**TOWN OF GROTON PLANNING BOARD**

**May 22, 2025**

**Meeting Minutes**

A virtual meeting of the Planning Board was held on Thursday, May 22, 2025, at 7:00 p.m.

**Members Present:**

Ms. Lorayne Black, Acting Chair

Mr. Russell Burke, Board Member

Mr. George Barringer, Board Member

Mr. Phil Francisco, Board Member

Mr. Paul Hathaway, Board Member

Mr. Matthew Killam, Board Member

**Members not Present:**

Mr. David Bonnett, Board Member (Excused)

**Also Present:**

Mr. Takashi Tada, Land Use Director/Town Planner

According to the Massachusetts Attorney General’s guidance regarding the Massachusetts Wiretap Statute, Ms. Black stated that the meeting was virtual and recorded, and all votes must be taken via roll call. Furthermore, the participants in the meeting introduced themselves.

***Public Hearing – Scenic Roads Permit for Removal of Public Shade Trees, Martins Pond Road (Groton Electric Light Department)***

Mr. Jon Patterson, General Manager of GELD, addressed the Board and said the request was to remove two mature trees on Martins Pond Road, as shown on the application plans. He said both trees posed a hazard to the electric lines, noting that one of the trees was very large and visibly rotting. He added that the second tree showed signs of aging, and while they were in the area, they felt it was best to remove it as well.

Mr. Tom Delaney, Tree Warden, addressed the Board and said both trees were large red oaks.

Mr. Delaney added that he had received a written letter of opposition to remove the less rotted tree (tree #2) by Ms. Natalie Greene, President, Friends of the Tree Warden. He said that in this case, if an objection were raised, the request would be technically denied, and an appeal would have to be heard before the Select Board or other ruling party.

Mr. Francisco said he looked at the trees and agreed that the first tree clearly needs to be removed. The second tree appeared to be healthy.

Ms. Black asked if there were members of the public who had questions or comments. There were none.

**MOTION:** Mr. Franscisco made a motion to approve the removal tree #1, but to deny the removal of tree #2. Mr. Hathaway seconded the motion.

A roll call vote was taken, which resulted as follows:

Yea: Mr. Francisco, Mr. Hathaway, Mr. Burke 7

Mr. Killam, Ms. Black, Mr. Barringer,

& Mr. Delaney

Nay: 0

**MOTION CARRIED: 7 – 0 – 0.**

***Discussion – Town Center Vision Plan (Destination Groton Committee)***

Mr. Greg Sheldon, Chair, Destination Groton Committee (DGC), Mr. Jeff Gordon, Member, DGC, and Mr. Tim Hess of Studio InSitu Architects, were present for the discussion.

Mr. Sheldon stated that the DGC had been very busy over the past three years in promoting the Town of Groton. He said that, according to their survey, most people would like to see a walkable, viable town center experience. He added that there were two primary economic factors involved in reaching that conclusion: The Groton Hill Music Center had opened three years prior and was attracting 60,000–80,000 people per year for its concerts, and the Groton Inn had been rebuilt and was a major hospitality destination.

Mr. Sheldon stated that the DGC had received a grant from the Montachusett Regional Planning Commission to conduct a retail leakage study. He noted that a significant portion of Groton’s retail spending took place outside of town, and approximately 30% could potentially be redirected to remain in town. He said he felt that if some of the retail were to return to Groton and it were executed correctly, it could bring in a reasonable amount of revenue.

Mr. Sheldon explained that the DGC received rural development grants for an engineering traffic analysis and a Vision Plan of what the Town Center could look like.

Mr. Tim Hess of Studio InSitu Architects addressed the Board and explained that his company would be doing the work on the Vision Plan. He said they had begun to model a number of specific alterations and additions to the circulation and the massing in the Town Center. The goal was to develop a singular, cohesive vision that embodies Groton. Some of the potential changes being evaluated include eliminating the parking requirements, expanding connectivity between parking areas, and enlarging the Town Center Overlay District.

The Board ensued in a conversation with the attendees regarding the Town Center Vision Plan. (The presentation, in its entirety, can be viewed on the Town of Groton’s cable channel.)

