

Park and Recreation Commission Meeting Minutes

April 13, 2026

6:32 PM

Remote Meeting (Zoom)

1. Call to Order

Chair Mara Huston called the meeting to order at 6:32 PM and conducted roll call.

2. Attendance

Commissioners Present: Mara Huston (Chair), Ben Carmel, Bobby Beagan, Laurie Eliason, and Granger Atkeson.

Also Present: Vivian Zeng, Director of Health and Community Services; Sandra Duran, Combined Facilities Director; Victor Garofalo, Assistant Town Manager; Amy Hamilton; consultants and members of the public, including Byron Woodman, Jon Charwick, Gail Kessler-Walsh, Tim Walsh, and Bettina Westerberg.

3. Public Comment

Gail Kessler-Walsh of 236 Raymond Road requested to comment on Feeley Field. The Chair advised that the matter was on the agenda later in the meeting and invited her to speak at that time. No additional public comment was offered on items not on the agenda.

4. Agenda Adjustment

Because outside presenters were in attendance, the Chair adjusted the order of business and moved the guest presentations ahead of the Director's Update.

5. Haskell Field Solar Canopy / Article 34

Sandra Duran and Byron Woodman presented an updated overview of the proposed Haskell Field parking lot solar canopy project. The canopy would be located in the Haskell parking lot, preserve existing trees, and avoid extending over the athletic field. A 30x30 fenced enclosure of electric substation equipment will be located in the grass between the parking lot and the walking path visible from Fairbank road. The presenters explained that, following discussions with Eversource, the project had shifted from a behind-the-meter structure to a standalone system, which changed the interconnection point and the financial model.

The updated project was described as approximately 1.27 MW DC / 900 kW AC, producing roughly 1.4 million kWh annually. Under the revised structure, the estimated first-year savings increased to roughly \$92,000, with projected long-term savings of approximately \$2.1 million over 25 years. The presenters emphasized that the project would not require an upfront Town capital expenditure, though geotechnical review, final engineering, interconnection approvals, and Planning Board review remained outstanding.

Commission discussion focused on project economics, parking lot condition, design profile, future flexibility at Haskell, potential impacts on parking, visual character, lighting, and whether the Commission would continue to be involved as design details evolved. Commissioners also discussed the legal and governance framework surrounding use of Haskell Field, including whether the project could be viewed as a change in use and whether Article 97 considerations had been fully resolved.

Victor Garofalo stated that staff was committed to keeping the Commission informed as the project moved forward and to working collaboratively on subsequent design and review stages. Ben Carmel requested that a formal set of legal and governance questions be sent to Town Counsel regarding the Commission's role, potential change-in-use questions, and Article 97 implications.

Action	Motion to authorize Ben Carmel to draft and transmit, on behalf of the Commission, a written set of questions to Town Counsel regarding Commission authority, change-in-use issues, and Article 97 considerations related to the Haskell solar canopy project.
Motion By	Mara Huston
Second By	Bobby Beagan
Outcome	Approved
Vote	Passed unanimously by roll call: Bobby Beagan – Yes; Granger Atkeson – Yes; Laurie Eliason – Yes; Ben Carmel – Yes; Mara Huston – Yes.

Action	Motion to support Article 34 / the Haskell Field solar canopy project for Town Meeting.
Motion By	Ben Carmel
Second By	Granger Atkeson
Outcome	Failed; the Commission did not support the project.
Vote	Roll call vote: Bobby Beagan – No; Granger Atkeson – No; Laurie Eliason – Yes; Ben Carmel – No; Mara Huston – Yes. The roll call reflected 2 in favor and 3 opposed.

Following the vote, the Commission agreed that its official Town Meeting position would remain opposition to the article. Commissioners discussed who would present the Commission’s position at Town Meeting, with Bobby Beagan and Granger Atkeson both offering to speak if needed. The Chair thanked Byron Woodman and staff for the presentation and responses to the Commission’s questions.

6. Haskell / Fairbank Outdoor Space Master Plan Presentation

Sandra Duran introduced Jon Charwick of Activitas to present preliminary master planning work for the Haskell / Fairbank outdoor space study. Laurie Eliason explained that she and Bobby Beagan had been serving as Park and Recreation Commission representatives on the working group and noted that a public community forum had been scheduled for April 30, 2026 at 6:30 PM via Zoom.

