

***NATURAL RESOURCES COMMISSION***

Meeting Minutes

Approved 1-28-2026

**7:00 PM, January 8<sup>th</sup>, 2026**

**Present:** Jay McHale, Chair; Steve Park, Vice-Chair; Michael D'Ortenzio, Bea Bezmalinovic and Brandon Schmitt, NRC Director

**Welcome, Call to Order and Citizen Speak**

Chair Jay McHale called the meeting of the Natural Resources Commission to order at 7:00 PM. Present at the meeting were Vice Chair Steve Park, Secretary Tom Hammond, Commissioner Michael D'Ortenzio and NRC Director Brandon Schmitt. Commissioner Bea Bezmalinovic arrived at 7:15 PM.

During Citizen Speak, Lara Crawford of 15 Rice Street provided feedback regarding the 2025 athletic season at the Hunnewell Track and Field complex. She acknowledged improvements in traffic management and trash collection but suggested that the next step should be evaluating outcomes for accountability and informed decision-making. Ms. Crawford recommended tracking metrics such as police labor hours dedicated to traffic management, revenue generated from increased athletic events, and lighting usage hours. She expressed concern about auxiliary lighting remaining on continuously from April through November, the proliferation of sports equipment storage on the fields, and the ongoing impact of trash. Ms. Crawford presented a bag of trash she had collected from the fields as a tangible example of the impact felt by residents.

**New and Continuing Business****Discuss 2025 athletic season at the Hunnewell Track & Field complex with School and DPW**

Linda Chow from the School Committee presented a report on the usage of lights at the Hunnewell Track and Field complex during the 2025 season. She was joined by Superintendent David Luccier, Athletic Director John Brown (participating remotely), and DPW Director David Cohen (participating remotely).

Ms. Chow shared statistics showing that 16 night games were held (13 regular season and 3 post-season), along with 6 night practices (one per sport). She noted that lights were used for a total of 72.74 hours, well within the 100-hour annual limit. The breakdown showed 8 hours in spring (primarily for graduation) and 64.7 hours in fall. Ms. Chow confirmed that all lights were turned off by the 9:30 PM curfew after every event.

Athletic Director John Brown explained that they were conscientious about minimizing light usage, turning them on only when necessary. He noted that he was the only person with access to control the field lights, ensuring proper oversight. Mr. Brown added that he now has control of the auxiliary lights as well, which was not the case earlier in the season.

Ms. Chow stated that community feedback regarding lighting and sound had been limited, and traffic and parking management had received positive comments. She provided an update on Phase 2A improvements, which included new lighting, sound system, and buildings (concession stand and bathrooms). She noted that Phase 2B (team rooms) is expected to be completed by fall 2026, following funding approval at the November Special Town Meeting.

Ms. Chow mentioned that as part of the Wetlands Protection Committee conditions, a wildlife habitat evaluation will be conducted, following up on the baseline assessment done two years ago.

Commissioner Steve Park asked if future reports could include tracking of ancillary lighting usage. Mr. Brown confirmed this would be possible going forward. Commissioner Bea Bezmalinovic inquired about additional storage space at Hunnewell, and Mr. Brown clarified that no new storage containers had been added; existing ones had been relocated during construction.

Commissioner Michael D'Ortenzio commended the schools for their management of the field, noting the positive community atmosphere at games and the successful enforcement of regulations. He appreciated that the ancillary lights were now connected to the Musco system for better control.

Chair McHale raised concerns about trash management at the field. DPW Director Cohen suggested that the issue was behavioral rather than a lack of receptacles. Mr. Brown noted that announcements were made during games reminding people to dispose of trash properly, and he recognized the efforts of custodians and DPW staff in maintaining the cleanliness of the facility.

#### **Approve Overbrook Park DPW Water Main Replacement License**

The Commission discussed the use of Overbrook Park for the temporary storage of materials during a water main replacement project. Director Schmitt noted that a license agreement similar to those used for other projects was being developed, and the applicant would be going through the wetlands permitting process as well.

***Motion: To approve the use of Overbrook Park for the storage of materials for the water main replacement project, subject to proper permitting and licensing, to be coordinated by the NRC Director.***

***Moved by: Commissioner D'Ortenzio   Seconded by: Commissioner Park   Vote: Approved unanimously***

#### **Discuss Request for Zoning Article Sponsorship from Mobility Manager**

This agenda item was deferred to a future meeting.

#### **Discuss Encroachment Policy**

The Commission reviewed a draft encroachment policy that had been circulated. Director Schmitt explained that the process would involve sending any comments or redlines back to the Select Board for their review, after which a revised version would be presented to jurisdictional boards.

During discussion, Commissioner Bezmalinovic asked whether private storage on fields would be considered an encroachment under the policy. Commissioner D'Ortenzio noted that while unpermitted storage units would technically be encroachments under the policy as written, implementation would be at the discretion of each responsible board.

