

North River Commission – Minutes

Meeting #618 – February 26, 2026 – Norwell Town Offices, 93 Longwater Circle, Norwell, MA

Present: Boulter (Pembroke), Jones (Hanover), Heine (Hanson), Cyrus (Marshfield – A), Gallagher (Scituate), Lalone (Scituate – A)

Absent: Butler (Hanover – A), Leonard (Marshfield), Lynch (Norwell), Simpson (Norwell – A), Kemmett (Hanson – A), Conway (Scituate – A)

1. Special Permit Application – 89 Neal Gate Street, Scituate (Hoffman)

Request: Raze and rebuild an existing single-family dwelling.

Presentation: James Garfield of Morse Engineering appeared on behalf of applicants Justin and Andrea Hoffman. Mr. Garfield presented revised architectural and site plans that had been prepared following discussion at the Commission’s January 22, 2026 meeting. The applicant explained that the proposed dwelling replaces an existing structure and is intended to modernize the residence while maintaining compatibility with the surrounding riverfront setting. The revised design modifies roof geometry and building massing to ensure the height of the proposed structure remains below the Commission’s 35-foot maximum height limitation. Mr. Garfield reviewed plan sheets showing existing and proposed grade elevations, building sections, and the relationship of the proposed house to the river corridor.

Discussion: Commission members reviewed the revised elevations and discussed how building height was calculated relative to existing grade and the natural bank of the North River. Questions were raised regarding the visibility of the structure from the river and whether the revised roofline sufficiently reduced the apparent mass of the building when viewed from the water. Commissioners also discussed the orientation of exterior stairways and decks and whether additional landscaping or screening might help soften views from the corridor. Members generally agreed that the revised design addressed the primary height concerns raised at the prior hearing. The Commission asked Mr. Garfield to provide a rear-facing elevation overlay with the existing structure cross-hatched against the proposed structure, along with the square footage of the existing rear face, the proposed rear face, and the percentage of the increase. The members discussed a conditional framework upon which approval could be granted without requiring an additional meeting.

Action: Motion to approve the Special Permit contingent upon submission of plans/documentation that demonstrate compliance with the 35’ structure height standard and visual impact massing calculations demonstrating a visual impact increase that does not exceed 25%. – Vote 5-0.

2. Special Permit Application – 22 Barry’s Landing, Scituate (D’Argento)

Request: Addition to existing dwelling. (Continued from January 22, 2026) A notice requesting the hearing be continued to the May 2026 meeting has been received.

Note: The Commission revisited the application, considering commission members reports that vegetation had been cut within the regulated riverfront area during the pendency of the application. Commission members expressed concern that the vegetation cutting may have occurred in a manner inconsistent with the vegetative cutting standards established in the North River Protective Order. Members discussed the importance of maintaining vegetative screening along the river corridor to preserve scenic and ecological values. Commissioners considered appropriate next steps, including documenting the observed cutting, notifying the contractor responsible for the work and a Cease & Desist Order. Members also discussed whether restoration planting or other corrective measures might ultimately be required.

Action: Motion to send correspondence to the tree company responsible for the vegetative cutting and to issue a Cease & Desist Order to the property owner. (Jones/Heine) – Vote 5-0

3. Request for Determination – 14 Damon’s Point Road, Marshfield (McCarthy)

Request: Phragmites removal.

Presentation: Margaret O’Brien of CRC Environmental appeared on behalf of the applicant and described a proposal to treat approximately 0.1 acres of invasive Phragmites australis located along the bank of Macombers Creek. Ms. O’Brien explained that the invasive reed has spread within the wetland fringe and is displacing native marsh vegetation. The treatment is planned over three years, primarily in year one, and as needed in subsequent years. The proposed project would involve targeted herbicide treatment applied directly to the invasive plants during the appropriate growing season, followed by monitoring of the site to encourage natural recolonization by native species. Native vegetation is expected to return; if recovery is slow, supplemental native seeding may be added.

Discussion: Commission members asked questions regarding the specific treatment methodology, including the type of herbicide to be used, application technique, and timing of the treatment. Discussion also addressed the limited size of the proposed treatment area and the likelihood that follow-up monitoring and additional treatment cycles might be required in future growing seasons. Members noted that invasive species control projects can provide ecological benefits when properly managed and coordinated with local conservation authorities. Members expressed strong support for the project, indicating that removal of invasive phragmites is beneficial to the North River Corridor and ecosystem.

Action: Motion to determine that the proposed Phragmites treatment constitutes an allowed use under the Protective Order. (Gallager/Heine) – Vote 5-0.

4. Special Permit Application – 16 River Road, Hanover (Lipowski)

Request: Additions and repair/expansion of an existing single-family dwelling.

