

**COTUIT FIRE DISTRICT
PRUDENTIAL COMMITTEE MEETING
ZOOM and at Freedom Hall
COTUIT, MA 02635
March 23, 2026**

The meeting was called to order by Mark Lynch at 6:02 pm on March 23, 2026.

Pledge of Allegiance

Chair Lynch led the Pledge of Allegiance.

Chair Lynch did roll call:

Commissioners: Mark Lynch, John Havel

Commissioner Seth Burdick arrived after the start of the meeting due to attendance at a Town Council meeting.

Also present: Treasurer Ray Pirrone and Assistant Treasurer Ryan Ouellette

Public Comment:

Patty Daly stated that the Bylaw Committee's final recommendations are available online and in print and were presented during the agenda item. She noted the committee reviewed other fire district bylaws, particularly on Cape Cod, to identify improvements. Key recommendations included establishing a Records Access Officer, moving the Annual District Meeting to 6:00 PM, publishing voting results sooner, adding 140 Old Oyster Road under Prudential Committee oversight, tabling changes to annual report deadlines, creating a recall provision, and updating the bylaws. All recommendations were unanimously approved by By-Laws Committee. Additional non-bylaw recommendations focused on improving administrative and technical support, expanding communications, enhancing transparency, and placing high-cost warrant articles earlier to increase voter participation.

Lally Lloyd thanked Patty Daly and the Bylaw Committee for their work and for presenting recommendations early to support transparency. She asked whether the recommendations would carry Prudential Committee endorsement, which was deferred to a later agenda item, and sought clarification that her role is limited to moderating rather than handling meeting logistics. She emphasized the need for adequate staff support and was advised to review the bylaws, with an indication that her understanding may be incomplete.

Lisa Vassiloff asked about the deadline for submitting nomination papers, noting the information is needed for publication in *Cotuit Currents*. The Chair responded that this will be addressed under a later agenda item regarding the Clerk.

Meeting Minutes Approval:

MOTION: To approve March 9, 2026, meeting minutes.

Motion made by: Mark Lynch Seconded by: John Havel

Motion passed unanimously. (Mark Lynch, John Havel)

Cotuit School Building Demolition Status Update

The Committee received an update that bids for the Cotuit School Building demolition have been issued and are due Thursday, with approximately 10 contractors having expressed interest. Following review of bidder qualifications, the Committee anticipates holding a meeting on Friday to potentially award the contract to the lowest qualified bidder, pending availability of members.

Historical Society Presentation re: Proposed Enabling Act Change to Allow Taxpayer Funding

The Committee heard a presentation from the Historical Society of Santuit and Cotuit regarding a proposed Enabling Act change to allow taxpayer funding. The Society outlined its operations, recent grant-funded improvements, and an ongoing annual deficit of approximately \$12,000, and requested a \$14,000 appropriation, noting its role as a Cotuit-focused organization similar to the library. It was reported that enabling legislation has been approved by the Legislature and is pending the Governor's signature.

Discussion focused on whether to place the article on the warrant or require a citizen petition, the distinction between placement and endorsement, and concerns about tax impacts and precedent. Mr. Burdick expressed opposition based on fiscal concerns, while other members supported allowing voters to decide. Chair Lynch recommended waiting for final enactment of the legislation, after which proposed warrant language will be submitted for future consideration.

Water Department Accrued Unfunded Sick Days

The Committee reviewed the Water Department's FY budget and accrued sick leave liability, noting a longstanding policy allowing eligible employees to receive 25% of unused sick time. The policy may not have been formally approved and requires ratification, with the liability estimated at approximately \$71,100.

Discussion focused on formalizing and documenting the policy, establishing a funding mechanism, and ensuring proper accounting before taking action.

MOTION: To approve the Water Departments unused accrued sick policy as stated in its current handbook retroactive to January 18, 1995 as amended subject to payment being made the following fiscal year after retirement or death.

**Motion made by: Mark Lynch Seconded by: Seth Burdick
Motion passed unanimously. (Mark Lynch, Seth Burdick John Havel)**

The Committee discussed funding the Water Department's accrued sick leave liability, proposing a stabilization fund to be funded over three years. Concerns were raised about voter approval requirements and accounting treatment. The Committee generally supported the approach, pending updated figures, handbook revisions, and further review of potential liabilities.

MOTION: To establish a designated Water Department Sick Pay Stabilization Fund to pay eligible accrued sick time of the Water Department to be funded over at three-year period.

**Motion made by: Mark Lynch Seconded by: Seth Burdick
Motion passed unanimously. (Mark Lynch, Seth Burdick John Havel)**

The Committee discussed concerns with using a stabilization fund for the Water Department's sick leave liability, noting the two-thirds vote requirement could create a "catch-22." Alternative approaches were considered, but no solution was identified, and further review was requested.