The Commission discussed the status of storage units on town fields, with Commissioner Bezmalinovic mentioning that she had previously documented which containers belonged to which teams. Chair McHale suggested that while existing storage could remain, any new additions without approval would be considered encroachments.

### **Annual Town Meeting Updates: Land Conservation/stabilization funds**

Commissioner D'Ortenzio reported that due to illness, he had been unable to complete the draft land conservation plan for review. The Commission discussed whether there was enough time to prepare the proposal for the upcoming Town Meeting.

After deliberation, the Commissioners agreed to schedule a special Zoom meeting for Tuesday, January 13 at 5:00 PM to review the draft if Commissioner D'Ortenzio could complete it over the weekend. They acknowledged that the timeline was challenging, particularly for meeting with the Advisory Committee before their January 21 deadline.

Chair McHale suggested that it might be more feasible to present the structure of a land conservation plan without requesting funding at this Town Meeting, with the possibility of seeking financial support at a future meeting after more review.

### **Liaison Reports**

The Commission briefly discussed upcoming meetings at the Community Preservation Committee (CPC) and Advisory Committee. Secretary Hammond agreed to attend the CPC meeting on Wednesday to discuss Wight Pond, while another representative would be needed for the Advisory Committee meeting regarding the MWRA tunnel land swap.

### **Director's Report**

#### **Project Updates: Wight Pond**

Director Schmitt reported on meetings with the DPW Director and Select Board's office regarding the potential acquisition of Wight Pond. He outlined several questions that had emerged:

- Specific conditions of the grant from the trustees
- Public access expectations after transfer
- Maintenance access requirements
- Potential presence of PFAS (testing underway)
- Ongoing maintenance costs
- Insurance liability in the flood hazard area
- Tax revenue impact (approximately \$1,200 per year)

Director Schmitt presented a rough budget estimate for maintaining the pond, including chemical treatments, invasive species management, and trail maintenance. He noted that more significant projects like culvert repair (potentially \$15,000-\$250,000) and dredging (estimated at \$400,000) would require substantial investment.

Chair McHale emphasized the importance of understanding the deferred maintenance issues and getting input from all stakeholders, especially the DPW, before proceeding with negotiations. Commissioner Bezmalinovic suggested examining the potential costs of not acquiring the pond, particularly regarding flooding risks.

## **Morses Pond Beach Project**

Chair McHale and Director Schmitt presented a schedule for moving forward with the Morses Pond project:

- January 23: Weston & Sampson to provide draft supplemental feasibility study
- January 29: NRC to review document and designate a proponent to take the project to the Permanent Building Committee (PBC)
- February 6: Submit packet to PBC
- February 24: Approve design phase at NRC meeting

Chair McHale stressed the importance of designating a proponent from the Commission to work with the PBC on behalf of the NRC.

## **Phillips Park**

Director Schmitt reported that several design concepts had been received for Phillips Park playground. He noted that the Public Works Department was reviewing the designs to ensure they met maintenance requirements. One design would incorporate Robinia wood frame playground material similar to playgrounds in Natick. Director Schmitt indicated that the designs would be presented to the Commission once they were further refined.

## **Climate Emergency**

Chair McHale noted the NRC's December 19, 2019 declaration of a climate emergency and commitment to consider climate impacts in all decision-making. He expressed concern about the federal government withdrawing from numerous climate agreements.

## **Discuss/Approve Minutes: December 18, 2025**

The Commission reviewed the minutes from December 18, 2025. Commissioner D'Ortenzio noted that the minutes should include the standard opening block listing who was present or absent. Commissioner Bezmalinovic added that she arrived at 7:15 PM for that meeting and this should be reflected in the minutes.

*Motion: To approve the minutes of December 18, 2025, with the changes discussed.*

*Moved by: Chair McHale   Seconded by: Commissioner D'Ortenzio   Vote: Approved unanimously*

## **Urgent Items Not Anticipated Prior to 48 Hours of Posting**

None were discussed.

## **Schedule Upcoming Meetings**

The Commission confirmed the following meeting schedule:

- January 13 at 5:00 PM (special Zoom meeting to discuss Land Conservation Plan)
- January 29 at 7:00 PM
- February 12 at 7:00 PM

- February 24 at 7:00 PM (at the Police Station)
- March 12 at 7:00 PM

Chair McHale suggested having dinner together before the February 24 meeting, as it would be his last meeting with the Commission.

Adjourn

*Motion: To adjourn the meeting.*

*Moved by: Commissioner Park Seconded by: Secretary Hammond Vote: Approved unanimously*

The meeting was adjourned at 9:10 PM.

#### **Materials Referenced**

- **End of season Update for Hunnewell Track and Field**
- **Morses Pond Feasibility Study Supplemental Study**
- **Draft Wight Pond Assessment**
- **Draft Minutes: 12/18**