

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

**Minutes of Meeting  
May 19, 2020**

**PRESENT:** Christopher J. Gerstel, Cynthia J. Chaston, Michelle S. Geddes, Matthew M. Toolan  
Stacey Mulroy, Angela O'Connor, Kristen Wright

Mr. Gerstel called the meeting to order at 7:00 PM remotely using Zoom.

Mr. Gerstel thanked everyone for joining the meeting.

**1A. Action Item – The Pools at Rosemary Recreation Complex**

Ms. Mulroy reviewed the different levels of the bid that were returned to the Town from the lowest bidder Weston & Sampson. Ms. Mulroy stated that she and other members of the team looked over the list and found a few items that were identified in a higher tier that will be required in a tier 1 opening.

Ms. Chaston asked for the staffs input on which tier they would recommend and as a second question, asked after tonight's vote, what the next steps are.

Ms. Mulroy stated that big difference between tier 1 and tier 2 are the installation of the water features and the removal of the pool covers. Ms. Mulroy stated that tier 1 should be enough for this year's opening.

Ms. O'Connor stated that she wanted to ensure that whichever option was selected that the Pools get the proper attention to ensure that the facility is well cared for this year.

Ms. Chaston asked if there would need to be a different tier of service selected if the facility was just opened for maintenance than if it would be open for the public.

Ms. Mulroy stated that if money were no object then tier 2 would be preferred, but at this time without knowing if we are opening, and if we open what the season would look like, that tier 1 has enough in it that we can make it work for any outcome.

Mr. Toolan stated that the pool covers were always planned to be outsourced and have the other identified items addressed without getting another bid. Ms. O'Connor stated that the copy in the Commission packet takes those items into account.

Ms. O'Connor stated that Park and Recreation will need to hire more staff to complete the tasks that are identified in tier 2 that will not be completed in tier 1.

Mr. Toolan stated that as a future ask to have a dedicated maintenance person.

Ms. Chaston shared concerns that for the difference between tier 1 and tier 2, it may be better to move forward with tier 2 to not sell the department short while working towards getting the facility open.

Ms. Geddes asked when we know the closing costs.

Ms. Mulroy stated that we can fund tier 1 and tier 2 would have to wait for Special Town Meeting. Ms. Mulroy stated that closing costs will not be known until we go out to bid.

Mr. Gerstel asked if the numbers provided could identify what the expense would be in future years. Ms. Wright stated that when it goes for bid in the early spring of 2021 that the hope would be to bid for one service level and get pricing for years 2 and 3. Ms. Wright also stated that add-on items could be on the scope to be added on over the three year time as necessary.

Mr. Gerstel confirmed that the tier 1 level of service would be sufficient for opening the pools for a singular maintenance reason, but if needed it would also be enough to open to the public for the season. Ms. Mulroy added that the added cost to opening to the public would be the internal payroll costs to complete the other necessary tasks.

Mr. Gerstel asked about the chemical bids for the Pools. Ms. O'Connor stated that we need to order the chemicals in advance. Ms. Mulroy asked if the contract was executed. Ms. Wright stated that the contract is still with finance but should be fully executed soon.

Ms. Geddes asked what the next steps would be and if any other approvals are needed.

**Ms. Chaston moved that the Park and Recreation Commission approve the tier 1 bid items as presented for the opening bid of the Pools at RRC for the 2020 season. Mr. Toolan seconded the motion. Chaston – aye, Geddes – aye, Toolan – aye, Gerstel – aye. The motion passed unanimously.**

## **2A. Discussion Item – Fields**

Ms. Mulroy asked a question from the public – Kirsten Allen from Blue Lotus Healing Arts stated that they are restricted and cannot host their classes indoors. Governor Baker has encouraged outdoor classes and wonders if it is possible to use Greene's Field or any other field with appropriate social distancing to hold their yoga classes. Stated further that re-opening is process and would appreciate any guidance.

