Liberty Ledge / Sewataro Advisory Committee Public Input Session Minutes
Thursday, October 8, 2026 7:00 PM to 9:00 PM
Fairbank Community Center, Multi-Purpose Room, 40 Fairbank Rd, Sudbury MA 01776 with HYBRID option

Members Present: Dave Henkels, Radha Gargeya, Kay Bell, Debbie Dineen, Jen Pincus, and Granger Atkeson via Zoom.

Other Panelists: James Goudie-Murray, Sudbury Management Analyst, Adam Burney, Director of Planning

Introduction

Chair Dave Henkels called the meeting to order via roll-call at 7:00 PM. Mr. Henkels reviewed the Committee's charge to explore potential uses of the Town-owned Liberty Ledge/Sewataro property and provide recommendations to the Select Board. He summarized the Committee's work over 17 meetings, including the June 24 public input session and a community survey that received approximately 700 responses, which informed the draft recommendations.

Mr. Henkels explained that the session would gather public feedback on 13 draft recommendations organized into immediate, medium-term, and long-term categories. Committee members would present the recommendations, followed by public comments. Participants were asked to provide their names and addresses, limit remarks to two minutes, and focus on substantive feedback. Written feedback worksheets were also available. Mr. Henkels thanked Committee members for their professionalism, transparency, and respect throughout the process.

Immediate-Term Recommendations

Committee members presented the three immediate-term draft recommendations.

During public comment, several residents supported continuing camp operations, citing dependable childcare, outdoor learning, youth employment, and the property's recreational and environmental value. Some advocated renewing the agreement without changes and pursuing a longer-term arrangement. Others supported the recommendations while requesting clearer enrollment priorities for Sudbury residents and expanded financial assistance. Concerns included the effect of scholarships on Town revenue and repeated requests to renegotiate extension terms.

Speakers generally supported clearer municipal oversight and stronger collaboration with the camp operator. Suggestions included a representative oversight body modeled on the Community Preservation Committee or assigning responsibility to a specific individual with sufficient authority. Questions were raised about staffing costs and whether existing personnel could assume these duties.

Residents also encouraged broader community access, year-round programming, and preservation of open space. One speaker questioned whether the draft adequately explored alternative uses, addressed costs, or evaluated the financial terms of camp operations. Other speakers defended the Committee's process and findings and requested that the final report more clearly reflect community support for the camp. Mr. Henkels explained that comments would be recorded for subsequent Committee consideration.

Medium-Term Recommendations

Committee members presented the five medium-term draft recommendations for implementation within five years, from 2027 to 2032.

During public comment, residents supported expanded recreation, community programming, and accessible trails. Several cautioned that restrictions on land disturbance should allow accessibility improvements and continued progress in public use. Speakers described increased use of the property for walking, fishing, and gatherings and encouraged further investment in these activities.

Some residents supported affordable reuse of the existing house at 213 Haynes Road, with requests to retain its footprint and consider working with the Sudbury Housing Trust. Other speakers opposed additional housing development elsewhere on the property and requested that the recommendations more firmly reflect their interpretation of community survey results favoring camp operations and open space.

Comments on the proposed evaluations and interim protections varied. One speaker emphasized the property's role as the headwaters of Pantry Brook and the potential downstream effects of development. Others questioned the cost, duration, and necessity of comprehensive studies and expressed concern that evaluations or restrictions could delay recreation improvements or camp investment. Speakers also requested financial analysis and review by Town Counsel and financial staff.

Additional comments encouraged trust, transparency, and respect for the Committee's planning process. One resident clarified that his concern was the property's financial performance and advocated making it financially self-supporting. Others emphasized the camp's importance to working families and requested a longer-term agreement and greater certainty for continued camp operations.

Long-Term Recommendations

Committee members presented the long-term draft recommendations.

During public comment, speakers supported preserving open space, continuing camp operations, and expanding public recreation. One resident recommended permanently designating the property as open space. Others requested clearer protections for natural resources, particularly the Pantry Brook headwaters, while allowing accessible trails and appropriate camp improvements. Expanded public swimming was also requested.

Several speakers expressed concern that broadly defined municipal uses could allow future housing development and requested an explicit exclusion of housing. Another resident supported affordable reuse of 213 Haynes Road, including consideration of a duplex, and potentially small peripheral housing opportunities that would not interfere with camp operations or open space. That speaker also requested comparable accessibility expectations for public and private camp programs operating on Town property.

Comments on future agreements emphasized the need for predictable terms that would support operator financing and investment. One speaker recommended defined performance requirements and penalties rather than periodic changes to core financial terms. Another cautioned that additional uses must not compromise youth safety or reasonable camp operations.

A resident also questioned duplicating existing accessibility evaluations and advocated targeted studies tied to specific projects.

Residents offered differing views on financial priorities. Some emphasized the property's public benefits and potential future revenue and cautioned against applying a different financial standard than to other municipal facilities. Others stressed the Town's responsibility to thoroughly evaluate costs and financial terms before entering a future agreement.

The session concluded with appreciation for the Committee's work. Director of Planning and Community Development Adam Burney thanked participants and invited them to the following week's Open Space and Recreation Plan forum.

Mr. Henkels adjourned the meeting at 9:00 PM.