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CITY HALL

1 Market Street

Amesbury, MA 01913

Amesbury Open Space, Natural Resources, and Trails Committee

MEETING MINUTES

February 25, 2026, 7:00 p.m.

This meeting was conducted under the "Executive Order Suspending Certain Provisions of the Open Meeting Law" G.L. c. 30A, Section 20, signed on March 12, 2020.

Attending: Jonathan Sherwood, Chair; Fred Zackon; Jessica Redfern; Richard Hucksam; Craige Hird; Amanda Armington (City of Amesbury)

Absent: Pascal Rettig, Michelle Faucher (resigned)

Guests: Ken Aspeslagh (Lake Gardner Improvement Association), Bob Brisebois, Bruce McBrien (Lake Gardner Improvement Association)

- Call to Order: The meeting was called to order at approximately 7:05 p.m. by Chair Sherwood. The Chair noted that the meeting was being recorded.
- Minutes from January 28, 2026 Meeting: Chair Sherwood noted that the January minutes were generated using AI-assisted transcription and reviewed by members. Zackon moved to accept the minutes as presented; Hird seconded. Approved with Redfern abstaining (absent from January meeting).
- Public Comment: None
- Communications: Chair Sherwood reported that Michelle Faucher had resigned from the Committee and from the Community Preservation Committee (CPC), effective immediately, citing competing commitments. The resignation has been forwarded to the Mayor's office. Sherwood noted that there was a previous applicant from the fall vacancy process who may be interested in filling the position and will follow up. Zackon also noted that the Conservation Commission currently has two vacancies and encouraged members to refer any interested individuals.
- Chair's Report:
 - Invasives Demonstration Project – Woodsom Farm
 - i. Chair Sherwood reported that the project has been approved by the City with support from Amanda Armington and Joe Buckley at DPW.
 - ii. Two volunteer work parties are being planned for late April and early May, tentatively April 18 and the first weekend in May.
 - iii. The first work party will involve a small core group to establish procedures before expanding to a larger volunteer effort. Work will include plant identification using iNaturalist markers from last fall and initial removal activities.
 - iv. The longer-term goal is to seek approvals to work at additional sites across town.
 - Coming Items

- i. Sherwood noted that the March meeting will focus on open space associated with cluster development subdivisions currently in the planning process. Armington will prepare a summary of pending and recently approved projects with open space components, including the Clark Road / Rocky Hill development. Armington and possibly Nick from City staff will present.
 - ii. The Committee continues to develop its thinking on town-wide trail stewardship and invasive plant mitigation policies and procedures, as discussed at prior meetings.
- Referrals: None at this time.
- Other Business:
 - Batchelder Park Improvements Presentation – Ken Aspeslagh
 - i. Ken Aspeslagh, a member of the Lake Gardner Improvement Association and creator of the Amesbury Trails website, presented plans for improvements to Batchelder Park on Po Hill.
 - ii. Phase one—clearing of overgrown brush back to the park boundary and removal of a deteriorated chain-link fence—was completed in the fall with City approval. The cleared area roughly doubles the usable park space.
 - iii. Aspeslagh shared a landscape plan developed with architect Ryan Gilboa, showing a perimeter pathway (approximately 700 feet), a potential stage/gathering area at the summit where a gazebo once stood, picnic areas, a labyrinth feature, native plantings, and garden beds.
 - iv. Discussion focused on accessibility: the park's relatively level grade makes it well-suited for an all-persons trail. Sherwood noted that DCR and federal standards for accessible trails are straightforward and offered to share a checklist with Aspeslagh. A 60-inch-wide firm surface would meet basic requirements.
 - v. Parking remains a challenge, with only street right-of-way currently available. A neighboring landowner has expressed willingness to grant a parking easement, which could eventually allow for dedicated accessible parking.
 - vi. Members discussed the importance of securing volunteer groups, such as the Amesbury Eco-Gardeners, to maintain any garden beds, given the lack of water and electricity at the site. Low-maintenance native species would be preferred.
 - vii. Aspeslagh noted that invasive regrowth (bittersweet, poison ivy) will need ongoing management. He is considering seeding the cleared areas with native wildflower mix.
 - viii. The park is not under Conservation Commission jurisdiction; it is general city-owned land. Adjacent conservation land on Po Hill is under ConCom.
 - ix. The Committee commended the project and encouraged continued development in phases. More information is available at the LGIA website.
 - Deer Island Park Improvements Presentation – Bob Brisebois

