

**COTUIT FIRE DISTRICT  
PRUDENTIAL COMMITTEE MEETING  
ZOOM ONLY at Freedom Hall  
COTUIT, MA 02635  
March 3, 2026**

The meeting was called to order by Mark Lynch at 6:00 pm on March 3, 2026.

**Pledge of Allegiance**

Chair Lynch led the Pledge of Allegiance.

Chair Lynch did roll call:

Commissioners: Mark Lynch, John Havel and Seth Burdick

Also present via ZOOM: Treasurer Ray Pirrone and Assistant Treasurer Ryan Ouellette

ICON Architecture: Paul DiGiandomenico

Tighe & Bond: Eric Doremus & Lauren Butts, Landscape Architect

LeftField: Kevin Sullivan & Joe Sullivan

**Public Comment:**

**Lee Connolly-Weill**, several questions regarding the project, including details about the proposed landscaping plan, insurance and liability coverage, and who would be responsible for ongoing mowing and site maintenance.

**Patty Daly** asked about the budget for the project, noting that it had not been discussed during the previous presentation. She requested information on the cost of each scenario currently being proposed and asked whether any funds would remain available for the property after those costs are covered.

**Meeting Minutes Approval:**

**MOTION: To approve January 20, 2026, meeting minutes with minor edit re Kettleers.**

**Motion made by: Mark Lynch      Seconded by: John Havel**

**Motion passed unanimously. (Mark Lynch, Seth Burdick, John Havel)**

**MOTION: To approve February 19, 2026, meeting minutes.**

**Motion made by: Mark Lynch      Seconded by: John Havel**

**Motion passed unanimously. (Mark Lynch, Seth Burdick, John Havel)**

**Cotuit School Building Demolition Status Update**

- **Further Review and Approval of Demolition and Landscape Construction Documents**

The committee continued its review of the Cotuit School demolition and “return to nature” project, focusing on the 50% construction documents and addressing questions raised during the previous meeting and through public comment. It was confirmed that phyto-remediation plantings are not necessary because no soil contamination or degradation was identified on the site. A previously proposed small parking area included in an earlier feasibility scenario has been removed, both to align with the return-to-nature directive and to reduce project costs. The design team also confirmed that all proposed plantings in the landscape plan are native specifically to Cape Cod, not just Massachusetts. The boulders shown in the plan are intended to delineate the property boundary and prevent vehicles from entering the area from the adjacent Kettleers parking area.

The committee also discussed the potential involvement of the Native Land Conservancy and Wampanoag representatives. Possible roles mentioned included reviewing the restoration approach, providing guidance on long-term maintenance or stewardship, or establishing a cultural or conservation easement. It was noted that any such easement would likely require a future district vote, and that broader discussions about long-term use of the property could occur after the demolition and restoration are completed. A suggestion to install a covered concrete pad with picnic tables was also discussed but was viewed as inconsistent with the goal of restoring the property to a natural condition.

Maintenance considerations were reviewed, including irrigation, pruning, mowing, and long-term upkeep. It was suggested that the final 100% construction drawings include guidance on irrigation and maintenance plans, particularly for management of the meadow area. The landscape architect indicated that pruning of existing trees is likely unnecessary, as no formal paths or gathering areas are planned beneath them, though an arborist could review the tree line if needed. Additional plantings will also create a natural buffer along the existing woodland edge. Questions were raised about public access and potential pathways across the property. The design team explained that the plan does not include formal hard-surface paths due in part to liability considerations, but open areas will remain where informal pedestrian “desire paths” may develop naturally over time. Existing driveway openings will also allow for pedestrian access to the meadow area.

The project manager then provided a budget and schedule update. The total project budget is approximately \$1.86 million, including about \$1.4 million allocated to construction costs for demolition, hazardous material abatement, and site work. Remaining funds cover design services, project management, environmental testing, contingencies, and other soft costs. While a detailed hazardous materials inspection identified higher abatement costs than earlier estimates, those increases were absorbed within the overall project budget through contingencies.

If the committee approves the current phase, the next step will be completion of the 100% construction drawings and advertisement for bids. The proposed schedule would advertise the project in mid-March, receive bids by late March, and potentially begin demolition and site work in early to mid-April, pending contract approvals and final documentation. Committee members indicated that the plan and timeline appeared reasonable and consistent with the project’s goals.

