TOWN OF SUDBURY

PARK AND RECREATION COMMISSION

MEETING MINUTES

Date:	Monday, August 17, 2026
Time:	6:33 p.m. - 9:35 p.m.
Location:	Remote Meeting via Zoom
Recording:	Meeting recorded and broadcast for public access

1. Call to Order and Attendance

Chair Mara Huston called the remote meeting of the Sudbury Park and Recreation Commission to order at 6:33 p.m. She conducted a roll call and confirmed that all participating members were attending remotely and that a quorum was present.

Members present: Mara Huston, Laurie Eliason, Ryan Poteat, Granger Atkeson, and Bobby Beagan.

Also present: Vivian Zeng, Director of Health and Community Services; Sarah Ernst, Assistant Recreation Director; Victor Garofalo, Assistant Town Manager; Sandra Duran, Combined Facilities Director; Zachary Kaufman; and members of the public.

2. Public Comment

No members of the public requested to speak on matters not listed on the agenda.

3. Director's Update

Staffing and Department Planning

Vivian Zeng reported that the Aquatics Manager position had been posted and interviews with qualified candidates were scheduled. The position will oversee the aquatics supervisors, lifeguards, seasonal staff, and development of in-house aquatics instruction. Recreation staff were also participating in the Town-wide classification and compensation study by completing detailed position questionnaires.

Ms. Zeng announced that grant funding would support a Metropolitan Area Planning Council strategic assessment of the Health and Community Services Department. The work will review the current public health, recreation, and veterans services structure, comparable municipal models, service priorities, coordination, and future growth. Recommendations are expected by January 2027. Ryan Poteat volunteered to participate based on prior MAPC experience, and Laurie Eliason volunteered to provide the perspective of families with middle- and high-school-age children. Ms. Huston encouraged broad Commission participation and asked that a future Commission presentation be considered.

Mosquito-Borne Illness and Cricket Pond

Ms. Zeng advised that West Nile virus had been detected in nearby communities and that the risk of eastern equine encephalitis typically increases at this time of year. She had coordinated with the school superintendents and prepared communications for user groups if local data required action. Bobby Beagan recalled the significant community effects of dusk restrictions during the 2019 EEE season and urged the Health Department to weigh the public-health benefit against the loss of games, practices, and community activities. Ms. Zeng responded that the Town would use a data-driven approach and would not impose broad restrictions unless mosquito testing supported them.

Ms. Eliason described the scheduling disruption caused when practices had to end before dusk and asked staff to consider alternate indoor or earlier practice options. Ms. Zeng said earlier coordination, possible emergency spraying waivers, and more formal quarterly communication with field-user groups could support contingency planning. Ms. Huston asked whether stagnant water at Cricket Pond created additional risk. Ms. Zeng reported that catch basins draining toward the pond had received larvicide treatment and that spraying would be considered only if testing showed sufficient disease burden. The DPW dredging project is in design, has grant funding, and is expected to require significant permitting before work could begin, likely the following summer.

Camps, Pool, and Fall Programming

Ms. Zeng reported that summer camps had concluded and staff completed a post-season review. Priorities for 2027 include additional structured swim instruction, more outdoor activity for preschool programs, earlier seasonal hiring, and increased camp capacity to reduce waitlists. The Atkinson Pool information and aquatics webpages were being reorganized in advance of new rates taking effect September 1.

Sarah Ernst presented the fall program brochure, which includes adult, youth, preschool, fitness, aquatics, and special-event offerings. Registration had opened that morning, and pickleball details were expected to be finalized by the end of the week. Ms. Eliason asked about distribution. Staff said the brochure would be shared through MyRec, email, social media, Fairbank bulletin boards, Sudbury Public Schools, and Camp Sewataro. Ms. Huston asked whether a Program Coordinator would be hired following Ms. Ernst's promotion; Ms. Zeng said the Aquatics Manager recruitment would be completed first.

Field Scheduling and Rest

Mr. Beagan asked whether portions of Haskell Field would be rested and whether Davis Field or baseball outfields could provide alternate space. Ms. Zeng and Ms. Ernst explained that staff and DPW were developing a formal spring field-rest and rotation plan, including maps, advance notice, and quarterly user-group meetings. The baseball outfield had been considered for fall use but was not needed this season. Mr. Beagan cautioned that baseball organizations invest their own funds in field maintenance and asked that Sudbury-based nonprofit groups receive appropriate scheduling priority over outside or private organizations. Granger Atkeson recommended using the existing Field Needs Assessment maps as a starting point. No vote was taken.

4. Liaison Reports

Ms. Eliason reported that the Rail Trails Advisory Committee was considering a future CPC request for connections to the trails, including an accessible connection to Lower Featherland. The Bruce Freeman Rail Trail had been turned over to the Town, although an opening ceremony had not been scheduled, and DPW expected to address trimming and sweeping in the fall. She suggested a bicycle tune-up and safety event associated with the eventual opening. Ms. Huston questioned whether the Rail Trails Committee should lead the event, while Mr. Beagan and Ms. Zeng noted that recreation programming can extend beyond properties directly controlled by the Commission and could involve Health, Police, and other departments.