Mr. Francisco commented that the presentation appeared to be an attempt to cram all of the reported retail leakage from the previous study into the Town Center without consideration for the existing, vacant storefronts in other neighborhoods such as the Four Corners and Mill Run Plaza. Ms. Black agreed.

Mr. Hathaway agreed with the above comments and added that the chances of success with the Vision Plan would be greater by spreading out the vision across a greater portion of the Town.

Mr. Burke said the Town has been looking at connecting parking areas for years, but it has proven difficult to get buy-in and cooperation from private property owners. He also pointed out that the retail sector is not consistently strong, citing the vacant Station House Restaurant behind Town Hall as an example in the Town Center.

Mr. Barringer said this was a good start, but he encouraged the DGC to prioritize the leakage study in terms of the best uses that make the most sense with respect to walkability and return visits.

Ms. Black observed that the presentation by Mr. Hess was a great visual reminder of the unique and special setting of Groton’s Town Center, sandwiched between Gibbet Hill and the James Brook wetland. She also said there have been many changes in and around the Town Center since the adoption of the overlay district.

Ms. Black asked if there were members of the public who had questions or comments. Mr. Barringer read aloud a couple of comments submitted by John Sopka regarding the existing traffic congestion.

***Discussion – Issue decisions for Definitive Subdivision Plan and Special Permit for Major Residential Development, “Gratuity Brook Farm Estates,” 63 Gratuity Road, Assessors’ Parcel 216-47 (Routhier & Roper Gratuity Road, LLC)***

Mr. Tada reviewed the draft decisions approving the Definitive Subdivision Plan and a Special Permit for Major Residential Development.

Mr. Tada pointed out that some members of the Planning Board needed to fill out and sign Mullin Rule Certifications.

Mr. Tada noted that the Board had voted to grant a waiver to allow a proposed grade that is eight feet above the existing grade, from STA 1+50 to STA 2+50, and from STA 8+50 to STA 9+50 on Therese Lane.

**MOTION**: Mr. Francisco made a motion to grant a waiver for §381.10D(5) Streets and Grades Definitive Plan waiver to allow for a proposed grade of eight feet above the existing grade. Mr. Barringer seconded the motion.

A roll call vote was taken, which resulted as follows:

Yea: Mr. Francisco, Mr. Hathaway, Mr. Burke 5

Ms. Black, & Mr. Barringer

Nay: 0

**MOTION CARRIED: 5 – 0 – 1. (Abstain: Mr. Killam)**

Mr. Tada said the second waiver was to allow the depth of cover over the drainpipes to be reduced from three feet to two feet, at catch basin three (CB-3) and catch basin four (CB-4), on Therese Lane.

**MOTION:** Mr. Francisco made a motion to grant a waiver for §381.11.C(1) - Stormwater Management and Storm Sewers. Mr. Barringer seconded the motion.

A roll call vote was taken, which resulted as follows:

Yea: Mr. Francisco, Mr. Hathaway, Mr. Burke 5

Ms. Black, & Mr. Barringer

Nay: 0

**MOTION CARRIED: 5 – 0 – 1. (Abstain: Mr. Killam)**

Mr. Tada noted that the applicant was still in discussions with the Conservation Commission, as well as the Earth Removal Stormwater Advisory Committee.

Mr. Burke asked about the revised landscaping plan. Ms. Black said the plan to add red cedar plantings around the leach field on Therese Lane was adequate.

**MOTION:** Mr. Hathaway made a motion to approve the Definitive Plan for Gratuity Brook Farm Estates, with the specified conditions. Mr. Francisco seconded the motion.

A roll call vote was taken, which resulted as follows:

Yea: Mr. Francisco, Mr. Hathaway, Mr. Burke 5

Ms. Black, & Mr. Barringer

Nay: 0

**MOTION CARRIED: 5 – 0 – 1. (Abstain: Mr. Killam)**

**MOTION:** Mr. Francisco made a motion to approve the Special Permit for Major Residential Development for Gratuity Brook Farm Estates, with the specified conditions. Mr. Hathaway seconded the motion.