Mr. Toolan stated that there are a few considerations to be made. In the past the commission has not allowed for-profit organizations to run their programs on the fields as it is an increase liability to the Town and there currently is not identified process as non-profits to use the fields. Mr. Toolan stated that there are great efforts to support businesses such as closing parking lots and streets to allow business to have outdoor seating in other communities. Mr. Toolan continued and stated that if the Town of Needham underwent any of these proposed efforts, that the

Commission would address how they could help the businesses as well. Mr. Toolan stated that until that time, there is not a mechanism to support such use of the fields. Ms. Mulroy stated that in speaking with the Board of Health, while we are in Phase 1 of reopening the fields in Needham, only passive recreation is supported. Ms. Mulroy stated that she agrees that as we move into different phases that it would be great to consider user groups, both for-profit and non-profit, to create some form of organized play. Mr. Toolan stated that guidelines would need to put in place as we do not want to create dead spots on the fields.

Mr. Gerstel stated that the news from Governor Baker may not have been everything that people expected to hear, but overall a positive new conference. Mr. Gerstel stated that the previous conversation that was held at the prior Commission meeting that hosted an open dialogue with the Commission, the Park and Recreation staff, the Superintendent of Park and Forestry and the Director of Health and Human Services, and was good practice on how we should continue to move forward as information becomes available. Mr. Gerstel stated that our current plan is still in line with the previous system and that the phasing of the field openings. In speak with Superintendent Olsen on Friday, Mr. Gerstel stated that the courts and the fields at Memorial Park could be ready to go for Monday, May 25<sup>th</sup> in line with the Governor's guidelines and use the 'Field Status' system to communicate this to the public. Ms. Mulroy stated that with her conversation with Public Health that fields can open closer to Tuesday and Wednesday of next week with Monday being the holiday. Ms. Mulroy stated we also have to consider that people are already out there utilizing the fields at some capacity and once we have our set policies for use, that it will be difficult to enforce without the help of everyone on the staff and on the commission to help regulate it. Ms. Mulroy stated that we are playing catch up to get our fields open as well as ensure equitable access to our open spaces. Ms. Mulroy stated that it is important to note that the Parks team is also still working on alternating shifts. Mr. Gerstel stated that he has a sense from what he discussed with Superintendent Olsen as to the schedule of opening the fields and he will send those out to everyone by end of day tomorrow. Ms. O'Connor stated that we need to keep the messaging clear and concise focusing on maintaining social distancing, wearing a mask and having carry in/carry out and leaning on members of their community to take care of their assets as there are more community members than there are staff to help enforce it and if they cannot commit to these standards, we will have to take them offline again.

Ms. Chaston asked if park restrooms would be open. Ms. Mulroy stated they would not be in phase 1. Ms. Chaston stated that we will need signage to post at the fields and we need to have a conversation with the Memorial Park Trustees to make sure we are including them in this discussion. Mr. Gerstel stated that he spoke to one of the Trustees and they are in majority favor of opening Memorial Park but their main concern is trash and that if the trash cans are not being placed at the facilities or emptied regularly that it will only increase the trash problem that already exists. Ms. Mulroy stated that the RTS is also working at a reduced capacity and we will need to coordinate with the to ensure prompt pick up. Mr. Toolan stated that it is a delicate balance between effectively communicating why we need to have a phased opening and not allowing it to appear that the Town is providing less than standard service.

Ms. O'Connor discussed a 'Keep the Parks Clean' campaign to promote these ideal to the community. Mr. Gerstel stated that a video of the Parks team, the RTS and Park and Recreation could be ideal to get the message across. Ms. O'Connor stated that reaching out to our high school athletes could be another good resource. Ms. Chaston asked if the Public Information Officer could help us with this campaign. Ms. Mulroy stated that she would work on this.