Regarding Sudbury Public Schools, Ms. Zeng said the available school space for recreation programming was limited and new programming likely would not begin in the fall. Ms. Huston reported that she had notified the School Committee chair of the Commission's earlier Curtis Field discussion. No other liaison reports were presented.

5. Liberty Ledge / Sewataro Statement

Mr. Atkeson summarized the Liberty Ledge/Sewataro Advisory Committee's work and reviewed the approximately 44-acre property, its existing camp amenities, wooded areas, accessible parking, prior subdivision layout, and potential for expanded public programming. He proposed a Commission statement supporting a management and use framework that preserves opportunities for recreation programming while the existing summer camp continues to operate.

Ms. Ernst reported that three fall programs were already planned at the property: Intro to Fishing, Puddle Stompers, and Nature Explorers. Staff were also considering trail races, pavilion activities, and seasonal community events. Ms. Zeng said the draft reflected the Department's goal of making the property more accessible to residents beyond the summer camp season.

Ms. Eliason recommended recognizing the value of the camp itself, noting that it supplements Town camp capacity, and asked whether the statement should identify current and contemplated programs. Ms. Huston preferred a high-level statement and questioned language calling for the minimization of nonrecreational development, stating that limited affordable housing or other Town needs might be compatible if future recreation opportunities were protected. Mr. Poteat agreed that the Commission should not foreclose other uses. Ms. Eliason expressed concern that removing portions of the property could affect camp operations and future expansion.

Mr. Atkeson suggested reframing the statement positively around fostering recreation programming rather than taking a position on specific nonrecreational development. Mr. Beagan agreed that the Commission should focus on maximizing recreational opportunity and avoid entering the broader land-use debate. After discussion,

the Commission removed the disputed bullet and retained one concise statement supporting a use agreement and management process that fosters Park and Recreation programming now and in the future.

Motion: Bobby Beagan moved to approve the Liberty Ledge/Sewataro statement, as amended.

Second: Ryan Poteat seconded the motion.

Vote: Bobby Beagan- yes, Ryan Poteat-yes, Laurie Eliason-yes, Granger Atkeson-yes, Mara Huston-yes. Motion carried unanimously 5-0.

6. Capital Planning - Synthetic Turf

The Commission continued its summer capital-planning series with a discussion of synthetic and natural turf. Ms. Eliason described the effect of rain, mud, divots, and field wear on natural fields and said additional synthetic turf could extend seasons and respond to repeated requests from field hockey and other users. Mr. Poteat said both surfaces serve different purposes; grass is generally preferred, but synthetic turf provides reliable access when weather makes natural fields unusable.

Ms. Zeng noted that the Field Needs Assessment included support for additional synthetic turf, while also identifying health and cost concerns. Ms. Ernst described her experience as an athlete and said she had experienced more injuries on synthetic turf, although it offers weather reliability. Ms. Huston opposed adding synthetic turf because of environmental, heat, abrasion, infection, and injury concerns. Ms. Eliason and Mr. Beagan supported keeping the option open, citing user demand, the Field Needs Assessment, weather-related cancellations, and the importance of allowing the broader community to weigh a major funding decision.

Mr. Atkeson suggested that lighting existing synthetic fields could provide the most additional playing hours per dollar before constructing another field. Mr. Poteat agreed that evening use could also reduce heat concerns. Mr. Beagan described prior unsuccessful attempts to light Cutting Field and the Lincoln-Sudbury turf fields and said any renewed effort would require strong coordination and advocacy by user groups. Ms. Huston suggested that improved LED technology and mature tree screening might support a renewed conversation with Cutting neighbors, but Mr. Beagan recommended first determining whether the user groups were prepared to organize and support the effort.

Members discussed a possible community flash survey. Mr. Beagan cautioned that a small or divided response should not outweigh established user-group demand. Ms. Zeng said a flash survey would be only one data point, alongside the Field Needs Assessment and direct user engagement. Mr. Garofalo advised against including Sewataro questions while the Liberty Ledge/Sewataro process was active. The Commission made no recommendation on additional synthetic turf. Staff will consider community-engagement options, including user-group meetings and the future Broadacres design process.

7. Capital Planning - Courts, Feeley, and CPC Requests

Featherland and Feeley Courts

Ms. Huston asked staff to evaluate periodic professional cleaning of the Featherland courts. Mr. Garofalo said DPW could obtain a cost estimate and determine whether operating funds were available. The Commission then discussed the aging Feeley courts, including extensive cracking, access and pathway issues, gate conflicts, and the possibility of adding multipurpose markings or basketball amenities when the courts are eventually reconstructed. Mr. Beagan agreed the courts belong on the capital list but questioned their priority relative to other projects. Mr. Atkeson and Mr. Garofalo emphasized placing the work in a realistic multi-year sequence after the cost of Davis Field and Broadacres is better understood.

