

**PARK AND RECREATION COMMISSION
TOWN OF NEEDHAM, MASSACHUSETTS**

**Minutes of Meeting
September 29, 2020**

PRESENT: Cynthia J. Chaston, Christopher J. Gerstel, Michelle S. Geddes, Bruce R. Williams ,
Matthew M. Toolan

STAFF: Stacey Mulroy, Kristen Wright

GUESTS: Charlie MacDonald

Ms. Chaston called the meeting to order at 7:02 PM remotely using Zoom. Ms. Chaston read a statement regarding public meeting process due to COVID-19.

1. Open Forum – Public Comment

None presented

3B. Facilities: Greene’s Field & Saint Joe’s

Ms. Mulroy asked to take an agenda item out of order. Mr. Toolan noted that he is a member of the Saint Joe’s Parish and that his children did not attend St. Joe’s school. Ms. Chaston also noted that she is a member of St. Joe’s and her adult children previously attended St. Joe’s during their early education.

Ms. Mulroy gave a brief description about the request made by St. Joe’s to utilize Greene’s Field this year. Ms. Mulroy stated that the schools have now submitted the forms after they already have notable been utilizing the space without a permit but have remained off the field since they were notified that there were more steps in the process that needed to be address before a permit could be issued.

Ms. Chaston noted that in the past the field has not been permitted for the schools daily used but has approved an annual special event held in the Spring. Ms. Chaston reviewed the Commissions permitting process and the steps that have already been considered for this Fall season, including that other permits for field space has been permitted. Ms. Chaston noted that not only is there a concern that the proper paperwork, including liability insurance, has not been received but also that the field is suffering damage that will force the field to fail and must be closed to all user groups if the use is not scaled down.

Mr. MacDonald introduced himself as the representative of the school for the purpose of this meeting and discussed with the Commission the reason the request was made and the difficulties the school is facing due to the limited amount of space they have and the COVID19 restrictions that are in place. Mr. MacDonald reviewed the request being made.

Mr. Gerstel asked about the plan to fix the ventilation of the indoor gym space. Mr. MacDonald stated that right now there is a future plan but nothing that can be accomplished quickly.

Ms. Geddes reviewed the request and noted that it was a significant amount of time spent on the fields. Mr. MacDonald discussed the changes to the schedule that they are using. Ms. Geddes asked what would be done if the field space was not available. Mr. MacDonald discussed the other thoughts that have gone into identifying the possible solution.

Mr. Toolan asked Ms. Mulroy what current permitted activity is scheduled on Greene's. Ms. Mulroy identified what permits were already issued. Mr. Toolan stated that his question was more about volume. Ms. Wright stated that with the current protocols that the YMCA is following no more than 50 participants will be on the field at any given time with a reduced number of spectators and that the classes that are held during the week are much less impactful and allow time for the field to rest and allows time for general standard maintenance to occur on the field throughout the week.

Ms. Chaston stated that while the Commission supports the students getting out, there are several issues that arise from this request of additional use, not limited to that St. Joe's is not a non-profit sports organization, that the field is already permitted to a group that followed the policy and process as it stands, and the fact that the Superintendent of Parks and Forestry has grave concerns about the field failing soon due to overuse.

Mr. Gerstel shared two other items including the user fee that is associated with utilizing the fields that would have to be addressed and the cohorts as listed on the request would have to be adjusted in a way that they would be limited to no more than 10 students per group to comply with the standards that have been implemented and approved by the Needham Board of Health.

Mr. Williams stated that where the field is already permitted that it may be in the best interest for St. Joe's to utilize the space that they have more effectively. Mr. MacDonald added that the primary focus is to be able to facilitate physical education classes. Ms. Mulroy suggested that perhaps one PE class a day could be facilitated at Greene's Field but the ultimate decision would be made by the Commission. Mr. MacDonald stated that even one class a day would be beneficial.

Mr. Toolan asked if something could be facilitated on just the basketball court or the playground area to give access for outdoor play. Ms. Geddes stated that she would be more comfortable with using more of the field instead of blocking access to the playground as it is heavily used.

Ms. Chaston suggested that Ms. Mulroy works with Mr. MacDonald to work out any solution, noting there would be a fee associated with the use. Ms. Chaston stated that if this is an ask in future seasons that they come to the Commission much sooner in the process. Mr. Toolan agreed with the suggestion. Mr. Gerstel, Ms. Geddes, and Mr. Williams also agreed with the suggestion.

Ms. Chaston thanked Mr. MacDonald for attending the meeting and for working with Director.

The Commission further discussed the permitting process and thoughts about future updates of the current policies.

2. Director's Report

Ms. Mulroy reviewed the Director's Report.

The Commission and the staff discussed the trash at the fields and the need to keep getting the message out about making sure trash makes it into the receptacles. The Commission and staff also discussed engaging the High School students to help and encourage solutions.

Mr. Gerstel discussed the updates to the Park and Recreation CPC applications.

3A. Projects

Boat Launch

No updates presented.

Walker Pond

Ms. Chaston stated that the project will be going to the Conservation Commission to discuss the scope.

Rail Trail

Ms. Mulroy stated that she will be gathering the Advisory Committee soon. Ms. Mulroy stated that she is working with Youth and Family Services, with the blessing of the Select Board to create positive graffiti on the fences.

Open Space & Recreation Plan

No updates presented.

3B. Facilities

Skate Park

Ms. Mulroy stated that while there were great intentions but after speaking with the Parks team, it seems that there may be some major wear and tear. Ms. Mulroy plans to take a look at it soon.

Tennis Courts & Basketball Courts

Ms. Mulroy stated that she and the Superintendent of Parks and Forestry will be working on putting together maintenance plans.

3C. Events

1775 Walk – April 2021

Ms. Mulroy stated that a meeting will be held in November/December to discuss the event.

4A. Meeting Minutes

Mr. Gerstel made a motion to approve the minutes of the June 22, 2020 meeting. Ms. Geddes seconded the motion and it passed, 4 – 0 – 1.

4B. Program Pricing

Mr. Gerstel made a motion to approve the program fees as submitted. Mr. Toolan seconded the motion and it passed, 5 – 0.

5. Upcoming Commission Meeting

The Commission reviewed the upcoming meeting dates.

6. Issues Not Reasonably Anticipated by Chair within 48 Hours

The Commission and staff discussed the typical fall events that the Department offers and how they can still hold a safe version of them as well as getting some information out about safely trick-or-treating in Town.

Ms. Mulroy stated that the Boosters have reached out about holding their Annual Christmas Tree Sale.

7. Adjournment of Business Meeting

Mr. Toolan moved to adjourn the September 29, 2020 Park and Recreation Commission meeting at 8:33pm. Mr. Gerstel seconded the motion and the meeting adjourned at 8:33pm.