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62 Friend Street

Amesbury, MA 01913

Amesbury Open Space, Natural Resources, and Trails Committee

MEETING MINUTES

March 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; Pascal Rettig; Jessica Redfern; Richard Hucksam; Craige Hird; Amanda Armington (City of Amesbury)

Guests: Jerry Klima (Coastal Trails Coalition / Salisbury); Tracey Chalifour (Amesbury Planning Board)

Absent: None

- Call to Order: The meeting was called to order at approximately 7:02 p.m. by Chair Sherwood. The Chair noted that the meeting was being recorded.
- Minutes from February 25, 2026 Meeting: Zackon moved to accept the minutes as presented; Hird seconded. Unanimously approved.
- Public Comment: None. (Guest Jerry Klima was present specifically for the Rocky Hill referral discussion.)
- Communications: No additional communications received this month beyond items on the agenda.
- Chair's Report:
 - Invasives Demonstration Project – Woodsom Farm
 - i. The first volunteer work party is scheduled for Saturday, April 18, 2026, from 1:00 to 4:00 p.m. Approximately six to eight participants are confirmed; the group will be kept small for the initial effort to establish procedures.
 - ii. Subsequent work parties are planned, with the goal of expanding to additional sites as the program develops.
 - "Green" Newsletter
 - i. Chair Sherwood reported that a community newsletter focused on open space, trails, and environmental activities is being organized by former OSNRTC member Vanessa Johnson Hall under the auspices of Amesbury Outdoors (formerly the Lake Gardner Improvement Association).
 - ii. The newsletter will be hosted on a paid third-party platform managed by Amesbury Outdoors rather than by the City, which avoids significant compliance considerations including Section 508 accessibility requirements that apply to materials published on the city website.

- iii. Sherwood discussed accessibility considerations with William Donahue at the City. The City may be able to maintain an inventory of links to each newsletter on the city website, but the newsletter itself will be produced by Amesbury Outdoors as a community publication.
 - iv. The newsletter is expected to launch this summer, potentially on a bimonthly or monthly basis. There is sufficient content—from this Committee, eco-gardeners, Lake Gardner / Amesbury Outdoors, Camp Kent, and seasonal events—to support regular issues.
 - OSNRTC Facebook Page
 - i. The legacy OSNRTC Facebook page, which has not been actively maintained for several years, will be taken down to align with the City's consolidated social media communications strategy.
- Referrals:
 - Rocky Hill Development (MBTA Zoning) – Notice of Intent / Planning Board Referral
 - i. Chair Sherwood and Conservation Agent Armington presented background on the Rocky Hill development, a multi-phase residential project (approximately 385 units) located in the MBTA-zoned area near the Elm Street / Clarks Road / Route 110 intersection.
 - ii. The site abuts significant existing recreational infrastructure including the Ghost Trail extension, the Riverwalk extension currently in design, and multi-use sidewalks along Elm Street.
 - iii. Members raised concerns that the applicant has not provided an adequate open space or trail plan despite repeated requests from the Planning Board. Pascal Rettig and Tracey Chalifour confirmed that promised materials have not been delivered.
 - iv. The "trails" indicated on the site plan appear to be unimproved mowed paths along steep gradients with drainage swales, which would not function as usable or accessible recreational trails. The trail also does not form a complete loop.
 - v. Discussion focused on pedestrian and bicycle access at the development's exit to Elm Street, including the question of whether sidewalks at the exit should be widened from the proposed 5 feet to 8 feet to support shared use by walkers and cyclists. Jerry Klima recommended widening to support safer connections to the existing trail network and noted that such a change would likely affect on-street parking along the boulevard.
 - vi. Members also discussed the question of whether to support a single high-quality pedestrian crossing of Elm Street (e.g., a HAWK signal opposite Stop & Shop, consistent with the planned Riverwalk connection) versus multiple lower-grade crossings.
 - vii. Klima also suggested that the project consider preserving a future connection to the Ghost Trail along the Route 95 right-of-way.
 - viii. Storm water runoff was identified as a concern given the site's location upgradient of Lake Attitash; peer review of the

Notice of Intent and other technical aspects has been requested by the Conservation Commission.

