**\*\* Meeting Minutes \*\***

**18 March 2025, 7:00 p.m.**

**Conference Room 112 - The Groton Center – 163 W. Main St., W. Groton**

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| **Attendees: (**Present = X) | **Visitors:** |
| Chair | Paul Funch | X | Bruce Johnson |
| Vice Chair | Britt McKinley | X |  |
| Clerk | Bob Fournier | X |  |
| Members |  |  |  |
|  | Kiirja Paananen | X |  |
|  | Josh LoPresti |  |  |
|  | Steve Legge |  |  |
|  | Richard Lynch |  X |  |
|  | Jim Peregoy |  X |  |
|  | Tom Montilli |  X |  |
|  | Dan Pierpont |  |  |
|  | Tom Gulik | X |  |

**Call to Order** - Meeting was called to order at 7:05 pm.

**VOTE:** To approve the 21 January 2025 minutes.

 Peregoy made the motion. McKinley seconded it. The motion was approved by a unanimous vote.

**VOTE:** Funch obtained signatures for reimbursement of the invoice he paid for Website Development Services performed by (Scott) Lewis Studios.

**Discussion**

* “Climate Resolution” - Ken Horton of the Sustainability Commission gave a brief explanation of the following article the Commission has placed on the Annual Town Meeting warrant:

“Groton affirms its support for the goal established by the Commonwealth of Massachusetts to reduce statewide greenhouse gas emissions to net-zero by 2050. Groton commits to evaluate and implement strategies to reduce emissions in municipal activities with a goal of eliminating all onsite burning of fossil fuels in municipal buildings and vehicles by 2050 and to support residents and businesses in reducing emissions.”

The goal for Groton in passing this article is to become a state Climate-Leader community. This is the 3rd of 5 steps that are required.

**VOTE:** That the Trails Committee supports the “Climate Resolution” warrant article..

Funch made the motion. McKinley seconded it. The motion was approved by a unanimous vote.

Funch will write a letter to the Sustainability Commission to document the Trails Committee’s support for the article.

**Reports**

* Conflict of Interest Training – Funch reminded all members to take the training. All present indicated they had done so.
* Annual Report – Funch acknowledged the work done by Legge in compiling the 2024 Annual Report for the Trails Committee and he conveyed Legge’s thanks for the photographs that members sent that will be used in the Town of Groton’s Annual Report.
* Gift Fund Update
	1. $11,353 is in the fund as of February 28th.
	2. Sue Mercer donated $1,000. Funch will write thank you.
	3. Squannacook River Runners Club donated $1,250 from proceeds from the 2024
	Town Forest Trail Races. Funch will write thank you.
* Presentation at Groton Public Library - Funch presented an update on the Trails Committee’s activities to a group of about 12 people on January 23.
* Nashua Riverwalk Trail Amenities and Educational Signage – Funch provided an update on the Nashua Riverwalk project.
	1. NOI Minor Mod submitted by DCR and approved by the Conservation Commission.
	2. The contract for design services for educational signage was negotiated with Geralyn Miller.
	3. The Freedom’s Way NHA Partnership Grant reimbursement of $2,500 for the designing of the signs was received.
	4. The Nashua River Wild & Scenic Stewardship Council reimbursement of $1,250 for signs was received. The balance of the grant that is available is now $1,250.
* CPA Grant for Tools and Equipment
	1. All planned purchases have been completed.
	2. Grant will be closed.
	3. Funch created a sign-out sheet for tools and equipment that members should use when taking items from the storage shed. Suggestions for improving the sign-out sheet are encouraged.
* New Website Status
	1. Scott Lewis has made a prototype available as of 18 March.
	2. Funch, Lynch, and Peregoy noted that there has been good progress on designing our new interactive map. All the old, and much new, information now needs to be entered via the WordPress forms.
		1. The interactive map is used as the base layer. It has the town divided into seven regions.
		2. A user can easily drill down into places within each region. Places can comprise one or more related and contiguous parcels.
* Trail Maintenance
	1. Montilli and LoPresti have been doing an excellent job of chainsawing trees off trails after a couple of windstorms have felled many trees.
	2. Repairs are needed on the Gratuity Brook bridge for damage caused by a tree falling on the bridge.
	3. A design for replacing the Wharton Plantation bridge has been developed by Montilli, Funch, and LoPresti. The water level is low now so construction will start as soon as possible.
* Eagle Scout projects – Four Scouts may be looking for project ideas this year. McKinley is currently working with Brody Tyler to define his project.
* Sign Subcommittee
	1. Funch emphasized the need to prepare articles for print and social media that describe what the money has been used for and to thank the Destination Groton Committee for obtaining the earmark funds. One sign has been installed at the Pollinator Garden at The Groton Center. Another sign, on invasives, still needs to find a home.
	2. Funch urged the subcommittee to survey what types of signs are most needed and where they should be put. There are directional signs, informational signs, property and trail identification signs, points of interest signs (e.g., the brook crossing signs we installed several years ago), and safety signs (e.g., road crossings, bridges not suitable for horses).
	3. Subcommittee membership is currently Funch, Lynch, Montilli, and Paananen, but more would be helpful to do all the work that is needed.
* Complete Streets Committee Update – Funch filled in for Legge who was absent. The Complete Streets Committee meeting was held earlier in the day. The Committee is looking at a connection to the Nashua River Rail Trail that would go over private property. Funch is assisting with contacting the owner to see if access might be negotiated with her.
* Conservation Commission Land Updates – The official names of the properties most recently purchased by the Conservation Commission are as follows: Noonan Woods (2025); C.L. Bennett Family Conservation Area (2024); Jack and Judy Palmer Conservation Area; and Marsh-Lewis Memorial Grove (2023)

