



*Under a notice duly filed with the Town Clerk, a meeting of the Recreation Commission was held on Thursday, January 8, 2026, at 6:00 pm at the Hunt Recreation Center and virtually via Zoom.*

**Attended:**

**Commission:** Phil Griffiths (Chair), Pete Funkhouser, Daniel Rodriguez, Laura Stearns

**Also in Attendance:** Mary Hartman (Select Board, via Zoom), Leigh Jackson (Director of Recreation), DJ Fimiani (Assistant Recreation Director), Meggi Leduc (Community Engagement Manager), Callie Sties (OARS), Matt Brown (OARS, via Zoom)

**Call to Order:**

At 6:00 pm Mr. Griffiths called the meeting to order; the roll was called, and a quorum was confirmed.

**Approval of Minutes from December 2025:**

Mr. Rodriguez moved to approve the minutes from the December meeting. Mr. Funkhouser seconded, all in favor.

**AGENDA**

**OARS Partner Presentation (Matt Brown and Callie Sties)**

Matt Brown (via Zoom) and Callie Sties (in person) presented an overview of OARS and its current and planned recreational programming. OARS is the watershed organization for the Assabet, Sudbury, and Concord Rivers, serving 36 communities across the region. Founded in 1986 to address severe water quality issues—particularly phosphorus pollution from wastewater treatment plants—OARS has played a key role in improving river health through long-term water quality monitoring, ecological restoration, policy advocacy, and education. As a result of these efforts, much of the watershed is now boatable, fishable, and in some areas swimmable.

Mr. Brown emphasized that Concord is a uniquely important location within the watershed, as all three rivers converge at Egg Rock and support some of the most heavily used recreational river segments. With water quality improvements achieved, OARS is now expanding recreational programming to foster community engagement and cultivate the next generation of river stewards.

Core OARS programs include a 30+ year continuous water quality monitoring program, dam removals and habitat restoration projects, climate resilience planning, and educational initiatives such as the **WaterWise** program, which has recently expanded into Concord schools and summer camps. Participation in these education programs grew from approximately 80 youth annually to more than 600 in 2025.

Ms. Sties outlined OARS’ recreational initiatives, including:

- **River Rats**, a free, guided paddling program designed to eliminate barriers to river access by providing boats, equipment, and instruction. The pilot program introduced nearly 100 first-time paddlers in 2025, with plans to expand to additional launch sites, including Concord.
- **Concord River Race**, launched in 2025 with 60 participants and expanding in 2026 to include multiple race distances and a youth race. The race is part of the New England Canoe and Kayak Race Association series, with turnaround points in Concord.

- **86 Miles Club Challenge**, encouraging paddlers to complete 86 miles on the watershed’s rivers at their own pace. The program promotes exploration and stewardship and includes both recreational and endurance participants.
- **Three Rivers Adventures**, a team-building and volunteer engagement program combining paddling with environmental service projects such as cleanups and invasive species removal.
- **Water chestnut pulls**, hands-on volunteer efforts to remove invasive aquatic plants, with multiple events held annually in Concord.

In celebration of OARS’ 40th anniversary, the organization is also planning special events, including a proposed **Carnival of Boats** at Egg Rock in summer 2026, intended to revive historic community river gatherings in conjunction with America’s 250th anniversary.

Mr. Bown concluded by noting that while OARS remains primarily focused on science, policy, and ecological restoration, recreation has become a powerful and efficient way to engage the public, build long-term stewardship, and broaden community connection to the rivers.

**Discussion & Questions:**

- Mr. Griffiths asked about OARS’ primary current advocacy challenges within the watershed.
- Mr. Brown responded that OARS’ largest challenge is reduced federal enforcement of water quality regulations, requiring organizations like OARS to take on enforcement and potential legal action when wastewater treatment plants exceed permit limits. He noted additional emerging concerns, including pollutants such as pharmaceuticals and PFAS that are difficult to monitor, increased road salt runoff affecting river salinity due to changing winter conditions, and the impacts of prolonged drought and altered flow patterns on river habitat and water quality.

**Proposed Fee Increases for 2026 (Leigh Jackson and DJ Fimiani)**

Mr. Fimiani and Ms. Jackson presented proposed fee increases across three program areas—White Pond, Carousel/Childcare, and Summer Camp—to support rising operational costs and maintain full cost recovery through the Recreation Revolving Fund.

For **White Pond**, Mr. Fimiani proposed a \$15 increase to all membership tiers, reflecting the addition of a staffed parking attendant booth to improve traffic management and safety. The increase also accounts for higher staffing, training, utilities, and infrastructure costs. Guest fees and day pass rates would remain unchanged. Mr. Fimiani noted improved traffic management last season and outlined additional signage and coordination with state agencies to further address parking challenges.

For **Carousel and Childcare**, a standard 3% increase was proposed to support staff retention, competitive wages, and reinvestment in program quality, supplies, and facilities. Ms. Jackson emphasized that this increase aligns with industry norms and departmental goals.