- i. Bob Brisebois, a resident of five years with prior experience as a board member and president of the York Land Trust, presented plans for improvements at Deer Island.
- ii. Brisebois described discovering Deer Island as a neglected but beautiful resource and organizing a volunteer group through a Facebook outreach effort. The group held its first meeting and developed a planning document outlining priorities.
- iii. Key priorities include: removing fallen trees and debris while retaining ecological health; widening and improving the trail system including the loop trail, cross trail, and spur trails to the beach and Cedar Little promenade; addressing invasive species including phragmites, bittersweet, and poison ivy; improving the parking lot including replacing deteriorated guardrails; adding amenities such as benches, picnic tables, and interpretive signage highlighting the island's historical significance; and addressing water safety concerns with additional life-saving stations being coordinated with the police chief/harbor master.
- iv. Brisebois has obtained a fencing estimate of approximately \$6,000–\$7,000 for post-and-rail replacement of the parking lot guardrail. Various alternatives (boulders, concrete stops) are also being considered.
- v. Redfern commended the involvement of the Amesbury High School Environmental Club in work parties. Brisebois emphasized the importance of broad community involvement for long-term stewardship.
- vi. Brisebois has submitted a request to the Traffic and Transportation Committee (now dissolved) regarding traffic safety concerns at the parking lot exit. The request has been forwarded to City Council. Redfern noted that the Council has received it and will determine next steps. Brisebois has also been in contact with DPW and the state regarding the traffic issue.
- vii. CPA funds were noted as a potential funding source for improvements at both Batchelder Park and Deer Island.
- Park Bench and Amenity Standards
 - i. Chair Sherwood raised the topic of standardizing park bench and amenity specifications across city properties, prompted by a bench donation request for a location along the Powow River near the bend.
 - ii. Sherwood shared documentation from the City, including DPW guidance on preferred bench and picnic table types, emphasizing accessibility features such as benches with backs and picnic tables with curved seating that allow side entry rather than requiring users to step over a bench.
 - iii. The bench donation request involves placing a bench near the riverbank. Armington reported that the location would require Conservation Commission review due to its proximity to the riverfront. Bruce McBrien noted the bank is steep and also used as a kayak landing point, suggesting a bench would be better placed at the grassy edge of the field rather than on the slope.

- iv. The Committee noted it does not have direct jurisdiction over bench installations but that the discussion highlighted important siting considerations related to erosion, competing uses, and accessibility. Armington will follow up with the applicant regarding next steps and alternative locations.
 - Community Preservation Committee (CPC) Appointment
 - i. With Faucher's resignation, the Committee needed to appoint a new representative to the CPC. Per the CPA ordinance, the OSNRTC appoints one member to the CPC.
 - ii. Hird volunteered to serve as the OSNRTC representative to the CPC. Zackon moved to appoint Hird; Redfern seconded. Unanimously approved.
 - iii. Sherwood offered to brief Hird on CPA background and the OSNRTC's prior presentation to the CPC, and will schedule a meeting.
 - iv. Redfern asked that Hird track opportunities for stakeholder groups to provide input on the CPA plan as it is drafted.
 - DPW Watershed Clearing
 - i. Bruce McBrien reported that DPW Director Joe Buckley is considering a comprehensive approach to clearing the river corridor, viewing the entire watershed as a dynamic entity for flood management purposes. The Committee noted this as a positive development.
- Motion to Adjourn: Moved by Zackon. Unanimously approved. Meeting adjourned at approximately 8:30 p.m.

Minutes unanimously approved at March 25, 2026 meeting, respectfully submitted by Jonathan Sherwood, Chair, OSNRTC