

Final Minutes

Discussion 2026 Budget for Department Parks and Recreation

Thursday February 19, 2025

Attended by:

Phil Rooney – Chairperson of Sub Committee

Hossan Behery – Member of Sub Committee

Julian Munnich – Member of Sub Committee

Paul Carew – Veterans Services Director

Kurt McDowell – Golf Course Manager

Travis Farley – Executive Director – Natick Community Organic Farm

Lauren Mercer – Director of Parks and Recreation

Angela Snell – Director of Community Services

Gloria Huang – Finance Administration

Tien Nguyen – Finance Administration

Todd Gillenwater – Chair Natick Finance Committee

John Townsend – Deputy Town Administrator/Finance Director

Absent:

Kat Monahan – Member of Sub Committee

Patricia Demeo – Member of Sub Committee

The meeting was called to order at 7:00. Motion to open meeting made by Todd Gillenwater and seconded by Hossan Behery. Our discussion began at 7:36. This was the fourth department discussed at the meeting. Community Services – consisting of six department budgets were discussed at this meeting. Separate Meeting Minutes have been issued for each discussion.

The discussions in these minutes are a summary of our meeting. The discussions were influenced by the written responses to questions previously submitted prior to the meeting by subcommittee members. We have attached the written responses from department leadership at the end of meeting minutes.

Lauren informed us there were no new initiatives planned for 2026.

The Cole Center and Memorial Beach do not meet ADA requirements. They hold many events at the Community Center (is ADA accessible) and have work-arounds to assist people at memorial beach.

The committee's discussion with Lauren concluded at 7:48.

The General Government Subcommittee voted 3-0 to recommend favorable action on the 2026 Budget with no override. The guidance from the Finance Committee Chair was to discuss and vote on the 2026 Budget information with no Override.

Parks and Recreation Responses for 2025 Budget Significant Items and 2026 Budget Specific Questions of Finance Committee General Government Sub Committee

2026 Budgets General Questions

The 2026 Budgets (with and without override) as presented by the Town Administration; did you actively participate in the preparation? Do you agree with the data?

The Recreation and Parks Director worked on the budget with the Community Services Director.

Can you represent to the public that your ability to safely perform the department duties and service all departments with adequate risk protection can be done without an override? If not, please give detailed reasons. We can provide safe programs and services to the public.

Are there any open or pending department legal issues? None

Parks and Recreation 2025 Significant Items

We note there is a new Director for this department. Please provide a brief background of their experience prior to taking this position as Director.

Lauren Meurer has been with the department since 2017, previously serving as the Assistant Director of Programs and Services.

In the past the department was always looking for grants and sponsorships. Funding from these sources supports many of the programs offered. The department was investigating if and how Conservation Protection Act Funds (CPA) could be applied to the Recreation Department. CPA Funds cannot be used for operating expenses. What has been learned?

The department continues to seek grants and sponsorships for a variety of programs and events, as shown on page 142.

CPA is the Community Preservation Fund. We understand that we can apply for a competitive grant in the recreation category when the application process opens in Natick. CPA funds may not be spent on ordinary maintenance or annual operating expenses; only capital improvements are allowed. In addition, CPA funds may not be used for a stadium, gymnasium, or similar structure. This prohibition generally means that CPA funds may be used only for outdoor, land-based recreational uses and facilities.

https://www.communitypreservation.org/allowable-uses#anchor_recreation

During our 2025 Budget discussions we discussed financial aid - \$23,000 to the community who rely on our services for summer childcare options and meaningful recreational opportunities. We see no reference to this funding for 2026. Does the program still exist? What has been the need for 2024YTD? Expected need 2026? This information is shown on page 142. This program still exists, this program reduces the fees for those who are eligible. Eligibility is screened by the Natick Service Council, and then participants will receive a discount on certain programs and memberships. We saw a similar need as the previous year, \$20,964, and anticipate this need stays the same or increases in FY26.

We were informed the department was exploring potential use of Johnson School as a site for programs. What has been learned? We have learned that due to the change in use upgrades to the building are required and that needs to be further explored. Due to turnover in the department, further time is needed to look into options.

Is the lack of lifeguards, especially as the end of summer approaches, causing more lost days for the beach to be open? There is a nationwide lifeguard shortage. We have been fortunate to recruit 14 lifeguards per year. Most of our lifeguards go back to school mid-August so that is how long we plan for the beach to be open.

Last year we were informed that indoor facility reservations continued to grow. Field reservations were remaining level. The majority of rentals were for Natick based organizations. Are field reservations an issue? What percentage of rentals are Natick groups? Is the indoor facility adequate?

Field rentals continue to be steady because we are maxed out of space in the afterschool and weekend time slots. 95% of the groups who use the fields are Natick Youth Sports Groups.

Indoor space at Cole remains the same. Due to restrooms not being accessible, it limits the use for rentals.

Do your facilities still not meet ADA requirements?

We were not funded for any ada improvement projects this past year. This will be something we continue to explore for funding.

Is the department bookkeeper still reconciling and managing recreational program fees/receipts and making deposits to the Revolving Fund account? Who is reviewing and signing off on their work? How often are reviews performed?

The Department works with the Community Services Executive Assistant. The executive assistant processes and reconciles the fees and receipts. The work is reviewed by the Director for each deposit.