For **Summer Camp**, Mr. Fimiani proposed modest weekly increases to reflect higher staffing quality, expanded field trips, transportation costs, and enhanced programming, while remaining below or comparable to surrounding municipal and YMCA rates. Mr. Fimiani confirmed that a

robust scholarship program remains in place and other community funding support is available. No child is turned away solely due to financial hardship.

Ms. Jackson also reminded Commissioners of an ongoing financial sustainability study, which will inform future fee structures and long-term planning.

**Vote:** Mr. Funkhouser moved to approve the program fee increases. Mrs. Stearns seconded. All in favor.

### **Potential Changes to Cancellation Policy (Leigh Jackson and DJ Fimiani)**

Ms. Jackson presented proposed updates to the Recreation Department’s cancellation policies after a detailed review of program budgets revealed that current practices are not fully covering operational costs. As a revolving fund, the department must maintain full cost recovery, and frequent late cancellations—particularly in camp and program registrations—have resulted in unrecoverable staffing, field trip, vendor, and processing expenses.

For the general cancellation policy, Mr. Fimiani proposed increasing the cancellation fee from \$25 to \$35 and revising the cancellation window from 7 calendar days to 10 business days. This change is intended to reduce confusion for participants and staff, especially around weekend timing, and to better align with staffing and scheduling commitments. Cancellations within 10 business days would not be eligible for refunds unless there is a documented medical or qualifying exception.

For Summer Camp, Mr. Fimiani proposed a more substantial revision to address significant financial exposure caused by late cancellations. The updated policy would make the 50% deposit due at registration non-refundable, with the remaining 50% due by May 1 for all sessions. A structured refund schedule would apply to the final payment only, depending on the timing of the cancellation and the camp session month, reflecting the department’s advance commitments to staff, transportation, vendors, and field trips. Ms. Jackson emphasized that the revised policy remains comparable—and perhaps more flexible—than surrounding municipal and YMCA programs.

Mr. Fimiani noted that exceptions would continue to be handled case by case and that same-day registration errors can still be voided without penalty due to processing timelines. The Commission expressed support for the changes, noting they align with standard industry practices while protecting the department’s financial sustainability.

**Vote:** Mr. Rodriguez moved to approve the updated cancellation policy. Mrs. Stearns seconded. All in favor.

### **Recreation Revolving Fund Balance (Chair)**

Mr. Griffiths discussed the current balance of the Recreation Revolving Fund in response to ongoing questions from the Finance Committee, Town Manager, and others regarding the presence of excess funds and expectations that the balance be “spent down.” Mr. Griffiths emphasized that the Revolving Fund is intended to support ongoing program operations—where revenues and expenses fluctuate throughout the year—not to serve as a routine source for capital investment.

Ms. Jackson explained that during the pandemic, federal funding—particularly for childcare—offset some expenses that would normally have been paid from the Revolving Fund. This shift allowed the fund balance to grow beyond historical norms. As a result, the department requested clarification from Town Finance and the Town Manager’s Office regarding what level of reserve is appropriate to maintain financial stability and what portion, if any, could reasonably be considered available for one-time capital use.

Based on discussions with the Assistant Town Manager, Finance staff, and the Town’s CFO, Ms. Jackson reported that maintaining approximately \$1 million in the Revolving Fund is appropriate, representing roughly two to three months of operating expenses, consistent with long-standing Town policy for revolving funds. The fund began the fiscal year with a balance of approximately \$2.1 million, leaving an estimated \$1.1 million that could be considered excess and potentially available for one-time capital investments.

Ms. Jackson stressed that this excess is the result of unique, non-recurring circumstances and should not be viewed as an ongoing funding source. The operating budget is expected to balance annually, with only modest fluctuations in fund balance over time. Any use of excess funds for capital purposes would be limited, strategic, and exceptional, rather than a shift in how the Revolving Fund is typically used.

The Commission expressed support for maintaining a \$1 million operating reserve and for using the remaining balance for carefully considered, one-time capital projects, noting that the issue should be revisited periodically as revenues and expenses evolve.

#### **Rideout Courts Resurfacing Project (Chair)**

The Commission revisited the Rideout Courts Project, considering newly clarified Revolving Fund availability, as this project is expected to be the primary use of the approximately \$1.1 million in one-time excess funds. The discussion focused on confirming scope, funding readiness, construction options, and next steps.

The Commission reviewed the subcommittee’s prior recommendation to proceed with Option 1, which retains the existing configuration of the courts—resurfacing the tennis/pickleball courts and basketball courts without changing their use or layout. This recommendation followed extensive subcommittee work and public input and was previously held pending confirmation that sufficient funding was available.

Staff reviewed current funding sources for the project, including:

- **Community Preservation Committee (CPC):** \$497,153 (approved specifically for post-tension concrete on tennis/pickleball courts)
- **ARPA funds:** \$130,000
- **Town Meeting appropriation (2019):** \$108,847

These sources total approximately \$736,000, leaving a funding gap that could be covered by the Revolving Fund excess. Staff confirmed that sufficient funds are available to proceed, even with added alternates, assuming bids align with current estimates.

