fully remote to discuss the right of first refusal letter the town received for three parcels on Worthen Drive. Representatives from the Groton Conservation Trust, the Affordable Housing Trust, and the Commission will attend.

Ames Meadow Mowing

- **Presentation:** Commissioner Lathrop stated that the Stewardship Committee did a site walk at Ames Meadow earlier this year and found many small native oaks and other native plants growing since it was mowed last fall, with very few invasives except along

the forest edge including a patch of bittersweet. He recommended mowing only a strip along the edges to keep invasives from spreading into the field. Administrator Steeves stated that every parcel is different, so this could be a trial for a management plan for Ames Meadow.

- **Discussion:**
  - It was noted that letting it grow in would mean losing the meadow, and Chair Smigelski stated that there is a lot more forest in town than meadow, which is why the Commission has required meadows to be kept open in past orders of conditions. Commissioner Kuliesis agreed that the meadow needs regular seasonal mowing or it will fill in with woody plants, and that a meadow next to the water is important habitat. Administrator Steeves noted that oaks are keystone plants and it is not common to see that many.
  - Commissioner Lathrop stated that past mowing has also cut through wet pockets with wetland plants that are not obvious when the ground is dry.
  - Commissioner Morrison suggested mowing half this year, leaving the half with the most oaks, and looking at it again next year. Commissioner Easom, who does the mowing, stated that he could let parts go for about three years before the saplings get too big for his tractor.
- **Outcome:** This fall, the northern half will be mowed along with a couple of tractor widths along the edges to keep invasives back, avoiding the wet areas as much as possible. The Commission will look at it again next year.

7:45 PM: Continued Public Hearing- Notice of Intent- 0 Wyman Road- DEP# PENDING

- **Motion:** A motion was made and seconded to continue the hearing to October 13, 2026.
- **Vote:** All in favor. Motion carried unanimously.
- **Outcome:** Continued to October 13, 2026.

7:50 PM: Continued Public Hearing- Request for Determination of Applicability- Sidewalk Along Lovers Lane

- **Presentation:** Administrator Steeves stated that she looked into the question from the last meeting and there is no exemption for sidewalks under the Wetlands Protection Act. She stated that a similar sidewalk project was approved a few years ago through a request for determination of applicability, with the condition that all disturbed areas be seeded with a native seed mix. She stated that the Department of Public Works director was expected to attend with photos of that project but was not present. The hearing was left open in case the director arrived, but he had not arrived by the end of the hearings.
- **Motion:** A motion was made and seconded to continue the hearing to October 13, 2026.
- **Vote:** All in favor. Motion carried unanimously.
- **Outcome:** Continued to October 13, 2026.

APPROVE INVOICES

- **Motion:** A motion was made and seconded to reimburse Commissioner Lathrop for Massachusetts Association of Conservation Commissions conference expenses in the amount of $150.
- **Vote:** All in favor, with Commissioner Lathrop abstaining. Motion carried.
- **Motion:** A motion was made and seconded to pay the GPR invoice for surveying in the amount of $4,101.15.
- **Vote:** All in favor. Motion carried unanimously.
- **Motion:** A motion was made and seconded to pay the Lowell Publishing Group invoice for legal ads in the amount of $311.55.
- **Vote:** All in favor. Motion carried unanimously.

ONGOING ISSUES

- Commissioner Easom asked if he should mow a small conservation parcel near Smith Street this fall. Commissioner Lathrop recommended leaving it alone this year since it is small and does not really need to be mowed. Commissioner Easom agreed, but noted that if it is left for more than about four years, his tractor will not be able to get through it.