- ix. The Committee determined that it does not currently have sufficient materials from the applicant to perform a complete review. Chair Sherwood will draft a memo to the Planning Board and Conservation Commission stating that a full review cannot be completed until the applicant provides an adequate open space and trail plan, and signaling the Committee's preliminary questions and concerns. The Committee requests that the Planning Board await the Committee's full review before taking action. Final review is expected at the April meeting.
- 27 Kimball Road – 40B Application / Zoning Board of Appeals
 - i. Armington presented the project: a Chapter 40B application currently before the Zoning Board of Appeals. Filed materials include an Abbreviated Notice of Resource Area Delineation (ANRAD); the site contains an isolated vegetated wetland, an intermittent stream, and bordering vegetated wetland.
 - ii. The proposed development would fill nearly the entire site, including most of the isolated vegetated wetland. The applicant has indicated they will seek a waiver from local regulations.
 - iii. The site is in Water Resource Protection District C with drainage flowing toward Lake Attitash. The Committee referenced its prioritization mapping: the parcel scores as priority for habitat and natural resilience.
 - iv. Members expressed concerns including: lack of any preserved open space; wetland filling; storm water runoff impacts on Lake Attitash and downstream properties; absence of safe pedestrian or bicycle access from the site to any natural or recreational amenities; and the development's reliance on every house being individually fenced rather than incorporating shared community open space.
 - v. Zackon offered observations regarding site design philosophy, suggesting that the project reflects an outdated paradigm of small individual lots rather than the kind of higher-density, shared-open-space development pattern that current conditions and the City's needs would favor. Hucksam noted that some communities work proactively with developers on "friendly 40B" projects that incorporate community open space and help advance the community's affordable housing goals.
 - vi. The Committee will prepare a memo to the Zoning Board of Appeals noting prioritization map findings, the absence of preserved open space, lack of walkable/bikeable access to recreational resources, and storm water runoff concerns.
- Other Business:
 - Community Preservation Committee (CPC) Update – Hird
 - i. Hird attended his first CPC meeting earlier the same evening. The CPC is scheduled to vote on an outline of the CPA plan at its April 29 meeting. Members are reviewing the draft outline.
 - ii. Anticipated CPC timeline: 95% complete plan with public hearing in June; pre-application process opening in July; finalize

plan with public comment in August/September; applications received in October; review November–December; recommendations to City Council in February–March 2027 for the first round of funding.

- iii. The CPC is treating recreation (active, e.g., youth recreation/sports leagues) and open space (passive recreation) as separate categories in its criteria. Members noted that direct OSNRTC engagement with active recreation stakeholders has been limited, but the distinction will be important as the plan develops.
- iv. Hird will distribute CPA plan materials to the Committee as they become available so members can provide feedback through Hird back to the CPC. Redfern emphasized the importance of stakeholder groups, including OSNRTC, weighing in on the draft plan.
- Draft Invasive Plant Management Plan
 - i. Chair Sherwood distributed a draft Invasive Plant Management Plan he has prepared in connection with the work group anticipated to take on city-wide invasive plant management on conservation and other city-owned land.
 - ii. Much of the substantive content is adapted from prior Mass Audubon plans (Bill Gette and Tanner). The draft adds operational standards and a prioritization framework for selecting where to focus mitigation efforts.
 - iii. Armington has reviewed the draft and provided comments. The Committee will discuss the draft at the next meeting and then forward it to the Conservation Commission for review and comment.
- Trail Stewardship Plan (Coming Item)
 - i. Sherwood noted that a parallel Trail Stewardship Plan is being developed as Amesbury Outdoors (the renamed Lake Gardner Improvement Association) prepares to take on volunteer trail stewardship work across Amesbury's open space properties on a town-wide basis. Standards and procedures will be drafted before significant freelance work begins on city-owned trails.
- Bartlett Farm Mowing / Grassland Bird Protection
 - i. Hucksam raised the perennial concern that City mowing operations at Bartlett Farm have not been following the rotational mowing schedule recommended several years ago for grassland bird breeding habitat protection.
 - ii. Last season, fields that should not have been mowed under the recommended rotation were mowed.
 - iii. Armington noted the Conservation Commission has been working to clarify which prior recommendations were formal requirements versus advisory and indicated bandwidth this year to revisit the topic. Armington will dig out the original mowing plan documentation and discuss with Joe Buckley at DPW.
 - iv. Redfern offered Committee support via memo if helpful, and Armington will also consider outreach to Natural Heritage regarding endangered species and critical habitat.

- v. The Committee also noted continued interest in protecting the "fireworks hill" area at Woodsom Farm from mowing during bird breeding season and adjusting the Amesbury Days fireworks schedule, recognizing that planning for the upcoming season is likely already advanced.
- vi. The mowing/bird protection topic will be on the agenda for the next meeting.
- Motion to Adjourn: Moved by Hird, seconded by Zackon (and Rettig).
Unanimously approved. Meeting adjourned at approximately 8:53 p.m.

Minutes unanimously approved at 04/29/2026 meeting, respectfully submitted by
Jonathan Sherwood, Chair, OSNRTC