

***NATURAL RESOURCES COMMISSION*****Meeting Minutes****7:00 PM, January 29th, 2026****Wellesley Town Hall 525 Washington ST****Approved 2-12-2026**

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

Guests: Glenn Remick, FMD; Cassie Bethony, Amanda Gaal, Weston and Sampson; Zach Cardwell, Maryanne Thompson, Maryanne Thompson Architects.

Welcome, Call to Order and Citizen Speak

Chair Jay McHale called the meeting to order at 7:00 PM. The Chair noted that the meeting was being broadcast by Wellesley Media on local channels and livestreamed. There were no citizens present for Citizen Speak.

New and Continuing Business**Discuss Morses Pond Beach Project 95% Supplemental Feasibility Study Report**

Glenn Remick, Project Manager for the Town of Wellesley, introduced the team presenting the 95% Supplemental Feasibility Study for the Morses Pond Beach Project. The team included Cassie Bethoney from Weston & Sampson, MaryAnne Thompson from MaryAnne Thompson Architects, and support staff from both firms.

Cassie Bethoney presented an overview of the study's findings, explaining that they had completed a series of tasks since May of the previous year, including site evaluation, permitting analysis, building location testing, geotechnical borings, soil investigations, and invasive species identification. The project aimed to preserve and enhance the beloved site while replacing the outdated bathhouse with a new, fully accessible facility.

The preferred design (Alternative B) features:

- Reduced building footprint (30% smaller than originally planned)
- Separation of pedestrian access in the north from vehicular access in the south
- Simplified site circulation using existing paths
- Six accessible parking spaces
- Reduced site disturbance and impervious surfacing
- Reduced environmental impacts and tree removals
- Full accessibility for all pathways and amenities

MaryAnne Thompson explained that the building would be seasonal rather than four-season, which helped address Article 97 concerns. The design includes changing rooms, a town office with guard station, family

bathrooms, and a covered outdoor eating area. The building will maintain a New England character with natural materials and exposed structural elements.

Project costs have been reduced, with the construction value now estimated at just under \$6.2 million, including \$3.8 million for the building and \$2.2 million for site work. The team noted that DPW would handle the southern access road repairs separately to avoid MBTA zone of influence issues.

The project timeline anticipates:

- Design and bidding phase from March 2026 to September 2027
- Special Town Meeting vote for construction funds in fall 2027
- Contract execution in November 2027
- Construction from February 2028 to February 2029
- Reopening in summer 2029

The team will explore whether the beach could remain partially open during construction.

Next steps include:

- Receiving comments by February 13, 2026
- Final presentation to NRC on February 24
- Assignment of project liaison
- PBC approval of contract on February 26
- Beginning design work in March

The Commission discussed potential food truck hookups, with Commissioner Bezmalinovic noting that the NRC has no formal policy on food service at NRC properties, and raising concerns about creating a precedent for a new use.

Commissioner Park agreed to serve as the PBC liaison for the project, with Chair McHale offering to assist with the transition.

Discuss/Approve FY27 Budget Changes

Director Brandon Schmitt presented proposed reductions to the capital budget as requested by Town Hall. The changes included reducing tree planting from \$60,500 to \$40,000 and parks and sidewalks from \$15,000 to \$0 (utilizing existing reserves). This would reduce the total capital budget from \$160,500 to \$125,000.

Schmitt confirmed that the tree planting program would not be affected due to carryover funds, and that park pathway improvements could still be funded from previous allocations. He noted that the capital carryover balance was at its lowest in years due to projects being completed.

Motion: To approve the reduction of the NRC capital budget from \$160,500 to \$125,000. Moved by: Jay McHale, Seconded by: Michael D'Ortenzio Vote: Approved unanimously

Annual Town Meeting Updates: Land Conservation/stabilization funds

Commissioner D'Ortenzio discussed the Land Conservation Plan and financing strategy. He explained that while the stabilization fund article was on the Town Meeting warrant, it would be beneficial to defer action until fall when the conservation plan would be finalized and a more robust financing strategy could be presented.

