



**CONSERVATION COMMISSION
MEETING MINUTES**

Thursday, May 8, 2025 6:30 PM

Annex Meeting Room, Town Hall, 1 Avenue A, Turners Falls and via Zoom

1. ROLL CALL

PRESENT: Mark Fairbrother (Chair), Sean Werle, Margaux Reckard, Justin Fermann, Al Averill, Toby Carter, Donna Francis, Anthony Reiber. (8)

STAFF: Maureen Pollock, (Staff Liaison, Planner/Conservation Agent)

ALSO PRESENT:

- Brett Grout, JWO Transit Center Facility Manager, Franklin Regional Transit Authority
- Michael Perreault, Deputy Administrator, Franklin Regional Transit Authority
- Andy Bridges, Community Relations Director, FirstLight Power
- Brian Wood, Senior Land Manager, FirstLight Power

2. MINUTES:

- a. Approval of Meeting Minutes from April 10, 2025 –

Moved by J. Fermann, seconded by D. Francis, and voted 8-0 to approve the meeting minutes from April 10, 2025.

3. PUBLIC MEETING:

- a. **RDA #2025-02 - Request for Determination of Applicability, filed by Brett Grout c/o Franklin Regional Transit Authority**, to determine whether the construction of an 14' x 20' concrete block, for a covered salt storage shed, within 100-foot buffer zone at 3 Sandy Lane (Parcel #21-0-149) is subject to the Wetlands Protection Act.

Brett Grout informs the Commission that FTRA is using more road salt than previously estimated. They use bagged pelletized salt, which is very expensive. They proposed building a salt storage facility on two paved parking spots at the Sandy Lane facility. The parking lot is curbed. The salt will be used on site and trucked to the Transit Center in Greenfield

The Agent shows the map of Sandy Lane and the wetland location.

The plan is to use three courses of 6' x 6' x 2' block on three sides with a covered

(canvas) top set directly on the asphalt. An image is provided. It would hold 30 tons of salt, which with last FRTA about two years.

A. Reiber describes the site visit as “straight forward” as long as the salt stays dry.

Justin Fermann asks about the weight of salt. Will it change the runoff? Grout responds that the corner of the lot is a high spot and rated for the weight of a bus. He does not see the asphalt or subbase failing.

Photos of the site visit are viewed and discussed, including the infiltration basin. Runoff leaches in the ground and south into the wetlands.

The agent asks what happens if salt is left outside the structure. Grout responds that salt is too expensive to leave in piles outside storage. The operator would “clean up the mess” J. Fermann remarks that all the salt will eventually end up in as runoff whether storage, overflow or onsite usage. Grout agrees, “whether they buy it in bags or bulk.”

The Agent asks Grout if he considered another location for the salt storage. He mentioned that there is another site that’s outside of the buffer zone, but it is not prepared and would cost another 20k. That location would also affect the traffic pattern of buses.

The Agent asks if there is an advantage of having a “shield” to prevent salt from going over the curb by accident. Grout asks the Agent if she is asking about the ramifications of flooding or operator error. The Agent responds “both”. Grout responds that the high spot is another benefit of the proposed location and it’s more of an issue that the ground doesn’t hold water; it’s very sandy.

The Agent asks the Commission for suggested conditions. M. Reckard proposes signage that “the salt remains in the storage facility” or similar. Grout responds that the operators will be trained. The Agent thinks that signage is reasonable.

General conversation about the pros and cons of having a front on the proposed structure. Grout thinks that the east side opening is ideal and doesn’t need a front panel.

Moved by J. Fermann, seconded by M. Reckard, and voted 8-0 for a Box 3 Negative Determination to FRTA for the work described in the Request is within the Buffer Zone, as defined in the regulations, but will not alter an Area subject to jurisdiction under the Act. Therefore, said work does not require the filing of a Notice of Intent, subject to the following conditions:

- 1. Salt shall not be stored outside of the salt storage structure.*
- 2. The applicant shall post a permanent sign on the salt storage structure that states "Salt shall not be stored outside of the salt storage structure."*

- b. RDA #2024-07 – First Light Power** – For the review and approval of the submitted planting plan & list, pursuant to condition 1, from the previously issued Negative Determination #2, located at landscape garden beds at the **Turners Falls Fishway, 2**

Gatehouse Drive (Parcel #04-0-0005) and 0 First Street (Parcel #04-0-0007)

FirstLight representative Brian Wood reports that “the invasives” have been removed and he shares his thoughts on plantings. Native plants will have all-year interest have been selected. The planting, created by Snow & Sons will be no taller than about 3-4 feet to keep the view of the water open to the public. One tree was removed and will be replaced. Public art created by the Franklin Technical School will be incorporated.

The Agent thinks the scheme is a “thoughtful variety” of flowers and shrubs. She appreciated the effort, especially the work with the Tech School.

Moved by M. Reckard, seconded by J. Fermann, and voted 8-0 to approve the planting plan & list, as submitted.

FirstLight will be hosting a “ribbon cutting” on Wednesday, May 14 at 10am.

4. NEW BUSINESS:

- a. Announce receipt of Massachusetts Executive Office of Energy & Environmental Affairs Planning Grant of \$34,000** – The Town has been awarded this grant for technical assistance in preparing the Town’s ten-year Open Space and Recreation Plan (OSRP). The Town’s 2017 OSRP Plan is now expired.