Cost scenarios were discussed in detail:

- **Baseline project (standard concrete, no post-tension, no conduit):** ~\$137,000 from the Revolving Fund
- **Post-tension concrete (tennis/pickleball only):** Significant upfront cost increase but projected to extend court lifespan from ~10 years to 25–35 years, resulting in long-term savings exceeding \$1 million
- **Post-tension concrete (basketball courts):** Lower relative cost increase due to court size, but less justified due to significantly lower usage
- **Future-use conduit:** Estimated ~\$27,000 per court area, proposed as an alternate rather than a guaranteed inclusion

The Commission discussed whether to limit investment to baseline resurfacing in order to preserve funds for future projects (notably Emerson), but consensus emerged that Rideout is the higher-priority facility and that doing the project “right” now would avoid repeated future replacement cycles. Commissioners emphasized that major capital needs like Emerson should ultimately be funded through General Fund, CPC, or other capital mechanisms—not the Revolving Fund.

*\*Please refer to the tables below for clarification and to the recording for the full discussion.*

<b>Sources of Funds</b>	
Recreation Retained (original vote)	\$ 392,000.00
ARPA	\$ 130,000.00
Town Meeting	\$ 108,847.00
CPC	\$ 497,153.00
Total	\$ 1,128,000.00
<b>Difference = ^Revolving Fund contribution</b>	<b>137,000.00</b>
	\$ 1,265,000.00
<b>Revolving Fund NEW Total Contribution (1.08.26)</b>	<b>529,000.00</b>

<b>Updated Project Costs</b>	10.21.25 per Activitas	
<b>Option 1</b>		
Tennis/Pickle to Tennis/Pickle		
Base	\$ 504,000.00	
Conduit		\$ 27,000.00
Post-Tension Concrete	\$ 393,000.00	
Total	\$ 897,000.00	
<b>Basketball</b>		
Base	\$ 368,000.00	
Conduit		\$ 17,000.00
Post-Tension Concrete		\$ 190,000.00
	\$ 368,000.00	
<b>Total Project Cost</b>	\$ 1,265,000.00	

**Vote:** Mr. Funkhouser moved to proceed with Option 1 as recommended by the Subcommittee, and to authorize staff to go out to bid, including alternates for post-tension concrete and conduit. Mrs. Stearns seconded. All in favor.

#### **Update on Recreation Commission Standing Topics:**

- **Select Board:**
  - Mrs. Hartman reported that the Board is heavily focused on the MCI redevelopment master planning process, land use planning for town-owned properties (including Peabody School), and discussions around possible consolidation of municipal services. She clarified that all land use analyses retain existing playing fields at both Ripley and Peabody School, recognizing their importance as recreation assets. Mrs. Hartman also noted ongoing preparations for Town Meeting and clarified that while the Community Preservation Committee (CPC) has approved funding related to the Rideout Courts project, final approval remains subject to Town Meeting vote. She relayed a Select Board question regarding whether pickleball nets are included in the Rideout Courts project, and staff confirmed that while nets are not part of the capital investment, they are not a cost-prohibitive issue and will be available.
- **Finance Committee:**
  - No liaison present.
- **Strategic Plan Initiatives:**
  - Nothing to report.
- **Community Preservation Committee:**
  - Nothing to report.
- **Land Use Working Group:**
  - Nothing to report.
- **Rideout Court Resurfacing Project:**
  - Update provided earlier in the meeting.
- **Maisey O'Donnell Dry Dive Training Facility Project:**
  - Ms. Jackson will be attending the upcoming Select Board meeting, where the MOU will be presented for construction.
- **Gerow Recreation Area:**
  - Nothing to report.
- **Community Partner Invitation:**
  - An invitation to attend the next meeting will be extended to CPW.

#### **New Business:**

Ms. Jackson shared that a draft of the Annual Town Report had been distributed to Commissioners for review. The report serves as a fact-based overview of departmental activities and accomplishments, and significant credit was given to staff for data compilation and analysis. Commissioners were invited to provide feedback and suggestions through the end of the following week, ahead of the submission deadline. No additional new business was raised.

#### **Public Comment:**

- **Jean Easterday, 48 Maple Street**

Ms. Easterday asked whether oversight of Gerow Park falls under the Recreation Commission, the NRC, or another entity.

- Mr. Griffiths responded that oversight is currently an open question and remains under discussion. At present, Gerow Park is managed by the Town Manager’s Office, with permits for use handled through that office.

- **Irl Smith, 537 Hayward Mill Road**

Mr. Smith raised concerns about whether pickleball nets would be town-provided or user-supplied at Rideout Park. He clarified that current nets are owned, maintained, and stored by pickleball players through a lockbox system, with funding from player donations.

- Commissioners acknowledged that ensuring adequate net availability is a reasonable concern and noted that the issue will require further discussion and coordination with staff to determine next steps.

- **Mike Carey, 260 Oak Hill Circle**

Mr. Carey expressed appreciation for the Commission’s process and the work undertaken by staff, while also noting some disappointment with recent decisions.

All members voted to adjourn at 8:00 pm.

Respectfully submitted,  
Meggi Leduc

Recordings: <https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PL1TTzrWEKOOmOMX8y2JYemPULjphSakNv>  
Meeting Materials: <https://www.concordrec.com/225/Recreation-Commission>