Presentation: Nick Leing of Grady Consulting appeared on behalf of the applicants and presented plans describing proposed renovation and expansion of the existing residence. The project includes reconstruction of an existing sunroom area, repairs to the structure, and installation of a new exterior stairway and balcony improvements intended to provide safer access to the rear portion of the dwelling. The existing sunroom setback is approximately 57 feet from the natural bank; the proposed expansion would bring the closest setback to approximately 53 feet – a reduction of 4 feet. The overall change is predominantly a lateral expansion along the existing structure’s face, with the house not extending any wider in plan. Existing foundation supports under the balcony will be replaced using helical piers or similar method. Plan sheets showing existing and proposed conditions were reviewed with the Commission.

Discussion: Commission members discussed the proximity of the proposed improvements to the natural bank of the North River and whether any portions of the project extended closer to the river than existing structures. Members reviewed setback distances and noted that portions of the improvements appear to occur within previously developed areas of the lot. Members confirmed that the structure is already non-conforming with respect to setback and noted that the proposal extends the non-conformity only marginally, and primarily in a lateral direction. The Commission was satisfied that the project does not substantially increase massing as viewed from the river.

Action: Motion to approve the Special Permit for additions and repairs at 16 River Road, Hanover as presented. (Heine/Gallagher) – Vote 5-0.

5. Special Permit Application – 78 Stony Brook Lane, Norwell (Robinson)

Request: Raze and rebuild an existing single-family dwelling.

Presentation: Attorney Jeff DeLisi, Engineer Dillon Brady of Grady Consulting, Builder Brian Greenberg appeared with the applicant Caitlin Robinson and presented plans to raze the existing dwelling, which dates to approximately 1963, and an accessory garage and construct a new single-family residence on the property. The existing structures are non-conforming with respect to Natural Bank setbacks. Mr. DeLisi reviewed the proposed building footprint, site layout, and relationship of the proposed structure to nearby resource areas and the North River corridor. The proposed structure would be approximately 12 feet further from the Natural Bank than the existing dwelling. An environmentally superior septic system is proposed as well as a native vegetation buffer strip. The new residence is intended to replace the aging structure while providing updated living space and a multi-generational home environment for the lifelong care of a child’s medical issues.

Discussion: A lengthy discussion followed regarding the Commission’s visual massing policy and its application to this project. Commission members discussed the proposed location of the new structure relative to the natural bank and considered the visibility of the proposed house from the river corridor. Commission members noted that razing the existing house and garage and constructing a larger single building in their place, including filling the gap between them, would significantly increase the visual massing as viewed from the river. The engineer presented calculations estimating an approximately 22% increase in massing if the gap between the two existing structures is included in the existing baseline footprint, and a substantially higher percentage if it is not. Considerable discussion ensued regarding whether the space between two buildings on the same lot should be included in the existing massing baseline. Members noted the Commission policy that additions to pre-existing structures may not increase visual massing from the river by more than 25%. Attorney DeLisi suggested that the 25% figure is a policy guideline rather than a mandatory provision of the Protective Order itself, and that the Commission retains discretion under the Order’s criteria to evaluate visual corridor impairment holistically, considering distance from the river, natural screening, orientation, and other factors. Members also discussed the location of existing accessory structures, driveway configuration, and potential landscaping measures that could help reduce visual impacts. Commission members acknowledged the project’s environmental benefits – moving structures further from the natural bank, improving the septic system, and adding native vegetation – while expressing the need for a more detailed visual representation of the proposed building before a decision could be made. The Commission requested that the applicant return with refined architectural renderings of the proposed structure as viewed from the river, massing calculations presented with and without inclusion of the gap between the existing structures and additional information regarding the Attorney DeLisi’s characterization of the massing percentage increase guideline relative to the language of the Protective Order.

Action: Motion to continue the hearing to the March 26, 2026 meeting. (Heine/Gallagher) – Vote 5-0.

6. New Business

Certificate of Compliance Request – 81 Kings Landing, Norwell: The Commission reviewed a request for a Certificate of Compliance associated with previously approved work at the property and discussed coordination with staff regarding completion of the documentation.

Approval of Minutes: Motion to approve the minutes of the January 22, 2026 meeting as written. (Heine/Lalone) – Vote 5-0.

Administrator’s Report: Administrator was absent from the meeting. Members reviewed the Administrator job description and contractual terms, noting that the existing language may require updating to reflect current responsibilities.

7. General / Old Business / Open Discussion

Proposed Float By-Law Update: The Commission discussed scheduling continuation of the public hearing regarding the proposed float by-law update and noted that an additional hearing date would be required. Motion to reschedule the Float By-Law Public Hearing. (Heine/Lalone) – Vote 5-0.

Adjournment

Motion to adjourn the meeting. (Heine/Gallager) – Vote 5-0.

Minutes prepared by: Gary Wolcott, Administrator