



TOWN OF
MONTAGUE
MASSACHUSETTS

TOWN HALL
One Avenue A
Turners Falls, MA 01376

CONSERVATION COMMISSION
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CONSERVATION COMMISSION
APPROVED MEETING MINUTES

Thursday, March 12, 2026, 6:30 PM
Annex Meeting Room, Town Hall and via Zoom
Meeting was recorded

6:31PM: ROLL CALL PRESENT: Mark Fairbrother (Chair), Al Averill, Anthony Reiber, Sean Werle, Justin Fermann, Toby Carter, Donna Francis, Margaux Reckard. ABSENT: Donna Francis
STAFF: Maureen Pollock (Staff Liaison, Planner/Conservation Agent)
ALSO PRESENT: Andy Brydges (FirstLight Power), Matt Wagner (Tighe & Bond)

ROLL CALL:

MOTION by M. Reckard to accept the meeting minutes from November 13, 2025. Seconded by A. Reiber. VOTE: Fairbrother (AYE), Averill (AYE), Reiber (AYE), Werle (AYE), Fermann (AYE), Carter (AYE), Reckard (AYE). MOTION PASSES (8-0) 6:34pm.

MOTION by M. Reckard to accept the meeting minutes from January 26, 2025. Seconded by A. Reiber. VOTE Mark Fairbrother (AYE), Averill (AYE), Reiber (AYE), Werle (AYE), Fermann (AYE), Carter (AYE), Reckard (AYE). MOTION PASSES (8-0) 6:36pm.

PUBLIC MEETING:

EmergCert 2026-01 – FirstLight Power Services LLC – Request an approval of an Emergency Certification for emergency spill response in accordance with the Massachusetts Contingency Plan (MCP; 310 CMR 40.0000) as per the direction of MassDEP Bureau of Waste Site Cleanup at Turners Falls Dam, 1 Gatehouse Avenue, Turners Falls within 100-foot buffer zone and 200-foot Riverfront Area.

The Conservation Agent gives an overview of the situation; on Tuesday March 3, 2026 she received an email from Matt Wagner (Tighe & Bond) on behalf of First Light Power informing the Town of a hydraulic fluid release from one or more of the pistons at Turners Falls dam. Repair work began on March 4, 2026, and DEP was notified. The Agent, in consultation with the Chair Mark Fairbrother, signed an emergency certificate for the repair work. The Agent recommends one condition related to weekly reports about the progress of First Light’s responsive actions. Mass Division of Fishery and Wildlife Natural Heritage and Endangered Species was informed of the hydraulic oil leak and the repair work in progress.

Andy Brydges (FirstLight Power) and Matt Wagner (Tighe& Bond) are in attendance and address the Commission. Brydges reviews the timeline of events: an oil sheen was observed near piston 4 and

reported to DEP on February 25, 2026. A subcontractor, JF Brennon, was hired to spread sand on the footpath. Ice was power washed off pistons 7 and 8. Packing was injected into the pistons after the ice melted and FirstLight deployed a harbor boom with absorbent pads on the upstream side of the water which were left in place until the oil is washed out of the ice.

The Agent asks when the project will be finished. Matt Wagner answers that the emergency certificate is good for 60 days and they are monitoring oil trapped in the ice. The Agent will receive weekly communication about the river and boom conditions. If the project goes past 60 days FirstLight will seek additional approval from the Commission. Andy Brydges comments that power washing the pistons has been effective. FirstLight has been replacing pistons since 2023 and will continue to do so. Images of the ice, location of sand, and boom are shown and described. There is no impact on the fish ladder.

M. Reckard asks for FirstLight's plan to monitor after the 60 days (April 26). Brydges replies that the pistons are monitored multiple times a week, if not daily, and every time they add hydraulic oil to the system regardless of the project. Reckard rephrases her question, "You said that you were going to keep an eye on the boom and replace it with new absorbent pads as needed. Is that going to continue after the 60 days, if needed." Brydges replies yes and this information will be included in the weekly monitoring reports.

A. Reiber asks that since oil leaks seems to be a regular (winter) issue, "are there proactive measures that FirstLight can take?" Brydges answers that deploying the booms before the winter doesn't work because they get frozen onto the ice. Reiber asks if/ how they monitor the amount of hydraulic oil used. Brydges responds "yes" and it is normal to replace hydraulic fluid in the reservoir tank and it is monitored daily.

The Agent asks the Commission to review the Special Condition in emergency conditions. Reckard comments that the language is generally fine; the applicant is required to seek another emergency certificate before it expires in 60 days.

MOTION by Averill to approve EmergCert 2026-01 – FirstLight Power Services LLC – Request an approval of an Emergency Certification for emergency spill response in accordance with the Massachusetts Contingency Plan (MCP; 310 CMR 40.0000) as per the direction of MassDEP Bureau of Waste Site Cleanup at Turners Falls Dam, 1 Gatehouse Avenue, Turners Falls within 100-foot buffer zone and 200-foot Riverfront Area. Seconded by M. Reckard. VOTE Mark Fairbrother (AYE), Averill (AYE), Reiber (AYE), Werle (AYE), Fermann (AYE), Carter (AYE), Reckard (AYE). MOTION PASSES (8-0) 6:56pm.

Brydges comments that when the pistons are all replaced, FirstLight will change to an environmentally friendly oil.

The Agent and Chair Mark Fairbrother review the reasons why the Town issued an emergency certificate rather than going through the NOI process.

PUBLIC HEARING:

NOI #2026-01/DEP #229-0268 – Skyjac Realty, Inc. – Request an approval of a Notice of Intent for wetland delineation; removal of concrete piles, brush, stump, and wood debris; and proposed restoration plan at Rod Shop Road (Parcel #12-0-052) within the 100-foot buffer zone and 200-foot Riverfront Area. CONTINUED FROM JANUARY 26, 2026

The Agent reports that the applicant submitted updated plans, however verifying wetland flagging is difficult with the snow; the applicant is agreeable to move the hearing until 6:30pm on April 9, 2026. There will be a site visit before the April meeting.

MOTION by S. Werle to CONTINUE NOI #2026-01/DEP #229-0268 – Skyjac Realty, Inc. – Request an approval of a Notice of Intent for wetland delineation; removal of concrete piles, brush, stump, and wood debris; and proposed restoration plan at Rod Shop Road (Parcel #12-0-052) within the 100-foot buffer zone and 200-foot Riverfront Area, to April 9, 2026. Seconded by J. Fermann. VOTE Mark Fairbrother (AYE), Averill (AYE), Reiber (AYE), Werle (AYE), Fermann (AYE), Carter (AYE), Reckard (AYE). MOTION PASSES (8-0) 7:05pm

Discussion about scheduling numerous site visits for the April 9 meeting. A site visit for NOI 2026-01 is scheduled for Monday, April 6, 2026, at 4pm. The Chestnut Hill area site visits are scheduled for the morning of Tuesday, April 7, 2026. The Agent will confirm times and dates with Commissioners.

NEW BUSINESS:

Upcoming joint meeting with the Conservation Commission and the Parks & Recreation Commission at 6:00pm on Thursday, April 2 via Zoom to discuss the draft Open Space & Recreation Plan. The Agent will email the draft plan to the Commission for comments.

MOTION by M. Fairbrother TO ADJOURN by Seconded by S. Werle. VOTE: Mark Fairbrother (AYE), Averill (AYE), Reiber (AYE), Werle (AYE), Fermann (AYE), Carter (AYE), Reckard (AYE). MOTION PASSES (8-0) 7:22pm.