A roll call vote was taken, which resulted as follows:

Yea: Mr. Francisco, Mr. Hathaway, Mr. Burke 5

Ms. Black, & Mr. Barringer

Nay: 0

**MOTION CARRIED: 5 – 0 – 1. (Abstain: Mr. Killam)**

***Discussion – Master Plan Implementation***

* Phil Francisco – Planning Board Liaison to the Select Board

Mr. Francisco asked the Planning Board how frequently they thought they should meet with the Select Board regarding the Master Plan. He suggested trying to schedule the first discussion with the Select Board at some point over the summer, presumably after the Town budget issues have been settled.

Mr. Burke suggested meeting once a month initially, followed by quarterly meetings.

Mr. Francisco reviewed the Implementation Program & Action Plan (Section V) of the Master Plan. Some of the action items listed are part of the ongoing business of municipal operations, and/or are relatively low in cost or complexity. Other items can be considered more complex with greater cost and timeline considerations. He asked the board members to review the table and provide feedback in a future meeting with respect to prioritization of items to discuss with the Select Board.

***Project Updates***

* MBTA Multi-Family Zoning – District Compliance Application
  + Application submitted to the Executive Office of Housing and Livable Communities (EOHLC), 5/15/25
* Groton Hill Music Center
  + Lighting complaint, Virginia Wood email received 5/16/25.

Board members discussed various aspects of the lighting at Groton Hill Music Center including the overall lighting schedule specified in the Site Plan Review permit, and the perception of light pollution from the interior lights in the grand foyer. There was general consensus that the parking lot light fixtures are well executed with respect to shielding and brightness, but Virginia Wood’s email pointed out a potential issue with some parking area lights being operated outside of the scheduled hours.

Ms. Black said she felt the lighted bollards were a point of concern because they are at eye-level and are not shielded, in addition to appearing to be brighter than necessary.

**MOTION:** Mr. Hathaway made a motion to request Mr. Tada to draft a letter to the Groton Hill Music Center requesting that they review the agreed-upon conditions for their lighting operation based on events and times, with particular attention drawn to a recent letter that the Planning Board received regarding one specific instance, and to please advise the Planning Board of their findings. Mr. Barringer seconded the motion.

A roll call vote was taken, which resulted as follows:

Yea: Mr. Hathaway, Mr. Burke 5

Ms. Black, Mr. Killam, & Mr. Barringer

Nay: 0

**MOTION CARRIED: 5 – 0 – 1** (Mr. Francisco abstained).

* Kilbourn Place, 240 Main Street
  + Landscaping inquiry, Alison Eydenberg email received on 5/20/25
  + Ms. Black said she would take a look at the landscaping
* Monarch Path Subdivision – There were no new updates.

***Committee Updates***

* Complete Streets Committee
* Grant application under review by MassDOT
* Community Preservation Committee – There were no updates.
* Conductorlab Oversight Committee
  + Received response to comments and PFAS sampling update from Honeywell on 5/20/25
* ZBA Updates
  + 409 Martins Pond Road appeal – Abutter Complaint (No decision made yet)

***General Business***

* Meeting Minutes
  + Minutes from the February 13, 2025, meeting.

**MOTION:** Mr. Hathaway made a motion to approve the minutes from the February 13, 2025, meeting, as presented. Mr. Barringer seconded the motion.

A roll call vote was taken, which resulted as follows:

Yea: Mr. Francisco, Mr. Hathaway, Mr. Burke 6

Ms. Black, Mr. Killam, & Mr. Barringer

Nay: 0

**MOTION CARRIED: 6 – 0 – 0.**

***Planning Board Meeting Schedule***

* June 12, 2025 (In-Person)
* June 26, 2025 (Via Zoom)
* July 17, 2025 (Via Zoom)

***Adjournment***

**MOTION:** At approximately 9:55 p.m., Mr. Killam made a motion to adjourn. Mr. Hathaway seconded the motion.

A roll call vote was taken, which resulted as follows:

Yea: Mr. Francisco, Mr. Hathaway, Mr. Burke 6

Ms. Black, Mr. Killam, & Mr. Barringer

Nay: 0

**MOTION CARRIED: 6 – 0 – 0.**

Respectfully submitted:

Trish Gedziun

Recording Secretary

*Approved 9/11/2025*