TOWN OF GROTON

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HOUSING PARTNERSHIP

Peter Cunningham, Chair
Anna Eliot
Jeffrey Wallens

Regular Session Minutes

Date:	Tuesday, October 5, 2026
Time:	2 pm
Location:	2nd Floor Meeting Room, Town Hall, 173 Main Street
Members in attendance:	Peter Cunningham, Anna Eliot and Jeffrey Wallens
Others in attendance:	Ed O'Neil (Common Street Realty Trust)
Referenced documents:	Draft minutes from September 21, 2026

Peter Cunningham called the Housing Partnership to order at 2 pm. The meeting location was changed from the first floor meeting room in Town Hall to the second floor meeting room.

Review draft minutes from September 21, 2026.

Jeffrey Wallens moved to approve the September 21, 2026 draft minutes as presented. Anna Eliot seconded and the motion carried (3:0).

Meeting with Ed O'Neil of Common Street Realty Trust

Peter Cunningham welcomed Ed O'Neil to the meeting. Ed O'Neil represents the developer of the former Ralph Smith land[1]. Ed O'Neil said that they have done extensive soil testing on both sides of the street. Ed O'Neil said that in practice there seems to be a variety in the buffer zone enforcement by conservation commissions across the state. Here, he has learned that Groton's Conservation Commission is stringent on the 100-foot buffer which, given site constraints, is prompting his team to look at zoning alternatives. They pulled together a plan for 125 Common Street that would fit with Chapter 40Y zoning,[2] but since Groton has not adopted 40Y zoning this path would require Town Meeting approval. The developer's 40Y plan envisions single family homes kept at least 25

[1] The former Ralph Smith land is comprised of approximately 28 acres at 162 Common Street and 25 acres at 125 Common Street. Much of 162 Common Street is wooded and contains the old Ralph Smith house. 125 Common Street is more open with about half the acreage having a past use as a Christmas tree farm.

[2] Enacted in 2022 through An Act Relating to Economic Growth and Relief for the Commonwealth (Acts of 2022, Chapter 268), the Starter Home Zoning Districts Act (M.G.L. Chapter 40Y), encourages communities participate in this optional program and create overlay zoning that reduce barriers to creating smaller, more affordable starter homes.

Chapter 40Y zoning:

- Allows minimum densities of 4 units/acre
- Allows starter homes up to 1,850 square feet to be built as-of-right
- Supports creation of smaller single-family homes on compact lots
- Requires at least 50% of homes to have three or more bedrooms
- Requires at least 10% of homes to be affordable to households earning up to 110% of area median income
- Includes clear local design standards for predictable development

The process would probably include Planning Board taking the lead on getting a proposed 40Y district that covers the Common Street land to be pre-approved by EOHLC and then approved by Town Meeting.

feet apart to avoid sprinkling. Jeffrey Wallens said that he would like to see the Partnership build momentum for 40Y.

Unlike Chapter 40Y, a Chapter 40B does not require Town Meeting approval. Ed O'Neil said that he is familiar with the comprehensive permit process and that the developer is considering a standard 40B for the 125 Common Street land. The group noted that a 40B for a homeownership development would produce 25% affordability for this development. Peter Cunningham said that the Partnership can be supportive of a 40B.

Ed O'Neil asked about whether the Town offers downpayment assistance. Fran Stanley said that it does not but that the state offers some downpayment assistance. Jeffrey Wallens referenced the HOP program that funded the Brookfield Commons development on Labbe Road. He said that that Brookfield Commons had downpayment assistance. Jeffrey Wallens added that the Partnership is interested in working with you.

Speaking of 162 Common Street, Ed O'Neil said that they are preparing a 4-lot plan (3 new buildable lots and a lot encompassing the existing Smith house). The developer is going to bring town water 700 feet down Breakneck Road and then install a water line. There will be on site septic. Zoning requires a special permit from the Planning Board if the developer intends to put in a common driveway.

Anna Eliot suggested a Shepley Hill sort of development that set aside land for conservation. She added that for Shepley Hill, when the Conservation Commission did not want to accept oversight of the conservation restriction, the Park Commission stepped in as the preserved land provides trails with public access for recreation.

Anna Eliot asked about the stone bridge that crosses over near the rail trail to one of the soap stone quarries. Ed O'Neil replied that they would not be going anywhere near that for their development plans. He added that the 4th lot will be a hammerhead lot with approximately 8 acres. Anna Eliot said that she sees a role for the Partnership to come with you to permitting meetings. She added that she is interested in preserving the views on the Christmas Tree property.

<u>Update on the Recent Historical Commission meeting</u>

Regarding the Ralph Smith home on 162 Common Street, Ed O'Neil attended the Historical Commission meeting on September 30th. The Commissioners and the developer had a conversation about the Town paying the developer in exchange for a historic preservation restriction on the property. Most such restrictions aim to preserve the exterior of the structure. The deadline for CPC application was October 1st. Given the shortness of time, the Commission voted to submit an application for $200,000 to enable them to place historic preservation restrictions. The application is not specific to the Ralph Smith house and the $200,000 amount is a placeholder number. Ed O'Neil was open to the idea. The parties have a couple of months to figure out the details assessing feasibility from the developer's standpoint and meeting historic preservation goals from the Commission's viewpoint. In the same meeting, the Historical Commission voted that it considered the Ralph Smith house to be of historic significance.[3] Ed O'Neil said that he is doing more research on the antique building and that it may need a new foundation.

Ed O'Neil said that he would stay in touch with Fran Stanley.

Meeting adjourned at 2:34 pm.

Notes by Fran Stanley

Next meetings: Generally, every second Tuesday of the month at 10 am

[3] 162 Common Street is known as the Flora J. Smith house is listed in the Massachusetts Historical Commission's MACRIS inventory as constructed in 1890 in the Italianate architectural style.