The Open Space and Recreation Plan (OSRP) is a ten-year action plan to manage, protect, and improve Montague’s conservation and recreation resources. This plan is informed by a community engagement process to ensure it reflects the needs and interests of our community. Once a new plan is complete and approved by the Massachusetts Executive Office of Energy and Environmental Affairs (EOEEA) Division of Conservation Services (DCS), Montague becomes eligible to apply for a variety of grants to help fund the implementation of the plan. Both the Planning & Conservation Department and Recreation Departments are responsible for updating the plan every ten years and overseeing its implementation. To learn more about the Massachusetts Executive Office of Energy & Environmental Affairs Planning Assistance Grant, visit: <https://www.mass.gov/info-details/planning-assistance-grants>. To learn more about stat’s guidance on Open Space and Recreation Plan: <https://www.mass.gov/info-details/open-space-and-recreation-plans>. Click here access the Town’s now expired 2017 OSRP Plan: https://montague-ma.gov/files/2017_Montague_Open_Space_Recreation_Plan.pdf

- b.** Announce notification of 2025 Yearly Operational Plan & Vegetation Management Plan for: New England Central Railroad; and Berkshire & Eastern Railroad. The Commission received a letter sent by regular mail stating that yearly herbicide application of the New England Central Railroad; and Berkshire & Eastern Railroad will occur between May 1 and the end of October. The Agent has been in touch with Keith Morris and requested an ariel map of the area impacted.
- c.** Possible canoe/kayak access proposal at 0 Meadow Road (Parcel #50-0-2A) – An initial site visit is scheduled at 9:30am on May 15, 2025 to look at the site explore possible design &

permits needed. Residents have asked Mount Grace about using the “Dr. Ross” property about river access. A NOI would need to be submitted to the Town. The Agent suggested that Mount Grace hire a qualified agent to draw up the plans. The Agent is willing to suggest possible grants for the project to Mount Grace. T. Carter suggests the Connecticut River Conservancy and Appalachian Mountain Club.

General conversation about river access.

- d. Connecticut River Flood Resilience Roundtable Series** - The Franklin Regional Council of Governments (FRCOG) in collaboration with the Pioneer Valley Planning Commission (PVPC) are organizing a series of 7 meetings for Connecticut River communities on flood resilience. The aim of these meetings is for communities to share on flood challenges, learn from experts and one another, and then explore opportunities for a more holistic and integrated response to flooding. Conservation Commission members are encouraged to attend.

The Montague Conservation Commission is invited to this group of meetings. The Agent attends meetings and will be keeping the Select Board updated on FEMA designated flood plains. Data from Montague City projects that waterflow will increase 2-3 feet in the next x-years; the Hadley levee will overflow. Hatfield is thinking about relocating municipal buildings because of flooding.

Roundtable Series 2025

- Meeting #1 – Thursday, April 24, 9:30 to noon - Connecticut River communities sharing on flood resilience challenges and responses
- Meeting #2 – Thursday, May 8, 9:30 to noon - Status of current and projected flood flow mapping for Hampden, Hampshire, and Franklin counties and recommendations in the meantime
- Meeting #3 – Thursday, May 29, 9:30 to noon - The role of floodplains and wetlands: Are there ways these natural assets can help us become more flood resilient and what might be needed to enhance function and protection?
- Meeting #4 – Thursday, October 23, 9:30 to noon - Strengths and vulnerabilities of the Army Corps of Engineers flood management system in the upper Connecticut River watershed
- Meeting #5 – Thursday, November 13, 9:30 to noon - Learning from Vermont: flood resilience response and nature-based solutions in the wake of devastating events.

Roundtable Series 2026

- Meeting #6 – Thursday, January 22, 9:30 to noon - Tools and lessons from project work on the Deerfield River
- Meeting #7 – Thursday, February 26, 9:30 to noon – Sharing from community listening sessions and identifying where there may be opportunities to form a more holistic and integrated response.

5. OLD BUSINESS:

- a. Project Update regarding Power Canal Left Dike Seepage Management System**
Remaining work: RDA #2023-06 - Previously issued Negative Determination #5 to FirstLight Power Services LLC (applicant) for the project at Cabot Station Power Canal Left Dike off of Montague City Road and Cabot Street.

FirstLight representative Andy Bridges gives an update on the Canal Left Dike off of Montague City Road and Cabot Street on May 12 and will need to close the bike path until the work is complete – estimate is 2-4 weeks. Construction was not completed in the fall of 2024 and straw was installed. On Monday, May 12 the project will resume. The bike path will be closed again, and material will be trucked in for the top layer. The system is currently working, and the volume of water isn't changing. Given the weather pattern, the project should be completed in four weeks. The public has been notified in local newspapers about the closure between Eleventh Street and Depot Street.

- b. Falls Farm Violations**– Old Sunderland Road (Parcels #50-0-18), property owner: James Arcoleo; Old Sunderland Road (Parcel #50-0-05, property owner: Falls Farm LLC; and Meadow Road (Parcel #50-0-04), Montague, Property owner: Falls Farm LLC

Nothing to report.

6. OTHER BUSINESS NOT ANTICIPATED WITHIN 48 HOURS:

The Agent is exploring a possible wetlands violation on Rod Shop Road.

7. ADJOURN:

MOTION by A. Reiber to Adjourn. Seconded by T Carter. VOTE: Mark Fairbrother (AYE), Toby Carter (AYE), Anthony Reiber (AYE), Sean Werle (AYE), Margaux Reckard (AYE), Justin Fermann (AYE), Al Averill (AYE), Donna Francis (AYE). MOTION PASSES (8-0) 7:34pm