Four key steps were identified for finalizing the conservation plan:

- Creating a cover page that serves as both executive summary and policy orientation
- Refining the list of conservation priorities with clear explanation of methodology
- Acknowledging other town priorities like housing while emphasizing conservation focus
- Making a minor adjustment to the NRC policy manual to incorporate the plan

Commissioner D'Ortenzio suggested deferring the stabilization fund request to fall when free cash would be certified and there would be less competition from budget items. The initial \$50,000 for the conservation fund (for due diligence, negotiations, and deposits) might be easier to secure then.

Motion: To notify the town that the NRC will be taking no action on the warrant article regarding the conservation stabilization fund. Moved by: Michael D'Ortenzio, Seconded by: Steve Park Vote: Approved unanimously

Liaison Reports

Commissioner Hammond reported on DPW discussions with the Advisory Committee, noting numerous projects on their plate, including PFAS remediation and potential impacts on free cash availability.

Chair McHale mentioned that he would be attending a PBC meeting on February 12th to discuss the Morses Pond project, with Commissioner Park agreeing to join him as the incoming project liaison.

Director's Report

Project Updates: Phillips Park

Director Schmitt reported that the Park and Tree Division was working with vendors on playground designs for Phillips Park. He confirmed that the Commission preferred fiber surfacing over poured-in-place surfacing, consistent with previous discussions.

Commissioner Bezmalinovic noted that the path from the basketball courts to the playground area at Phillips Park is not currently accessible, suggesting this should be addressed as part of the improvements.

Schmitt indicated that final site plans would be presented at an upcoming meeting, with a 12-14 week lead time anticipated for the project.

Permit Requests

Director Schmitt presented two permit requests for amplification:

- Terrier Sports requested amplification for their annual April vacation activities at Kelly Field, Tuesday through Thursday, April 22-23 from 1:30-3:30 PM.

Motion: To approve the amplification permit for Terrier Sports. Moved by: Steve Park, Seconded by: Michael D'Ortenzio Vote: Approved unanimously

- Wellesley Youth Softball and Baseball requested amplification on Wednesday, Thursday, Friday, and Saturday from 6:00 PM to 9:15 PM at Diane Warren Field, as well as for end-of-season trophy ceremonies.

Commissioner Bezmalinovic expressed concerns about sound levels, noting she had observed loud amplification during past events. The Commission decided to review previous meeting minutes regarding sound limitations and invite representatives to the next meeting to discuss compliance with the 70 DBA limit in the policy manual.

Climate Emergency

Chair McHale read the climate emergency declaration adopted by the NRC on December 19, 2019. Commissioner D'Ortenzio noted that 2025 was calculated to be the hottest year on record worldwide.

Discuss/Approve Minutes

The Commission reviewed the minutes from January 8, 2026. Commissioner D'Ortenzio noted two corrections: he was not remote at the meeting, and there were no materials referenced at the end of the minutes.

Motion: To approve the minutes of January 8, 2026, as amended. Moved by: Brandon Schmitt, Seconded by: Michael D'Ortenzio Vote: Approved unanimously

The January 13, 2026, minutes were deferred to the next meeting.

Urgent Items Not Anticipated Prior to 48 Hours of Posting

There were no urgent items.

Schedule Upcoming Meetings

The Commission confirmed their next meetings would be held on February 12, 2026, in the Juliani Room, and February 24, 2026, at the Police Station.

Adjourn

Motion: To adjourn the meeting. Moved by: Michael D'Ortenzio, Seconded by: Steve Park Vote: Approved unanimously

The meeting was adjourned at approximately 9:20 PM.

Materials Referenced

Morses Pond Supplemental Beach study, Morses Pond Beach Study Presentation, Permit Requests, Draft Minutes (1/8/2026, 1/13/2026).

