



## Groton Stewardship Committee Minutes

**Present:** Lisa Murray, Chair; Eileen McHugh, Vice-Chair; Olin Lathrop; Anna Eliot.

**Absent:** Kimberly Kuliesis; Bob Hanninen; Deborah Collum; Ronald Hersch

**Others Present:** Charlotte Steeves (Conservation Administrator); Jeffrey Brem (Heritage Landing, LLC.); Sasha Auer (Stewardship Planner DCR); Aubrey Theall (Chari, Groton Historical Committee); Rick Salon (Representing Ron Hersch in his absence); Paul Alphen (Attorney for Heritage Landing, LLC.); Alison Hamilton (Conservation Commission); Bruce Easom (Conservation Commission).

**Location:** Virtual Meeting (Zoom)

**When:** February 21st, 2024

**6:30 PM L. Murray called to order. There was not a quorum for the meeting and no votes were taken.**

### Committee updates

#### Heritage Landing Turtle Habitat Discussion

E. McHugh said she asked C. Steeves to move the turtle habitat discussion with Heritage Landing, LLC. to the Stewardship agenda first in the hopes of presenting a recommendation from the Stewardship Committee on how the Conservation Commission should proceed with the project.

P Alphen said the project is a 40B, so the Town zoning and wetland by-laws and regulations do not apply. The land surrounding the proposed development is endangered turtle habitat, so the entire project has to be reviewed by Natural Heritage. He said there will likely be a requirement for a conservation restriction to be placed in the surrounding area. The CR would be approximately 9.14 acres. He said the septic fields and detention basin would have to be located within the boundaries of the protected area. He said he expects that the septic systems would be under the ownership of the condominium association. He said he is ultimately looking for the Groton Conservation Commission to have enforcement power over the CR.

E. McHugh said she was not aware that Heritage Landing would be proposing a CR rather than a creation of turtle nesting habitat, as was originally proposed. She said she was under the impression that Natural Heritage and Heritage Landing would be establishing a turtle nesting area, and that the Groton Conservation Commission would ultimately participate in the care and custody of the area. \

P Alphen agreed that this was his understanding as well, until he read the form of the declaration of restriction used by Natural Heritage, referring to a CR.

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*\*P. Alphen said he read this document the morning of the meeting, so it was new information that the Stewardship Committee was not yet aware of.*

E. McHugh noted the presence of B. Easom and A. Hamilton, which constituted a quorum of the Conservation Commission.

*\*B. Easom promptly left the meeting and there was no longer a quorum of the Conservation Commission.*

E. McHugh said discussions on CRs are better suited for the Conservation Commission. She said her understanding of the project was that Heritage Landing would form a homeowners association who would be responsible for the turtle habitat. The Town would carry the escrow and maintain the responsibility of ensuring that homeowners were doing their job. This is the case of other turtle habitats in town.

P Alphen said he was reading the restriction form today and got caught up with the need for the CR.

E. McHugh said the hope is to make a recommendation to the Conservation Commission.

O. Lathrop said the Commission does not want to be in the business of having to maintain the turtle habitats. He suggested Natural Heritage could hold the CR and the Commission could own the land. He suggested a homeowners association be formed to maintain and be responsible for the turtle habitat, while the Commission would only be responsible for enforcement. He also suggested an escrow be established and held by the Town of Groton.

E. McHugh noted that Deb Collum would be resigning from the Stewardship Committee.

A Hamilton expressed concern about the maintenance and activities necessary to keep the septic areas operating properly, as there is overlap of the proposed septic areas within the proposed turtle nesting habitat area. She asked for clarification on how the septic areas would be accessed.

P Alphen said the workers would be able to walk out and access the septic areas. He said there is plenty of room between the units to access the septic areas if needed.

A Hamilton said that the turtle habitat needs to be contiguous so that turtles can move between wetland and upland areas safely.

P Alphen said the requirements from Natural Heritage were still to be determined and he suggested that no final decisions be made until they know these requirements. He said he would like to know what the Commission would do under the different circumstances that were discussed.

E. McHugh said there were still a lot of things that need to be worked through before Heritage Landing presents to the Conservation Commission.

Discussion: Gibbet Hill Trail Stewardship Plan

S. Auer said the CR on Gibbet Hill would be co-held with the town and DCR. She said there is a draft Stewardship Plan that she had been working on with the previous Administrator. She said the Stewardship Plan is meant to contain all the management and maintenance activities. She said the

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plan is mostly finalized. She said recently A. Theall has reached out to discuss restoration of the Bancroft Castle, which DCR fully supports. She said she would like to see the restoration of the castle incorporated into the final Stewardship Plan.

A. Elliott asked if the Stewardship Plan will be part of the Open Space Plan.

E. McHugh said she did not think the Stewardship Committee gets into the level of stewardship plans in the Open Space Plans.

S. Auer said she is looking for the draft plan to be edited and sent to DCR for approval. She said one of the edits they are looking for is more details on plans for the castle.

E. McHugh suggested that the edited document be sent to the proper committee (either Stewardship or the Commission) for review before submitting the document to DCR.

Water Quality at Lost Lake/ Knopps Pond: Update

R. Salon said he is concerned about finding funding to curb the invasive weeds and algae on the lakes if the override does not pass. He said the Groton Lakes Association is trying to raise money and they are also looking into grants.

L. Murray said that she received an email requesting a letter of support for the 319 Grant.

E. McHugh said there is no quorum, so the Stewardship Committee could not vote to sign the letter during the meeting.

L. Murray suggested the letter could be signed during the next Stewardship meeting in March, depending on if there is a quorum.

E. McHugh suggested the letter be sent to Conservation to be signed as a backup plan.

O. Lathrop suggested the letter be brought to the Stewardship Committee again in March to see if there is a quorum to sign it.

L. Murray set the next meeting date for Wednesday, March 20th at 6:30 PM.

Adjourn

**E. McHugh made the motion to adjourn and it was seconded by R. Hersch.**  
(Yes: EM, OL, AE, RH, LM)

Minutes Approved: 4/17/2024

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