

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

**Minutes of Meeting
October 21, 2013**

PRESENT: Michael J. Retzky, Chairman
Cynthia J. Chaston, Vice Chairman
David C. DiCicco, Member
Thomas M. Jacob, Member
Matthew M. Toolan, Member
Patricia M. Carey, Director
Karen A. Peirce, Assistant Director

GUESTS: Bob Cohen, Resident
Dan Shapiro, Heather Yountz, Susan Owen, Rachel Miller, Michael Miller, Ed Jacobs, Benjamin Spector, Rhonda Spector- Cricket Neighbors
Rick Lunetta, Resident
Katy Dirks, Needham Community Center

The meeting convened at 8:01PM in the Charles River Room located in the Public Services Administration Building.

1. Action Items

A. Hillside/Mitchell Pre-Feasibility Study (Cricket): Mr. Retzky welcomed everyone to the meeting to discuss the Hillside Mitchell Pre-Feasibility Study. Cricket neighbor Dan Shapiro spoke about Cricket Field as an historical treasure and an important green space for all residents, not just people living in the neighborhood. He noted the Park and Recreation Commission members are correct to protect the green space. He is in support of a school but does not support spending town money studying a parcel of land that should be preserved as green space. Cricket Field should not be an option for a school building.

Ms. Carey shared a copy of the petition received by fax in support of keeping Cricket Field as an option for the feasibility study. During the meeting, Cricket neighbor Sue Owen handed Ms. Carey a petition from the Save Cricket Field group.

Mrs. Chaston stated that her responsibility as a Commission member is to preserve and protect green space. She is a proponent of rebuilding or renovating Hillside and Mitchell schools but not at Cricket..

Mr. DiCicco stated, as a Hillside parent for many years, he was disappointed by the misinformation about the Hillside building that was being shared by some Hillside parents. He believes that if the environmental concerns are addressed, a new school can be built on the Hillside site. He also believes in preserving the limited green space in Needham Heights. Removing Cricket Field from use will impact many youth and High School programs which will then create overcrowding on other fields. He noted he is pleased that many of the Selectmen understand the importance of Cricket Field. He supports saving Cricket Field.

Mr. Toolan expressed his concern that there already is limited field space and if Cricket becomes a school site it will affect the entire town. He supports Cricket Field remaining as a park.

Mr. Jacob recalled that when he was elected to the Park and Recreation Commission, Greene's Field was the topic of discussion for a senior center. At that time, the Park and Recreation Commission worked to keep Greene's Field a park for all to enjoy. The senior center ultimately found another solution and he hopes the same can be done for Hillside School. He recognizes the expense of building a new school and needing additional funds that are not reimbursable from the state to provide swing spaces during the construction period. Cricket is not the solution. DeFazio Park's renovation was designed knowing that there was always the possibility of building a school within the parking lot which was supported by the Commission. He suggests the School Committee look at DeFazio Park as an option since it was part of the original Kaestle-Boos and the DiNisco Town-wide facility studies. In the pre-feasibility study, many properties were initially removed from the list of options because of environmental issues and other barriers, including legal obstacles. Tonight, he proposed that Cricket Field be taken off the list of locations to be included in the feasibility study.

Mr. Retzky stated he has been troubled by this project since the beginning. Cricket has never been available and should never have been considered for a school site. He believes no board has the right to strip another board of its mission and beliefs. He is supportive of the school improvements that have been proposed but he is disappointed by the division that has been created by including Cricket Field as an option.

Mr. Jacob made a motion that Town properties under the jurisdiction of the Needham Park and Recreation Commission including Cricket Field are not available for study or use by another town boards or committees without express written permission of the Parks and Recreation Commission. Mrs. Chaston seconded the motion and the motion was approved unanimously.

Mr. Jacob made a motion to maintain and preserve Cricket Field in its current use as a park under the sole jurisdiction of the Park and Recreation Commission. Mr. DiCicco seconded the motion and the motion was approved unanimously.

Ms. Carey noted the Board of Selectmen will be meeting on Tuesday, October 22 and the Hillside/Mitchell Feasibility Study discussion should be presented at approximately 8:00PM. Mr. DiCicco, Mr. Jacob and Ms. Carey will attend.

Mr. Jacob asked if the Park and Recreation Commission would support a study of DeFazio Park for a school site if the Hillside site is not an option. Mr. Toolan would support an open discussion to study DeFazio as an option.

Mr. Retzky noted that a major concern will be swing space during construction of the Hillside and Mitchell schools and also the future projects such as Police/Fire and School Administration. He would support investing in building a more permanent swing space that could be used at the end of the construction rather than spending money on renting modular facilities.

7. Adjournment: Mrs. Chaston made a motion to adjourn the meeting at 8:40PM. The motion was seconded by Mr. Toolan and approved unanimously. The meeting adjourned at 8:40 PM.

Respectfully submitted,

Karen A. Peirce, CPRP
Assistant Director