8:00 PM: Request for Determination of Applicability- 28 Ridgewood Ave

- **Presentation:** No one was present, but it was explained that the applicant is requesting to remove trees on the property, including a large pine hanging over the cottage, which will need a crane to remove.
- **Discussion:**
    - Commissioner Wolfe stated that the request is fairly straightforward. He stated that there was a question during the site walk about why some smaller trees near the road need to come down and a letter from the applicant explained that the tree company needs them removed to get the pine out with the crane.
    - It was stated that during the site walk, the applicant was told to also mark the oak trees leaning toward the house along with some smaller dying trees by the dock, but the updated map does not show them. The Commission agreed to allow the leaning oaks to come down in addition to the trees shown on the plan.
    - Commissioner Lathrop and Commissioner Easom stated that trees by the water that are not threatening anything should be left, since a tree falling into the water is natural, but agreed that trees that threaten the dock could come down. It was agreed that Administrator Steeves would oversee which trees are removed by the water.
- **Motion:** A motion was made and seconded for a negative three determination, finding that the work in the request is within the buffer zone as defined in the 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 conditions that the oak trees leaning toward the house may also be removed in addition to those shown on the plan, and that only trees that threaten the dock may be removed by the water.

- **Vote:** All in favor. Motion carried unanimously.
- **Outcome:** Approved with a negative three determination.

8:10 PM: Notice of Intent- 605 Lowell Road- DEP# PENDING

- **Presentation:** The applicant's engineer stated that the cottage on the property burned down and will be rebuilt in the same spot along with the shed that burned, and the stairs that were there before. He stated that the new house will be built on helical piles that are screwed into the ground so no foundation will be dug. He stated that the old cesspool will be replaced with a Title 5 septic system with a 1,500 gallon two compartment tank and a single leaching trench for the one bedroom cottage. He stated that the old shallow well will be taken out of use and a new well drilled near the road. He stated that they still need to talk about replanting with the Commission, and that DEP has not yet issued a file number.
- **Discussion:**
    - Commissioner Hurley asked about the plastic barrier shown on the plan, and the engineer stated that it will be buried upright in a trench next to the leaching trench, and that the straw wattles shown on the plan are already in place.
    - Commissioner Easom noted that the Natural Heritage and Endangered Species Program found no impact.
    - Commissioner Lathrop stated that the new house looks bigger than the old one on the plan, and that nothing should be bigger than what was there. The engineer stated that the corners were estimated since the house had already burned, and that it is not bigger, though a small bump out that was part of the old enclosed porch will be squared off. Commissioner Lathrop stated that he does not want to see any more foundation or roof area than before, since by today's standards nothing could be built there at all and that adding a roof over the back deck, which was open before, would be incremental creep.
    - Commissioner Morrison stated that he did not have a problem with a roof over the deck, since a deck is not much different from a roof in terms of water getting through. Chair Smigelski noted that the helical piles will disturb less ground than a dug foundation.
    - Commissioner Easom stated that an uncovered deck lets water through to the ground below while a covered one does not, so he would prefer no roof. The applicant asked for a larger overhang at the top of the stairs to keep things out of the rain. The engineer asked if a gutter running to a drywell would be acceptable with a roof. Commissioner Easom stated that he would still prefer it uncovered, and Chair Smigelski stated that a drywell would make sense to him since it puts the water back into the ground.
- **Motion:** A motion was made and seconded to continue the hearing to October 13, 2026.
- **Vote:** All in favor. Motion carried unanimously.

- **Outcome:** Continued to October 13, 2026, while waiting on a DEP file number. The Commission will think about the roof over the back deck before the next meeting.

APPROVE MEETING MINUTES

- No minutes were discussed.

ONGOING ISSUES

- Commissioner Lathrop reported that after the site walk, he and Commissioner Easom checked the gate at the Cow Pond Brook baseball fields. The gate was working but the lock was missing. Commissioner Easom stated that the lock has since been put back and everything is working, and the Commission thanked him for taking so many shifts at the gate during the baseball games.
- Chair Smigelski stated that he recently reseeded Walnut Run and pushed the hedgerows back. It was also noted that the area across from the Groton Music Center has been regraded and seeded without disturbing the brook.
- Commissioner Easom stated that the Commission is supposed to put the haying of its properties out to bid every five years. Commissioner Lathrop agreed that the Commission has been behind on this and should follow the correct process. Commissioner Easom asked that it be added to the next agenda.

ADJOURNMENT

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

APPROVED: 11/10/26