**Discussions**

* “Hidden Treasures” by Freedom’s Way in May – Events must be submitted by April 1. Members were encouraged to create an event (hike, bike, kayak, etc.) by filling out the on-line form on the Freedom’s Way website. The Trails Committee is a partner of Freedom’s Way NHA and helped to establish this series of events. We have been holding hiking events for over 10 years.
* Casella Trail Reroute – The loop trail has a switchback section with excessive cross slope. We need to re-route the switchback and then clear and mark the new section of the trail.
* Trail Maintenance at Groton School - Funch requested, and received, permission from the committee to offer our assistance in maintaining the trails that go to and around the Groton School Pond from Keyes Woods, Moors Schoolhouse, and The General Field.
* Paquawket Path Easement
	1. A public access to the Nashua River Rail Trail exists from Paquawket Path per a Town Counsel letter written in 2004, but the installation of signs to identify the public trail never occurred.
	2. Funch requested, and received, permission from the committee to arrange a public hearing with abutters to describe our plans for identifying and marking the public access and to hear any concerns they have about those plans.
* GrotonFest Spring Registration – The event will occur on Sunday May 18th, from 11 am - 3 pm. The registration fee is $100.

**VOTE:** That the Trails Committee register for GrotonFest Spring.

McKinley made the motion. Montilli seconded it. The motion was approved by a unanimous vote.

* Virginia Wood discussed her ideas for creating scavenger hunts on Groton’s trails over the summer. The goal is to raise interest in the outdoors and to improve biodiversity education. A rough outline of the hunts is as follows:
	1. Write the scavenger hunt challenge - not naming specific items, but more the part they play in the ecosystem. Put “coins” at the items along the trail.
	2. Roughly five items are to be identified on each trail. A participant would collect a “coin” at each item.
	3. Participants would then hand in their coins for a chance to win a mug (which Virginia will make) with the name of the trail on which the hunt was held.
	4. The scavenger hunt will be advertised in the Groton Herald and promoted on social media, with the Trails Committee listed as a co-sponsor.
	5. A different trail in Groton will be used every week, month, or whatever frequency seems practical.

Wood requested we provide her with a list of trails that can be hiked in about an hour, with loops being preferred. The committee discussed some trails that might fit these specifications.

Funch will prepare a list of trails that would have good examples of biodiversity, and possibly invasives as well (as representing a threat to biodiversity).

**Adjournment**

**VOTE:** At 9:03, McKinley made a motion to adjourn.

The motion was approved by a unanimous vote.