Feeley Field and Baseball Planning

Ms. Huston reviewed current and potential Feeley improvements, including the Lower Feeley softball renovation, drainage and irrigation at the 90-foot baseball diamond, lighting, parking, bathrooms, ADA connections, and the Upper Feeley bathroom/snack-shack building. Mr. Garofalo explained that remaining Phase 1 and Phase 2 funds may be used for eligible ADA access, netting, and tennis-court access improvements, subject to the article scope and legal review. The planned CPC application for the Upper Feeley bathrooms will include an ADA path. A new Lower Feeley bathroom may be unnecessary if an accessible connection to the renovated Upper Feeley facilities can be completed.

Members debated whether to submit a CPC design request for the Feeley baseball field this year. Mr. Atkeson and Mr. Poteat cautioned against adding another request while the Town is considering major Davis Field and Broadacres construction projects. Mr. Beagan said more current baseball participation and program data were

needed before advancing a project that could affect other field decisions. Ms. Eliason did not object to consecutive CPC requests in principle but was concerned about staff and consultant capacity and wanted Haskell and the Outdoor Space Master Plan work implemented first.

Mr. Garofalo described an alternative: use approximately $80,000 for schematic and 75% design phases, potentially from the Fields Maintenance Fund, and defer permitting, construction documents, bidding, and oversight until a later construction request. Mr. Beagan supported exploring this option because it would demonstrate Commission investment and allow additional consultation with baseball. Mr. Atkeson confirmed that the early design phases could support a later CPC construction request. Ms. Eliason asked that baseball confirm its commitment to using the Feeley field before funds are committed. Mr. Beagan agreed to invite baseball representatives to an October meeting. Bobby suggested the Commission could consider using their Meadow Walk funds for the initial design phases. The Commission agreed not to submit a Feeley baseball design CPC application this cycle.

CPC Applications and Capital Timeline

Mr. Garofalo confirmed that staff would submit three CPC applications: Upper Feeley bathroom and ADA improvements, estimated at approximately $80,000 to $90,000; the Haskell National Fitness Court, estimated at approximately $250,000; and Davis Field construction, preliminarily estimated between $1 million and $2 million pending design refinement. Ms. Huston and Mr. Atkeson will consolidate the Commission's recent discussions into a draft five- to ten-year capital timeline for staff review before the September meeting. Ms. Zeng asked that the schedule account for construction duration, fields taken offline, user feedback, and the operational work required to relocate programs.

8. Haskell Lacrosse Wall

Ms. Huston reported that the lacrosse group now expected to fund the wall privately, eliminating the anticipated CPC request. Zachary Kaufman said the group wanted formal Commission support before soliciting contributions and would continue coordinating with Facilities on budget, procurement, and approvals. Sandra Duran described a preliminary structure of three precast concrete panels, each approximately eight feet wide and sixteen feet high, on a prepared base with a turf surface. The Select Board would need to accept the gift, prevailing-wage requirements would apply, and the final location must be surveyed and coordinated with the Haskell Landscape Master Plan and ADA circuit path.

Mr. Beagan initially questioned voting before the final size, design, and location were settled, but supported the project after staff clarified that those details would return to the Commission and that the wall could be installed without preventing other planned improvements. Ms. Eliason supported moving forward after several years of discussion, provided the final design and location remain consistent with the master plan. The Commission expects to review and finalize the siting in October.

Motion: Bobby Beagan moved to support the Haskell lacrosse wall project, subject to agreement among the Park and Recreation Commission, Facilities Department, and Activitas on the final location.

Second: Laurie Eliason seconded the motion.

Vote: Bobby Beagan- yes, Ryan Poteat-yes, Laurie Eliason-yes, Granger Atkeson-yes, Mara Huston-yes. Motion carried unanimously 5-0.

9. Open Space and Recreation Plan Survey

Ms. Huston reminded members that responses to the Open Space and Recreation Plan stakeholder survey were due August 20 and emphasized the importance of the recreation questions. Members may answer all sections but should complete at least the recreation page. Mr. Atkeson confirmed that responses should be sent directly to Adam Burney. No vote was taken.

10. Review of Prior Meeting Minutes

The Commission did not approve the outstanding draft minutes. Members were asked to compare the drafts with the meeting transcripts and provide corrections to staff. Ms. Huston specifically noted that a prior public-comment summary did not identify the speaker or accurately capture the substance of the comment and that a member's late arrival had not been recorded. Mr. Garofalo explained that staff are preparing summary minutes from the Zoom transcript, using the same general process as the Finance Committee, and that member review remains part of the approval process. The Commission plans to address its minutes backlog in September.

11. Calendar and Adjournment

The next regular meeting was scheduled for Monday, September 28, 2026, at 6:30 p.m. via Zoom. The October meeting date will be announced separately.

Motion: Granger Atkeson moved to adjourn the meeting.

Second: Ryan Poteat seconded the motion.

Vote: Bobby Beagan- yes, Ryan Poteat-yes, Laurie Eliason-yes, Granger Atkeson-yes, Mara Huston-yes. Motion carried unanimously 5-0.

The meeting adjourned at 9:35 p.m.