Mr. Gerstel stated that Tuesday would be a good target date. Ms. Mulroy stated that perhaps Wednesday would be a better target so that the Commission could vote on the processes at the Tuesday meeting. Mr. Toolan stated that Wednesday is too late, and that the community is going to get out over the long weekend to use these spaces and we should be opening sooner. Ms. Wright stated that the Governor ruling was that things could begin to open on Monday the 25<sup>th</sup>, not sooner. Ms. Mulroy stated that the benefit of agreeing to opening on Wednesday and publishing the plan Wednesday is that until Wednesday there is a clear message from the Commission. Ms. Mulroy stated that waiting until Wednesday would also give the Parks team an extra day to set the field right after the long weekend before we begin our planned role out. Mr. Toolan stated that we need to open the courts and Memorial Park on Tuesday and publish the remainder of the plan on Wednesday so the Commission can finalize the plan. Mr. Toolan stated that we need to provide some guidance in incremental steps to the public or we will continue to be behind the curve, and we will be inundated with requests for information. Mr. Toolan stated that we need to show we are on-top of this role out. Ms. Geddes stated that the sooner we can send out the expectations, the better informed the community can be. Ms. Wright stated that the idea is to get some message out, but bigger conversations need to be had before final policy can be set. Mr. Toolan stated that getting the general ideas out to start and then get the more finalized guidelines later in the week. Mr. Gerstel agreed that getting the message out. Mr. Toolan stated that utilizing our 'Field Status' to update the fields and consistently send a message out and make it apparent that the information about the fields is available. Mr. Gerstel asked if this was feasible. Ms. Wright stated that it can be done and would hopefully drive the website to be a reliable source of information about our fields. Ms. O'Connor stated that I can also be shared on the COVID information page as well as a new page called 'Get Connected' that is featured on the COVID page. Mr. Toolan stated that we need to also reach out to the sports groups directly and stated that if they are organizing before they are permitted that their permits would be at risk. Ms. Chaston stated that if the communication is going to difficult to maintain, she would like to know. Ms. Chaston stated that as we continue to open that more communications will need to be sent out as well regarding the Pools and the programs, if that is something that we can offer.

Ms. O'Connor stated that and idea that has been floating around is going 'old school' and placing a park monitor at each location. The monitors could keep an eye on the fields and then also host social distancing games if we do not end up offering programs.

Mr. Gerstel stated that putting out the messaging that the courts and Memorial Park on Monday the 25<sup>th</sup> and a larger communication will be sent out on Wednesday, the 27<sup>th</sup> after the Commission meeting on Tuesday the 26<sup>th</sup>. Ms. Chaston stated that where this is Memorial Park that the Memorial Park Trustees are involved.

## **2B. Discussion Item – Hiring Freeze**

Mr. Gerstel stated that when or if we decide to open the public, how will the hiring freeze will affect the opening of the Pools. Ms. O'Connor stated that we should focus on bring back our returning staff first and at least get our supervisors started to get the operations in order. Mr. Toolan asked what we need to get done to have these staff start if we decided to open. Ms. O'Connor asked what the returning staff would need to return. Ms. Wright outlined the paperwork. Ms. Chaston asked if we are still on a hiring freeze. Ms. Mulroy stated that we are on a hiring freeze, but we are working on getting firm dates and the cost analysis for payroll numbers. Ms. Chaston stated that we also need a date to commit to the staff to ensure we can open. Mr. Gerstel asked how quickly we can get the Pool opening contract executed. Mr. Toolan stated that while we are gathering the data to also get an idea about the impact on the program side as well. Ms. Mulroy stated that upper Town management wants up to run things and they will support us accomplishing these goals.

A comment from resident Payson Greene – Needham has many service-related business to return or donate fees to support the pool.

Mr. Greene stated that he and his family has been attending the Pool since they moved to town and wondered if it would be inappropriate to ask for donations for opening and closing. Ms. Chaston stated while it is an interesting concept, but the opening and closing must be procured through proper channels. Mr. Greene also asked if the commission has ever thought about having their own set of boosters. Ms. Chaston stated that it was a great idea. Ms. Mulroy stated that it could be something to investigate.

Mr. Gerstel asked if there were any additional things to be discussed. No items were identified.

## **3. Adjournment of Business Meeting**

**Ms. Chaston moved to adjourn the May 19, 2020 Park and Recreation Commission meeting at 8:32pm. Mr. Toolan seconded the motion and the meeting adjourned at 8:32pm.**

Respectfully submitted,

Kristen Wright  
Administrative Specialist