



TOWN OF GROTON
Park Commission
Town Hall
1st Floor Meeting Room

PARK COMMISSION
Mary Jennings, Chair
Anna Eliot, Vice-Chair
Mark Presti, Clerk
Rob Foley, CPC Representative
Jeffrey Ohringer, Member

Date: Monday December 8, 2025
Time: 5:00 PM
Location: 1st Floor Meeting Room

Members Present: Rob Foley, Anna Eliot, Mary Jennings, Mark Presti, Jeffrey Ohringer
Others Present: Laura Fisher, Brian Callahan, Valerie Denataly, Judy Anderson, John Strauss, Don Barry.

Call to Order: 5:10 p.m.
Mary Jennings chair, called the meeting.

Public Comments – None

Chair Report –

Valerie Denataly, chair of the Prescott Garden Club, presented a plan to the Commissioners, for a stone bench and commemorative plaque to mark the town's 250th anniversary. They plan to have it ready by Flag Day on June 14th with an approximated \$2,000 set aside for the project. A follow up with the Historical Commission on

Upon motion by Commissioner Presti, seconded my commissioner Eliot, to accept the gifted commemorative stone bench at the Prescott Common Garden, was unanimously approved.

CPC Application for GD Softball –

The committee reviewed a CPA application for softball field improvements, with Don explaining that the proposal had been pared down to focus on essential needs. The application includes funding requests for outfield fencing, protective barrier netting, parking lot fencing, and an infield groomer, with total costs of \$99,000. The committee raised concerns about improperly installed bases and agreed to follow up on getting a copy of the original purchase order to determine responsibility for correction.

Resident John Strauss voiced concerns with fencing and whether the new plans would cut into the hill at Cutler Field which creates a berm for water containment.

Don Barry mentioned there will not be many more changes to the field and that the fencing will not be continuing along the rest of the sidelines.

Upon motion by Commissioner Foley, seconded my commissioner Eliot, to Co-Sponsor CPA application 2027-08 for Groton-Dunstable Youth Softball for \$99,000.

Upon motion by Commissioner Eliot, seconded my commissioner Foley, to write a letter of support for the CPA application 2027-08 for Groton-Dunstable Youth Softball.

Approval of Minutes –

Upon motion by Anna Elliot, seconded by Rob Foley, the minutes for October 6, 2025 were unanimously approved.

Upon motion by Rob Foley, seconded by Anna Elliot, the minutes for October 27, 2025 were unanimously approved.

Upon motion by Anna Elliot, seconded by Jeff Ohringer, the minutes for November 10, 2025 were unanimously approved.

Upon motion by Rob Foley, seconded by Anna Elliot, the minutes for November 25, 2025 were unanimously approved as amended.

Budget Review –

Chair Jennings mentioned the need for timely submission of needs reports to facilitate better planning and decision-making. Jennings emphasized the importance of completing individual reports in advance of meetings.

Jennings proposed a 3% inflation increase for the park budget, which was supported by the other Commissioners. A budget meeting with the town manager is scheduled for Wednesday, December 10th to discuss the proposed \$25,750 capital budget and \$66,716 operating budget, with Mary planning to present a level-funded budget while highlighting the need for future capital improvements.

Chair Jennings wanted to remind the Commissioners that the Public Hearing would be our next meeting, scheduled for January 12, 2026.

CPC Rep –

Commissioner Foley reported that the previous CPC meeting consisted of whether to pay off the Middle School track in a year or not so there would not be two major projects being funded simultaneously. They have requested that the Parks Committee let them know what the major priorities are for their next CPC meeting. The Commission agreed that the Cow Pond Project was their main priority for projects.

Financial and Permits –

The Commissioners approved a permit for a Christmas tree bonfire to be held at Cutler field on January 16th. Trash bins at all parks will be removed as of tomorrow for the winter months. The bidding process for irrigation work will start in January, with DPW director Brian Callahan overseeing the process and ensuring both general and irrigation contractors are notified.

Needs Assessment –

Rob Foley read a statement into the minutes. See Attached.

The Parks Commission discussed park improvement priorities and reviewed a needs assessment. They identified Cow Pond project being the top priority, supporting the finishing the renovations at Town Field, Woitowicz possibly expanding parking, and completing the softball field along with getting a sign at Cutler Field as highest priority items (rated 1.0-2.5).

Upon motion by Vice-Chair Elliot, seconded by Commissioner Ohringer, to approve the DPW department to order a sign for Cutler Field and to repair the sinkhole at Woitowicz Field up to an amount of \$500 was unanimously approved.

Schedule Next Meeting and Adjourn- Monday, January 12, 2026 5:00pm

Mark Presti moved to adjourn at 6:55 pm, Rob Foley seconded. The motion carried unanimously

Minutes by Laura Fisher, Administrative Assistant.

APPROVED: 3/23/26

PARKS COMMISSION STATEMENT 08 DECEMBER 2025

I ask that the following statement be read into the public record.

