



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

PARK COMMISSION
Mary Jennings, Chair
Anna Eliot, Vice-Chair
Mark Presti, Clerk
Jeffrey Ohringer, Member
Jack Petropoulos, Member

Date: Monday April 27, 2026
Time: 5:00 PM
Location: 1st Floor Meeting Room

Members Present: Mary Jennings, Anna Eliot, Jeff Ohringer & Jack Petropoulos
Members Absent : Mark Presti
Others Present: Laura Fisher, Brian Callahan, Judy Anderson, Mike Johnson, Brian, Ethan & Benjamin LeBlanc, Kelly & Joe Catale, Max Stoll & David Pitkin

Call to Order: 5:02 p.m.
Mary Jennings, Chair, called the meeting.

Public Comments – None

Chair Report –

Chair Jennings wanted to remind everyone that there would be a continuation with the CPC Commission towards the end of the Parks meeting. Also, that there would be a meeting on Wednesday April 29th at 5:00 to discuss the Cow Pond project and review Activitas engineer Megan Budzinski's presentation for town meeting.

DPW – Irrigation Bids –

Irrigation bids for three fields (Cow Pond, Cutler, and Woitowicz Field). The only bidder, Montachusett, proposed \$3,375 for spring startup and closing, and \$2,725 for fall maintenance.

Upon motion by Commissioner Eliot, seconded by Commissioner Ohringer, to accept the irrigation bids for Montachusett, was unanimously approved 4:0

If any issues with irrigation arise, contact Admin Fisher or Chair to contact Montachusett.

Permit Requests –

Upon motion by Commissioner Eliot, seconded by Commissioner Ohringer to approve the Garden Club permit request for May 8-10 at Legion Hall, was unanimously approved 4:0.

Planning Town Meeting – Bids & Next steps –

The Commissioners discussed options for addressing bid costs exceeding projections, including potentially canceling the application, modifying amounts, or eliminating certain items. A joint meeting with the CPC was scheduled this evening to review proposed changes, discuss bid options, with particular attention to balancing user needs and cost considerations, including potential changes to curbing and lighting.

Chair Jennings outlined eight general topics for discussion at the upcoming town meeting, with questions prepared for each topic to help guide the conversation and determine what needs to be addressed. The topics focused on regarding a potential road closure and safety concerns. The Commissioners discussed the need to substantiate claims about traffic and parking dangers, with plans to possibly involve the police chief and fire chief as speakers. They noted that a traffic study had been conducted and that Activitas Engineer Megan Budzinski would present information about it at the Wednesday meeting. The discussion also touched on potential improvements to Cow Pond Brook Road if the project proceeds, including repaving and adding parking lanes.

The discussion also focused on parking lot maintenance costs and endangered species concerns related to road access. DPW director Brian Callahan explained that maintaining the current parking lot costs approximately \$5,000 annually in materials and labor, while a new asphalt driveway would last 10-15 years without significant maintenance costs. The Commissioners clarified that shutting down the road between the baseball fields and soccer fields would prevent access to the baseball fields entirely, as there's no direct vehicle access from Cow Pond to the baseball fields. The Commissioners discussed that while the road would need to be shut down regardless of the project's approval, doing so would impact emergency vehicle access and require parents to walk approximately half a mile to reach the baseball fields. The road closure is required due to the area being designated as an Area of Critical Environmental Concern (ACEC) under state regulation for endangered species management, though specific written notice of the closure timeline was not clearly established during the discussion.

Goal #2 –

Chair Jennings shared a Q & A handout composed of user group permit information from other towns. Asking commissioners to continue with helping to do follow up calls on subjects such as what they use for software, fees, rentals, online calendar access and permits.

Budget –

The Commissioners discussed upcoming meetings about baseball field costs, scheduled for May 11th, where user groups will meet to determine actual expenses and potential fees. The budget review revealed an expected overspend of \$16,571 in operating expenses, which will be covered by transferring \$16,471 from the capital budget, leaving \$8,528 available. Several potential expenses were reviewed including sprinkler repairs, playground maintenance, porta-potty upgrades, and sinkhole repairs at Woitowicz Field. The Commissioners discussed funding priorities for various items totaling \$10,605, with a need to reduce costs due to being \$2,000 over budget. They identified four key priorities: repairing the Woitowicz sinkhole (\$700), reducing playground maintenance to \$2,500, sprinkler repairs for baseball and soccer fields (\$3,900), and switching the porta-potty to a handicap accessible one and adding a trash bin at the baseball area (\$300). The total cost for these selected items came to \$7,100, which was within their budget constraints.

Upon motion by Commissioner Ohringer, seconded by Commissioner Eliot to accept the sprinkler repairs for the Cow Pond baseball and soccer fields, was unanimously approved 4:0.

Mountain bike Proposal –

NDO Racing requested to use Cow Pond Playing Field and adjacent hill for mountain bike practice skills training. The team explained their need for a grass surface and small hill to teach safe biking techniques, emphasizing that their usage would be limited to 30 minutes during specific practices and would not damage the field. Concerns were raised about potential wear and tear on the grass field and compliance with town bylaws prohibiting bikes on playing fields. The committee agreed

to review the bylaw, observe a practice session, and explore alternative locations, with a follow-up meeting to be scheduled.

CPC & Parks Discussion – 7:02pm

Town Manager Mark Haddad provided an update on the Cow Pond project, explaining that the initial bid estimate was around \$3.9 million, with the formal request for \$4.284 million. After receiving seven bids, the low bid of \$3.6 million was withdrawn due to a mathematical error, leaving the second-lowest bid at \$4.853 million. Budget options for the project came in \$769,000 over the original \$4.2 million budget due to higher bids and necessary additions like the playground to retain a \$1 million grant.

Three options were presented: rejecting the bids and potentially re-bidding, approving the full \$5.053 million project with bonding, or accepting a \$4.8 million budget with \$371,500 in value engineering reductions. The Town Manager recommended rejecting the \$208,000 alternate for lights on a Little League field due to budget constraints and proposed adding a \$100,000 contingency to the base bid of \$4.853 million.

The Park Commission indicated support for the \$4.8 million option with reductions, pending Community Preservation Committee approval, and it was confirmed that the committee could modify their original \$4.2 million warrant article recommendation.

Upon Motion by Commissioner Ohringer, seconded by Commissioner Eliot, to accept the Cow Pond proposal as newly proposed for \$4.8 million, was approved 3:1 Commissioner Petropoulos Abstaining.

Schedule Next Meeting and Adjourn- Monday, May 11, 2026.

Commissioner Eliot moved to adjourn at 8:02 pm, Commissioner Jennings seconded. The motion carried unanimously 4:0.

Minutes by Laura Fisher, Administrative Assistant.

APPROVED: June 22, 2026