The Committee voted to rescind the prior motion to establish the fund and will revisit the issue after additional research, emphasizing the need for proper resolution and identification of any other unfunded liabilities.

MOTION: To move to rescind the previously voted upon motion to establish a designated water department accrued sick pay stabilization fund to pay eligible accrued sick time of the water department to be funded over a three-year period.

Motion made by: Mark Lynch Seconded by: John Havel

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

Water Department Budget Presentation

The Committee reviewed the Water Department budget, which reflects an overall increase of approximately 6%. Salary costs, which comprise roughly half of the budget, increased by less than 2% and were limited to COLA adjustments, with some savings from staff turnover. Maintenance expenses increased by approximately 24%, driven by higher costs for tank inspections and water meter replacements, while operations rose about 7% due to software, fuel, and general expenses. The Department noted it is self-funded, with revenues of approximately \$1.4 million exceeding the proposed \$993,000 budget, supported by a tiered rate structure. Mr. Pirone reiterated that statement refers to the "operating budget" and that does not include additional costs of Water Department portions of Debt Premium and Retirement Benefits.

Capital planning includes ongoing water main replacements, some involving infrastructure dating back to 1936, as well as future needs such as well cleaning, generator replacement, and cybersecurity upgrades. Long-term considerations include a potential \$20 million water treatment facility. The Department continues to monitor water quality, including PFAS, and is exploring preventative measures, such as septic system improvements, to reduce contamination risks and potentially delay the need for costly treatment infrastructure. The Department remains in compliance with current PFAS standards.

Additional updates included participation in a PFAS-related class action settlement, with approximately \$193,000 received to date to be reserved for future water quality needs. Potential future funding mechanisms for infrastructure were also discussed, though no action was taken.

Clerk Replacement

The Committee discussed the urgent need to appoint a District Clerk and identified **Ryan Ouellette** as the preferred candidate. While noting a steep learning curve, members expressed confidence in his ability with available support.

Compensation was discussed, with a proposal to increase the stipend from approximately \$4,000 to \$6,000 annually. The position is appointed annually, allowing for future adjustments. The Committee generally supported proceeding with the appointment.

MOTION: To appoint Ryan Ouellette as the Clerk of the Cotuit Fire District at a rate of \$6000 per year.

Motion made by: Seth Burdick Seconded by: Mark Lynch

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

The Committee discussed the District Clerk's responsibility to accurately determine and communicate key deadlines (e.g., nomination papers, warrant articles, election timelines), emphasizing the need for accuracy and alignment with bylaws.

Concern was raised about potential liability if incorrect information is provided, and the importance of verifying all dates and including appropriate disclaimers.

A draft election timeline and notice was presented, outlining key deadlines and procedures. The Committee supported public dissemination (e.g., website and public postings), subject to final review and inclusion of disclaimer language.

The discussion underscored the Clerk's critical procedural role and the need for careful attention to detail.

Treasurer's Report

The Treasurer reported no updates on the \$85,000 item, with auditors still reviewing accounts. As of February, revenue is approximately \$400,000 ahead of projections, with tax collections slightly behind but expected to catch up, while expenditures remain below budget, leaving the district about \$1 million favorable.

The Water Department stabilization fund is approximately \$272,000, and capital funds are being actively managed amid project delays. Overall finances are strong, though future budgets may face pressure from rising debt and the pending Fire Department budget.

Fire Union Negotiations

No update was available on fire union negotiations. It was noted that information is expected once negotiations are complete, at which time the Fire Department budget will be finalized.

The Committee briefly discussed scheduling a meeting on Friday evening (approximately 6:00 PM) to review school demolition bids, which are due Thursday.

Proposed Bylaw Changes

The Committee discussed the Bylaw Committee's proposed changes, generally viewing them as minor updates, and considered warrant placement and recommendations. Legal review was requested for certain items, with further consideration deferred and additional recommendations referred to the Policy Advisory Committee.

MOTION: To move to refer the recommendations to the Policy Advisory Committee.

Motion made by: Seth Burdick Seconded by: Mark Lynch

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

Public Comment

Lally Lloyd questioned whether the Bylaw Committee's recommendations must go directly onto the warrant, citing bylaw language suggesting the committee submits recommendations "in the form of articles" for voter consideration, rather than requiring Prudential Committee approval.

Discussion followed regarding whether the Bylaw Committee is advisory or has authority to place articles on the warrant. Members noted that, in practice, recommendations are typically reviewed and placed on the warrant by the Prudential Committee, though this interpretation was questioned.

The issue was identified as requiring further legal clarification, and no final determination was made.

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 8:30pm.

Respectfully submitted,



Gina Gonsalves