

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

**Minutes of Meeting
May 26, 2020**

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

ABSENT: Matthew M. Toolan

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

Mr. Gerstel read a statement regarding public meeting process due to COVID-19

1. Director's Report

Ms. Mulroy reviewed the office staffing that is currently in place and changes that would take place on June 1st.

Ms. Mulroy reviewed that all spring programming was cancelled, and that Parks and Forestry staff is back a full capacity and are working diligently to get all the fields up and running.

Ms. Mulroy stated that we are in the process of having the Start-Up contract executed. Mr. Gerstel asked if the Weston & Sampson was aware that we plan to move forward with the contract. Ms. Wright stated that Weston & Sampson will get the contract soon and they will have to sign it to move forward. Mr. Gerstel asked what the timeline was to begin opening. Ms. Wright stated that we cannot schedule a time until the contract has been signed. Mr. Gerstel asked what the timeframe was for the contract to be completed. Ms. Wright stated that we hope to have it completely executed by the end of the week.

Ms. Mulroy stated the latest report on the dredging project was included at the end of the Commission Packet.

Ms. Chaston asked when the office staff will be back in the office and when in-person meetings will begin to take place. Ms. Mulroy stated that the Town is in Phase 1 and each department had to submit a plan to the EOC for office staffing to return to the office. For the Park and Recreation Department each staff member has one day a week to come in, if needed, to perform job responsibilities outside of the lower storage areas that we are cleaning out. Ms. Mulroy stated as the Town works through the phased openings, the staffing plan will change.

Ms. Chaston asked if the contract is fully executed by the end of the week would Weston & Sampson be able to start next week. Ms. Wright stated that there would need to be some time to consider the amount of staff on the deck and how that may work with other tasks that need to be completed from the Town's side to support the opening. In terms of getting the bid signed, the Town is implementing a new system using DocuSign which will hopefully quicken the process. Ms. Mulroy stated that with the Town's new protocols, Weston & Sampson needs to follow those standards as well. Ms. O'Connor stated that with the restrictions on how many people can be on the pool deck, it may take longer.

Ms. Chaston asked if the staff had seen the comments on the Town page regarding the dredging project and if the information was accurate. Ms. Wright stated that the links provided by the Town of Needham page were the same documents the Commission receives in their packets and they are updated weekly. Other links were to non-Town run pages that do not have specific information about the dredging project. The question about the operations of the Pools has not been responded to.

Ms. O'Connor stated that another activity calendar has been discussed but not finalized. Alyssa Kence, who we were partnering with for our Superhero Academy, has reduced hours. We continued to work on our Activity Bags partnering with the schools, Needham Housing, and Youth and Family. Rafi Nova has donated masks that can be decorated for the bags and has offered to donate masks for the guards as well. Sudbury Farms has donated the bags that will be used for the Activity bags. Registration will begin on June 8th and the schools have asked that we hold distribution until school is over to curb any distractions that the bags may bring. We are looking at hosting other virtual events that could be held in the meantime. In terms of preparing for Summer, we are still currently in a hiring freeze, so we are looking at going virtual with the potential to switch to in person programming if that becomes an option. Another idea has been to hire Playground Instructors that basically monitor the playgrounds and have some supplies for them to use. The potential to use School Buildings will be discussed later this week. There are still questions about running both Arts in the Park and Children's Theater and how that could be accomplished, if we move forward, while maintaining social distancing.

Ms. Chaston asked about hiring summer staff during the hiring freeze. Ms. Mulroy will address during discussion items.

2A. Action Item – Picnic Tables at Greene's Field

Ms. Mulroy stated that the Town Manager has asked the Commission to consider the placement of picnic tables at Greene's Field to continue to add spaces for people to eat outdoors. The tables would remain throughout the summer and could be moved depending on the increase of field use. The Select Board approved the placement of the other picnic tables throughout Town.

Ms. Chaston stated that she thinks this is a great idea and asked if any feedback has been received with the tables that are already in place. Ms. Chaston asked if we would have to issue a permit for the alcohol and who, if anyone, will be monitoring these tables. Ms. Mulroy stated that she had not heard any feedback from over the weekend and that this will not be a permit and will fall under the larger scope of the Town's initiative. As for monitoring, the Police will patrol, but the users are supposed to carry in and carry out and clean up the space they are using themselves. Ms. Chaston asked if we feel that it isn't going well at the fields that we could have the tables removed. Ms. Mulroy stated that when talking with the Town Manager, that if there becomes an issue that the Town will address it head-on and roll the whole initiative back completely.

Ms. O'Connor stated that she was concerned with people trying to use the playgrounds. Ms. Wright stated that the playgrounds are gated, and the gates are still locked. Mr. Gerstel stated

that the proposed location of the picnic tables is closer to Great Plain Avenue on the opposite side of the park from the playground.

Ms. Geddes wanted to confirm that the picnic tables would not be placed directly on the field. Mr. Gerstel stated that they would not be. Ms. Geddes agreed that the playground would be enticing but the locked gate would deter most families.