The presentation reviewed project objectives, existing field use, site constraints, pedestrian circulation, easements, and accessibility concerns. Activitas explained that the work was conceptual and intended to identify options and long-term planning directions rather than immediate construction decisions. Discussion included accessible pathways, improved connectivity between Haskell and Fairbank, relationships between existing and future field layouts, and how the site might ultimately accommodate additional amenities.

The consultant presented a phased concept in which initial work could focus on pathways and accessibility while maintaining current field programming. Concepts discussed included a potential multi-purpose synthetic turf or natural grass field, a lacrosse wall, accessible route improvements, selective site lighting associated with a future lighted field, and possible additional accessible parking in limited locations. The consultant noted that the existing playground and main parking lot were not proposed to be altered as part of the current concept work.

Commissioners emphasized the need to preserve current field capacity while planning for future improvements. They also raised questions regarding the northwest easement area, ADA access throughout the site, maintenance access, potential field lighting, integration with Fairbank, and how the plan should

account for other recreation assets such as the existing fitness area and the caged storage area on the property.

The Commission also discussed the upcoming public forum and agreed that it should remain focused on the outdoor space master plan. Ben Carmel raised concern that the separate Haskell solar proposal should not overtake or confuse the public discussion of the CPC-funded landscape planning work. Staff responded that the public forum would stay focused on the scope approved for the master planning process.

Vivian Zeng reported that she had reached out to the Council on Aging to invite participation and broaden stakeholder input. Staff confirmed that the Town would promote the April 30 forum through the website, newsletters, social media, and outreach to field user groups. Sandra Duran also advised the Commission that she anticipated returning with a possible Massachusetts Office on Disability grant opportunity, potentially up to \$250,000, tied to accessibility improvements connected to the project.

7. Atkinson Pool Closure

Sandra Duran provided a brief update on the upcoming Atkinson Pool closure associated with replacement of the dehumidification unit. The pool was expected to close at the end of the day on April 30, 2026. Staff anticipated a brief parking lot closure in early May to remove the existing rooftop dehumidification unit and install the new equipment. Sandra reported that the work was on schedule, the equipment had been secured, and staff did not foresee any issues with the project. The anticipated reopening date was June 1, 2026.

8. Annual Town Meeting / CPC Article Format and Other Agenda Items

The Chair noted difficulty locating individual CPC articles in the Annual Town Meeting warrant. Victor Garofalo explained that this year's warrant presented the CPC appropriations as a combined article with itemized subcomponents rather than separate articles, and that individual items could still be pulled for discussion rather than being voted only as an all-or-nothing package.

The Commission also acknowledged that a broader discussion on Commission meeting management would be deferred. Bobby Beagan suggested taking that item off the agenda due to the late hour. The Chair asked commissioners to provide concrete suggestions before the next meeting on how to shorten future meetings while still allowing substantive discussion. The Commission also noted that review of minutes remained backlogged and would be taken up at a future meeting.

9. Feeley Field Phase 2 – Fence Modification Along ADA Path

Victor Garofalo presented a proposed modification to the Feeley Field Phase 2 fencing plan. He explained that concerns had been raised at recent hearings that the planned fence alignment along the ADA path would limit winter sledding on the hill adjacent to the field. Staff explored whether a portion of the fence could be removed while still maintaining adequate protection in the areas where safety concerns were greater, particularly near the infield and areas where line drives or foul balls were more likely.

Victor showed that the compromise under consideration would remove approximately 120 feet of fencing in a middle section, while retaining fence segments where risk was greatest. He emphasized that the project was not being redesigned, the field dimensions would not change, and the Town was not formally designating or endorsing the site as a sledding area. Amy Hamilton suggested that temporary seasonal measures such as snow fencing could also be considered during the playing season if needed.

Commissioners discussed user impacts, softball concerns, and risk questions. Ben Carmel asked that Sudbury Softball be consulted before the fencing change was finalized, noting the Commission's history of supporting the Feeley improvements for softball use. Victor stated that the ADA-path fencing issue had not previously been a concern raised by the softball group, but agreed that staff could reach out to them for input.