**MOTION: To approve the 50% construction documents as presented and direct the design team to proceed with 100% drawings and preparation for bidding.**

**Motion made by: Mark Lynch      Seconded by: Seth Burdick**

**Motion passed unanimously. (Mark Lynch, Seth Burdick, John Havel)**

Another meeting may be scheduled for Monday, March 9, 2026, to approve final documents before the project is sent out to bid.

### **Clerk Replacement**

District Clerk, Charlie Eager recently suffered a serious fall and is currently in rehabilitation. As he will be unable to continue in his duties, the committee discussed the need for both a short-term and longer-term replacement.

To address immediate needs, it was proposed that John Havel be appointed interim clerk under the bylaws to sign required district documents until a permanent clerk is appointed prior to preparations for the annual meeting.

**MOTION: To appoint John Havel as temporary clerk on a non-compensated basis.**

**Motion made by: Mark Lynch      Seconded by: Seth Burdick**

**Motion passed unanimously. (Mark Lynch, Seth Burdick, John Havel)**

The committee discussed options for filling the District Clerk position on a longer-term basis. Assistant Treasurer Ryan Ouellette was suggested as a potential candidate, though the role was noted to carry significant responsibilities, particularly with the upcoming annual meeting. Members also discussed seeking candidates with prior experience or advertising the position. It was agreed to conduct additional outreach and revisit the matter at the next meeting after Mr. Ouellette has had an opportunity to consider the role.

### **Treasurer's Report**

An update was provided regarding previously incorrect W-2 forms issued to Water Department employees. The issue has now been corrected and updated forms are available in the employee portal. Staff are also reviewing alternative payroll vendors, with a goal of transitioning to a new provider by June 30.

Mr. Pirrone reported that financials through January show the fiscal year 58% complete. Tax collections are currently lower due to the timing of the new levy but are expected to increase. Water and ambulance revenues remain strong, including grant funds that will be transferred to special revenue accounts. Expenses are at or below budget, capital project articles remain on track, and the District continues to maintain a strong cash position supported by T-bill and CD investments.

### **Freedom Hall Audio/Visual**

The committee discussed recent Zoom connectivity issues at Freedom Hall. Staff are upgrading Wi-Fi speed from approximately 100 Mbps to 800 Mbps with a new router. A broader review of long-term audio-visual needs will occur after the Annual District Meeting.

### **Emergency Warming Station Discussion**

The committee discussed the potential use of Freedom Hall as a warming/charging station, though the lack of a generator and staffing limited its use during the recent storm. The possibility of using Cotuit Federated Church as an emergency shelter was also mentioned. Members noted potential logistical and legal considerations and agreed the idea warrants further review.

### **Public Comment**

**Water Commissioner Mark Robinson** thanked staff and the Prudential Committee for resolving the payroll issue and noted that corrected W-2 forms are now available through the employee portal. He also stated that Water Commission policy requires permanent irrigation systems to use a private on-site well (estimated \$5,000–\$7,000). It was clarified that irrigation at the Cotuit School site would likely be temporary, with watering provided during a 90-day establishment period and a two-year plant replacement guarantee.

**Carol Zais** suggested using trees and shrubs rather than boulders as a buffer between properties and emphasized that plantings should be native to Cape Cod and drought-tolerant. She also encouraged further consideration of upgrading the Freedom Hall audio-visual system and suggested coordinating with the Barnstable County Health Department and Medical Reserve Corps if a warming shelter is pursued. Mrs. Zais also raised questions regarding proposed enabling legislation allowing district funds to support the Historic Society, noting it has passed the House and is awaiting Senate action. Discussion followed regarding whether another district vote would be required and whether a funding article could be placed on the Annual District Meeting warrant if the legislation is enacted in time.

**Jim R.** expressed concern that the current interpretation of the “return to nature” concept for the former Cotuit School property may be too restrictive. He noted that residents rely on the area for access to the Kettleers field and suggested that a simple porous pathway or bike connection could still be consistent with the return-to-nature intent.

Discussion followed regarding public access, interpretation of the directive, and the possibility of additional public input. It was noted that any changes to the use of the property could be brought forward through future district meeting articles or other public processes.

**Matters not reasonably anticipated by the Chair:**

None discussed.

**Adjournment**

**MOTION: To adjourn.**

**Motion made by: Seth Burdick**

**Seconded by: Mark Lynch**

**Motion passed unanimously. (Mark Lynch, Seth Burdick John Havel)**

Meeting was adjourned at approximately 7:17pm

Respectfully submitted,

*Gina Gonsalves*

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