Ms. Chaston asked if there is signage on the gate at the playground indicating it was closed. Ms. Mulroy stated that there was and that the staff can ensure that it is still in place. Ms. Mulroy stated that she can also work on messaging with the Public Information Officer if the Commission approved. Ms. Wright stated that Greene's Field is not phased to be opened until June 15th. Ms. Geddes asked why Greene's was indicated in an earlier phase. Mr. Gerstel asked Ms. Geddes if she felt that it was important to bump up the timing of Greene's field opening to match the roll out of the picnic tables being added to Greene's Field. Ms. Geddes stated that moving the opening of Greene's Field up to match the installation of the picnic tables made the most sense. Ms. Mulroy stated that she wants to discuss moving Greene's field up in phase with the Superintendent of Parks and Forestry to make sure the field can safely be opened.

Mr. Gerstel stated that his only concern is the trash and the ability of the RTS having these trash barrels emptied more often. Ms. Mulroy stated that the RTS has been a part of these conversations and knows that they may have to increase the service of the bins at Greene's.

Mr. Gerstel moved that the Commission vote to allow the consumption of alcohol as defined in MGL Ch. 138 Section 1, that has been sold in association with take-out service of food pursuant to Ch. 53 of the Acts of 2020, Section 13 at the Town Common, Needham Heights Common, Avery Square, Eaton Plaza, and Greene's Field under provision of Section 3.1.9 of the By-Laws of the Town also contingent on the approval from the Parks and Forestry department and Superintendent of Parks and Forestry Ed Olsen guidance of opening Greene's Field for passive recreation in an earlier phase. Ms. Chaston seconded the motion. Chaston – aye, Geddes – aye, Gerstel – aye. The motion passed unanimously.

Ms. Mulroy added that Director of Public Works Rick Merson is an attendee of the meeting and has just informed her that trash pick-up is being proposed 7 days a week at all table locations.

3A & 3B. Discussion Items – Pools at RRC & Summer Programs

Ms. Mulroy stated that the Pools are closed and will remain that way through the end of June. In speaking with Public Health Nurse Tiffany Zike and Director of Health and Human Services Timothy McDonald, there has been no new guidance for operating outdoor pools and do not expect any new guidance until at least June 8th. Ms. Mulroy stated that they also discussed what guidance the Department would need to provide if we were to open to the public. Ms. Mulroy stated that the Public Health department has asked for a 4 week turn-around time to approve any protocols for Programs and a 6 week turn-around time to approve any protocols for the Pools from the date of guidance received from the state. Various scenarios have been discussed but without guidance,

we are in a holding pattern. Ms. Mulroy stated that outside of waiting on guidance staffing is a concern as potential staff could be accepting employment elsewhere.

The Commission discussed different scenarios with these guidelines and taking the current hiring freeze into account.

3C. Fields

Mr. Gerstel thanked the staff for the great communication with the Field Opening Plan. Mr. Gerstel stated he would like to send the Field Status update each day. Mr. Gerstel asked about the Tennis Courts at Newman and the status of tennis nets.

Ms. Mulroy stated that many people are not following the social distancing rules and asked the Commission to help encourage the residents to follow the rules would be tremendously helpful to the Park and Recreation Commission and Parks and Forestry staff.

Ms. O'Connor stated that we also need to be on the look out for private lessons on the courts and on the fields. Ms. Mulroy stated that any that we have come across on social media have been addressed personally.

Mr. Gerstel asked about editing the policy to allow private user groups to begin to collect user group fees to mitigate the extra field use. Ms. Mulroy stated that perhaps these groups could run them under the Park and Recreation umbrella. Ms. Wright stated that permitting to the for-profit could take away from the non-profit user times. Ms. Mulroy stated that currently there are no permits being issued but that this worth a conversation in the future.

Mr. Gerstel asked if the Schools had any feedback from them about field openings.

3D. Project Updates

Mr. Gerstel asked how the Town Election went at RRC. Ms. Mulroy stated that there was not any update, so we believe it went well.

4. Issues Not Reasonably Anticipated by Chair within 48 Hours

Ms. Chaston asked about Town Meeting both logistics or Park and Recreation articles. Ms. Mulroy stated that Town Meeting will be on Monday, June 8th at Memorial Park. Ms. Wright stated that outside of the Operating Budget, all CPC that had Park and Recreation tied to it, there are no additional Park and Recreation articles.

Ms. Geddes asked about Commissioner Toolan's email regarding a Drive-in Movie. Ms. Mulroy stated that the staff is already been discussing the potential to host one, potentially at DeFazio. Ms. Geddes asked about restroom facilities.

Ms. Chaston asked if we were moving forward with Arts in the Parks. Ms. O'Connor stated that Administrative Assistant Kim Parsons is reaching out to our scheduled performers to see if they

would still be interested in playing. We have also looked into a layout of how to safely use Memorial Park.

Ms. Mulroy stated that June 8th is the next scheduled Park and Recreation Commission Meeting and would Tuesday, June 9th be an alternative. Mr. Gerstel stated that we should meet on Tuesday, June 9th. Mr. Gerstel stated that going forward he would like to get back to a schedule in terms of having a meeting to discuss the agenda the Thursday meeting and Commission Packets be sent at end of business on Friday.

Mr. Gerstel asked about next steps with the new Commissioner and the appointment of Mr. Toolan to finish Mr. DiCicco's term. Ms. Mulroy stated that she would find out more but the request for Mr. Toolan's appointment would come from Chairman Gerstel.

5. Topics for Future Agendas

None presented

Adjournment of Business Meeting

Ms. Chaston moved to adjourn the May 26, 2020 Park and Recreation Commission meeting at 8:38pm. Ms. Geddes seconded the motion and the meeting adjourned at 8:38pm.