- As CPC representative for the Parks Commission I, Robert Foley, will of course represent the views of the Parks Commission to the Community Preservation Committee, including but not limited to the Parks Commission's FY27 priorities later this evening. However, within the confines of the Parks Commission itself, and as an official elected by the people of Groton, I will not vote in favor of the currently proposed \$4.1MM Cow Pond Brook Fields project as that project stands today, also known as CPC application 2027-02, *"Accessibility, Renovation, & Restoration Improvements at Cow Pond Brook Fields"*.
- The following five reasons are why I will not vote in favor of this project:
 - **Reason #1, Unproven Root Cause:** As far as I know, the root cause for this project has not been shown to the Parks Commission. The root cause for this project has been verbally stated as traffic safety concerns related to traffic congestion near and at the parking lot for the soccer fields, especially on Saturdays. We have heard that this is a major concern of the Police Department. However, since I was appointed to the Parks Commission this past January and elected in May, I have not seen any data, report, traffic study, or official statement in writing from the Police Department or rest of the municipality about the traffic on Cow Pond Brook Road, and specifically that the soccer fields parking area are a major concern. Therefore, it appears to me at least that the supposed root cause and problem is based on hearsay and not data, and that this \$4.1MM project is a reaction to such hearsay. Was it shared with the Parks Commission before I joined it? If it hasn't been then it is incumbent upon those with such data, reports, traffic studies or the like to officially bring that evidence to the Parks Commission. That evidence should include the increased threat to safety especially caused by increased traffic and parking, including any data on increased traffic, accidents, and injuries on Cow Pond Brook Road and at the soccer fields parking lot. To my knowledge the youth soccer schedule has not changed such that it has led to any increase in soccer-related traffic or parking, and I am not aware of any increased traffic to the Transfer Station or DPW.
 - **Reason #2, Lack of Alternative Solutions:** If the traffic safety need that has been verbally described is real, no solutions other than the \$4.1MM project have been proposed. What I have heard so far is that traffic and parking at the soccer fields is a problem so we need to fix the soccer fields parking lot, and to do that we must apply for a grant that will now require us to spend \$4.1MM. I have seen no other alternatives offered, and to me that is ineffective. Perhaps such idea generation has been done and I just don't know about it, but if so that output has not been shared

- with the Parks Commission this year. For example, has anyone proposed spacing the soccer games apart enough to minimize incoming and outgoing traffic when games end and begin? That might be a simple, no cost alternative to the \$4.1MM project.
- **Reason #3, Ineffective Parking and Traffic Design:** The currently proposed design would likely create more traffic issues than there are currently, but at a different location. The current parking and road design provided by Activitas Inc. has not changed materially in the 1.5 years that I have seen designs. This design eliminates the access entrance/exit to the baseball parking area, which was supposed to be temporary and eliminated years ago. To accommodate that, baseball patrons would need to enter where soccer patrons enter at the very end of Cow Pond Brook Road across from the DPW/Transfer Station, and all baseball and soccer patrons would exit from a new exit to be created at the southernmost point of the present soccer parking lot. In effect, this would eliminate one entrance and one exit, resulting in doubling the number of cars entering at the soccer parking entrance and also doubling the number of cars at the proposed exit point (both soccer and baseball patrons). Given that this \$4.1MM project initially started because of a perceived parking and traffic issue, this appears to not actually address that alleged issue.
 - **Reason #4, Lack of ROI vs. the Spend:** The proposed project does not return enough value for the proposed total spend of \$4.1MM. The \$1MM State grant notwithstanding, I would expect a much-improved facility considering the total \$4.1MM project cost of CPC Application 2027-02. While the current design provides new asphalt parking and entrances/exits, increased accessibility, plus a new play area, it does little to improve the Cow Pond Brook Fields in the form of high-quality improvements or additional field capacity. As of today, a good deal of the funds would be to move one baseball field and to replace the football field with a multi-use field largely by decreasing the grade of the current football field. I consider these incremental improvements and not what I would consider major changes that should be expected for \$4.1MM. For \$4.1MM I would expect capacity increases in the form of new fields and quality improvements at a large scale. Adding additional lacrosse, softball, baseball, or soccer fields from the surrounding acreage or replacing some current fields with turf surfaces to lengthen playing seasons would be the kinds of major infrastructure improvements I would expect given a \$4.1MM price tag.
 - **Reason #5, Bad Process:** It is concerning to me that the grant application was submitted to the State before a design could be agreed upon across stakeholders, thereby locking us into a \$3.1MM spend to obtain full reimbursement of the State grant. My opinion is that that is bad process. To me, no project should move to a

grant application step that includes costs before the final design is completed and agreed on by all major stakeholders. Now, because that wasn't the case here, we are potentially tied to a grant with reimbursement that rewards for spending the full \$4.1MM. What if we had first determined that a simpler solution cost only \$2.1MM? We would have saved the taxpayers \$1MM. It would have been much better if this and all projects could have been first based on the Parks Commission's needs assessment, which is being finalized now. Second, the reimbursement rate was incorrectly communicated to important stakeholders like the Parks Commission and Select Board during the process of getting support for this project prior to its CPC application submission. Had we known the real reimbursement rates we may not have voted to support this project at all, but at the least this is again bad process. I think prioritizing this project highly when it is based on bad process would be a mistake and would put the reputation of the Parks Commission in jeopardy.

In preparation for tonight's meeting I prioritized our assessed needs as asked. Besides seeing other needs as more urgent than the Cow Pond Brook Fields project, I also cannot in good conscience support the CPC application 2027-02, "*Accessibility, Renovation, & Restoration Improvements at Cow Pond Brook Fields*" for the five reasons I've stated. Some may be excited at the thought of a big, well-funded project at one of our parks, especially given that our budget has remained flat for five years and that each year we can take care of less and less due to inflation. Or maybe some feel that just because the project has been around for years as an idea that we should get behind it. But I think neither is the case. And I think that asking the town of Groton and its taxpayers to spend \$3.1MM (\$4.1MM - \$1MM grant) for what I would see as only incremental improvements, at a time when both municipal and school budgets are being tested to their limits, would be irresponsible. As Parks Commissioners our role is to act as stewards of our parks and determine the most important needs for our town and our taxpayers, and our parks and commons are every bit as important as the Conservation land so valued in our town. But for the reasons stated above I cannot in good conscience support the large Cow Pond project.