

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

DIRECTOR'S REPORT

January 7, 2016

*Background notes for Monday, January 11th
Park and Recreation Commission Agenda*

COMMISSION MEETING

The Park and Recreation Commission meeting will begin at 6 PM, in order to provide adequate time for the Commission to discuss updated information on the Rosemary Pool Design project. At 7:30 PM, they will hold their annual Field Scheduling Summit meeting.

THANK YOU, COMMISSIONER RETZKY

Commissioner Mike Retzky has accepted a position with the Town of Needham, as one of its project managers for the Public Facilities-Construction Department and the Permanent Public Building Committee, and has therefore submitted his resignation from the Commission. I am very excited to gain Mike as a co-worker, but sad that it also ends his tenure on the Commission. After many years of discussions, studies, and designs, the Fields of Dreams was coming close to being constructed when the Needham Sports Council introduced me to Mike Retzky, who had volunteered to be their construction oversight manager. I'm not sure Mike knew how many meetings he would be attending with the Town, but he brought his professional experience to the table, and was instrumental in keeping the Sports Council and the Town working together to make the much needed improvements to DeFazio Park and Memorial Park. Through his involvement with youth sports, he was also very helpful working with me as we transitioned into using the new fields and continuing the collaborations we had developed between the groups and the department.

Mike was elected to the Park and Recreation Commission in April 2010. He served two terms as Chairman from April 2012-April 2014. Mike has served as the Commission's representative to the Community Preservation Committee for just about six years, and has served as Chairman of the newly formed Rail Trail Advisory Committee. Mike joined me as the user agency representative to the PPBC for the Cricket Building Feasibility Study. His knowledge of construction and public procurement has been a great asset during a time of renovation and growth of recreation and park facilities. During his tenure, there were some very busy meetings – but lots accomplished during the six years! Rosemary Pool has been on just about every agenda during Mike's tenure...first as a discussion about how to rebuild that turned into three legal issues related to draining the pool and lake – all resulting in judges' rulings on behalf of the Town...and now, a feasibility study complete, lots of public input meetings, and a design project well underway! When Mike joined the Commission, discussions were underway for the location of a new senior center, and Greene's Field was a much debated option. Eventually Center at the Heights was built at the Heights MBTA parking lot – a beautiful new building with many programming features. Next came the discussion about what to do with the Hillside School, a topic that remained on the Commission's agenda for several years, as a

discussion was held on whether Cricket Field should be an option for a new school. Ed Olsen was hired as Superintendent of Parks and Forestry, and began a productive collaboration with the Commission and department to improve the quality of the natural grass fields and properly maintain the new synthetic turf fields to get the most years of use from them. The new maintenance programs required additional funding, which the Commission supported, along with efforts to educate the field users so that their practices didn't unnecessarily damage the fields. The purchase of 174 Charles River Street with CPA funds enabled that park to have a major renovation under Ed Olsen's new expectations for construction of fields. With the change in CPA legislation, Greene's Field was also able to be renovated to the new standards, and with a fundraising group, the iconic wood structure playground was replaced with a new, modern playground with features for all age groups. Discussions about a possible rail trail started just prior to Mike joining the Commission, and as he leaves, residents are able to use the new rail trail! CPA funds have also enabled us to not only rebuild the Newman athletic fields, so they will become more useable, in essence adding three fields to the inventory – but also allowed us to rebuild the Eastman Trail behind Newman, providing an accessible boardwalk and trail with educational opportunities throughout. Though sometimes it feels like it takes a long time to get things done in municipal government, Mike can leave the Commission knowing that lots of great projects were completed during his tenure!

Mike will be working just down the hall from us, as of January 11th, so I will still have the benefit of working with Mike. It would be nice if he didn't have Monday night meetings anymore, so he could keep up with Monday Night Football, but alas, the PPBC also meets on Monday nights. ☺ Thank you, Mike, for all that you have done on behalf of the Needham community!!

EVERSOURCE

The work at DeFazio has begun this week. The private contractor working for Eversource has been putting down mats adjacent to the work area, to insure that the fields are not damaged by their vehicles and work.

NEWMAN/EASTMAN

The major aspects of the project are complete. The majority of the construction fencing is down. A small section remains near the tennis courts and playground, as the original fencing needs to be re-installed, with gates for pedestrians and vehicles. There is access to the project through the playground area, as well as at the other end of the school, where the Pre-School program is located. The railings on the new sets of stairs are being fabricated and haven't been installed, yet. The Eastman Trail is open for use. With tree coverage, it takes a while for the snow and ice to melt on the boardwalk, but it is passable. The walkway around the fields will not be plowed, with the exception of the section that is used by walkers from Great Plain Avenue. I walked the two areas last Saturday, and there were some other people enjoying it, and I've heard some of the school parents are too.

RAIL TRAIL

Since the rails were removed in the spring, there have been regular users of the rail trail, and they were still out while construction was underway with fencing and stone dust surface. The work is now concentrated on the two road crossings, and then we'll start working on some signs.

A Boston police officer, who primarily is on his bike, gave me a call to thank the Town and volunteers for the creation of the trail. He is a Needham resident, and looks forward to using it. He has helped create trails in the Boston area, so will try to meet up with me in the future, to see if he can be of assistance on other projects.