Public comment was then reopened on the Feeley matter. Gail Kessler-Walsh of 236 Raymond Road thanked the Commission for considering a compromise. Tim Walsh, also of 236 Raymond Road, described

longstanding neighborhood use of the hill for sledding and urged that the ability to continue informal winter recreation be preserved. Bettina Westerberg of 239 Raymond Road also thanked the Commission for working toward a compromise and asked whether the matter would return if issues arose; staff responded that, absent a significant issue, the project would likely proceed once the Commission acted.

Action	Motion to approve the amended fencing plan for the Feeley Phase 2 project, pending input from Sudbury Softball.
Motion By	Ben Carmel
Second By	Laurie Eliason
Outcome	Approved
Vote	Passed unanimously by roll call: Ben Carmel – Yes; Laurie Eliason – Yes; Bobby Beagan – Yes; Granger Atkeson – Yes; Mara Huston – Yes.

The Chair noted that staff would report back once outreach to Sudbury Softball had occurred and that the matter could return to the May meeting if any issue arose.

10. Open Space and Recreation Plan – Property Inventory Review

The Chair then reviewed a draft property inventory prepared for the Open Space and Recreation Plan. Mara Huston stated that she had done only a quick review but had already identified a number of corrections, omissions, and places where recreation-related information was incomplete or inaccurate.

Among the points raised were the need to remove references to the Bruce Freeman Rail Trail as merely ‘proposed,’ to better reflect recreation uses and parking roles at several sites, to correct or clarify descriptions of Davis Field, Fairbank, Feeley, Featherland, Grinnell, Haskell, the State Crime Lab fields, and Parkinson, and to identify missing or inaccurate references to amenities such as the Fairbank outdoor pavilion, pickleball courts, winter rink uses, Haskell’s fitness area, and other recreation features. The Chair also referenced the potential significance of parcel G05-0005 as access to Stearns Mill Pond that might someday support recreational water access.

The discussion then shifted to process. Mara Huston argued that the PRC’s recreation expertise should be integrated more directly into the Open Space and Recreation Plan effort so that issues could be identified and addressed more efficiently between regular meetings. Victor Garofalo responded that staff had competent internal processes and noted that other boards such as the Conservation Commission and Planning Board also were not formally seated on the working group.

Vivian Zeng clarified that she had shared the draft inventory with the Commission promptly and that the process was still in early stages. She emphasized her intention to keep the Commission informed and to solicit feedback before the next staff working session. In response to the discussion, the group agreed on a more practical communication approach: Mara Huston and Laurie Eliason would serve as PRC points of contact for more frequent check-ins on the Open Space and Recreation Plan, while the full Commission would continue to receive updates and provide input at formal meetings consistent with Open Meeting Law.

Vivian requested that Commissioners provide any additional comments on the inventory by the end of the week so that staff would have guidance before the next planning discussion. Commissioners expressed support for that approach and appreciation for more regular communication.

11. Reflections / Commissioner Comments

Ben Carmel shared remarks marking his final meeting on the Commission. He reflected on how he came to join the PRC, credited Bobby Beagan for encouraging him to get involved in Town service, and thanked fellow Commissioners for their partnership and leadership. He highlighted a number of accomplishments during his

tenure, including the creation of the Commission charter, expansion of CPC-supported recreation work, progress on Feeley Field improvements, the field needs assessment, advancement of the Open Space and Recreation Plan, support for the Fairbank Community Center and Atkinson Pool, and growth in community recreation programming.

Ben also candidly discussed ongoing frustrations that contributed to his departure, particularly the Town's funding model for recreation and recurring tensions over Commission inclusion in decision-making. At the same time, he expressed optimism about current staff leadership, the opportunities created by the field needs assessment and Open Space and Recreation Plan, and the Commission's ability to continue strengthening programming, partnerships, and governance. Other Commissioners thanked Ben for his service and contributions to the Town.

The Commission informally noted that outstanding minutes would be taken up at a future meeting.

12. Adjournment

Action	Motion to adjourn.
Motion By	Ben Carmel
Second By	Bobby Beagan
Outcome	Approved
Vote	Passed unanimously by roll call: Ben Carmel – Yes; Bobby Beagan – Yes; Laurie Eliason – Yes; Granger Atkeson – Yes; Mara Huston – Yes.

The meeting adjourned at approximately 9:40 PM.