

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

**Minutes of Meeting
October 13, 2020**

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

ABSENT: Michelle S. Geddes

STAFF: Stacey Mulroy, Kristen Wright

GUESTS: Kim Parsons

Ms. Chaston called the meeting to order at 7:05 PM remotely using Zoom. Ms. Chaston read a statement regarding public meeting process due to COVID-19.

1. Open Forum – Public Comment

None presented

2. Director's Report

Ms. Mulroy review the Director's Report.

Ms. Chaston asked how strong Superintendent Olsen felt about not allowing St. Joe's use Greene's Field. Ms. Mulroy stated that he was pretty adamant and typically she would agree with him but allowing kids to be outside is important during the pandemic.

The Commission and Ms. Mulroy discussed the budget process and funding for the FY22 year. Mr. Toolan asked about having a discussion regarding camps vs. programs and if the change should be made and when the change should be made. Mr. Toolan asked for a full proposal for any type of change to our programming set up.

Mr. Toolan asked who owns the field equipment and specifically Park and Recreation providing nets to youth user groups. The Commission discussed who owns the equipment and how we should and can proceed with new youth user groups in the future.

3A. Projects

Boat Launch

No updates presented.

Walker Pond

Ms. Chaston asked for an updated regarding the Walker Pond project and anything that may have resulted from the meeting with the Conservation Commission. Ms. Mulroy updated the Commission with the conversation that the Conservation Commission had provided on this project including that they were supportive of this project. Ms. Mulroy stated another meeting is already in the process of being scheduled.

Rail Trail

Ms. Mulroy stated that she and Interim Director of Public Works Carys Lustig are working on scheduling a meeting of the Rail Trail Committee.

Open Space & Recreation Plan

No updates presented.

3B. New Program Ideas

Pickleball

Ms. Chaston stated that she was approached by members of the Select Board regarding adding Pickleball. Ms. Mulroy stated that Pickleball has grown in popularity around the nation and the largest hurdle is finding a location. Ms. Mulroy stated that placing lines at Tennis Courts or Basketball Courts is the typical way to facilitate this, however Tennis is very popular during the pandemic and the basketball courts are currently being used as lunch areas for the schools. Ms. Wright added that the Department did try to run an indoor program in a similar manner to how we run Adult Basketball, Badminton, and Volleyball, but it was not well received by the community as it was not the right time or the right location. Mr. Gerstel stated that the blacktop space at Pollard may be something that can be resurfaced and turned into a pickleball court. Mr. Toolan disagreed with the Pollard location but would prefer to see this added to our Playground revamp instead of taking away the spaces that exist. Ms. Chaston stated that street hockey is not a permitted user group, and perhaps the Town facility could be better used. Ms. Mulroy stated historically pickleball players do not want to contribute financially to have the access to the courts. Ms. Chaston stated that it would be a future consideration while we are looking to update other courts throughout Town. Ms. Mulroy stated that a survey of Town interest can be conducted to determine the Town interest.

3C. Facilities

Skate Park

Ms. Mulroy stated that she had finally looked at the skate park, but she was alone, and it is very cumbersome. Mr. Gerstel asked if at this point in the season would be necessary or if it should not be a bigger focus for a spring set up. Ms. Mulroy agrees that spring would be a better consideration. Mr. Gerstel stated he would discuss this with Ms. Geddes as she originally brought this matter to the attention to the Commission and Department.

Tennis Courts & Basketball Courts

Ms. Mulroy stated she is in the process of working on a maintenance plan and gathering quotes to determine the different costs to replace or repair the current courts throughout Town. Ms. Chaston stated that they will probably fall into the capital plan. Ms. Mulroy stated that it is possible depending on the scope but would not be a FY22 capital ask.

Greene's Field & Saint Joe's

Ms. Chaston asked for the Commission's input around this request. Mr. Gerstel shared concerns in alignment with Superintendent Olsen's but understands that during this school year it is important to allow kids on the fields. Mr. Toolan asked about the user fee and the inclement

weather policy and using the field if it is still wet. Mr. Toolan shared that the extra traffic is a concern, but the bigger concern is if they use it when it should not be used. Ms. Mulroy stated that the conversation would be consistent and if there were a time that they should not use the fields, she would contact them and if they questioned it, they would contact her. Regarding the user fee, Ms. Mulroy stated that St. Joe's would be willing to pay a user fee if they were permitted use. Mr. Williams stated that he drove by St. Joe's recently and they had been managing the situation well. Mr. Williams expressed that while he is sympathetic, but it is not the responsibility of the Town to provide space for the private school. Ms. Mulroy stated that the original request was for more space, but they are mostly concerned about the 8th grade wellness class that let them move around and be more active. Mr. Toolan stated that we are being very accommodating to the Town owned and operated schools, and if this was a request for a different field the conversation may be different, and if this becomes a better partnership between the Town and St. Joe's to use space and accommodated the needs of both. Mr. Gerstel asked which user groups would be impacted if the field was delayed open in the Spring.

Mr. Toolan made a motion to permit space as a test run to St. Joe's for the hours agreed to by the Park and Recreation Director for the Fall of 2020 with the understanding that there will be a user fee set at a later date, a clear communication plan regarding inclement weather, and a possibility of rescinding the plan if there is more damage to the field than can be permitted. Mr. Gerstel seconded the motion and it passed, 4 – 0. Ms. Chaston asked about the fee. Ms. Mulroy suggested that they be invoiced like other user groups.

3D. Events

Halloween Event

Ms. Wright described the proposed event for October 24th and the drive-thru event after.

Mr. Toolan made a motion to approve the suggested fee of \$20 per table for the Fall Family Fun Day event. Mr. Williams seconded, and the motion passed, 4 – 0.

1775 Walk – April 2021

Ms. Mulroy stated that she will be having a meeting with the group this coming Friday and will update the commission at the next meeting.

4A. Meeting Minutes

Mr. Gerstel moved to approve the minutes of June 26, 2020, July 13, 2020, and July 27, 2020. Mr. Williams seconded, and the minutes were approved, 3-0-1.

4B. Program Pricing

Discussed earlier in the meeting.

5. Upcoming Commission Meetings

The commission discussed the upcoming meetings and potentially cancelling the meeting prior to Thanksgiving.

6. Issues Not Reasonably Anticipated by Chair within 48 Hours

Ms. Mulroy discussed the Special Event Requests that have been received from the various schools and the potential concerns that have been shared by Superintendent Gutekanst and the Board of Health. Mr. Toolan stated that it would be a hard line to draw if we are allowing youth sports but do not allow school affiliated special event if they can follow the social distancing rules. Mr. Toolan does not want to create a double standard. Ms. Mulroy stated that it will be up to the Board of Health to identify what standards they need to have in place and the group will need to see if the event can be held safely.

Mr. Gerstel made a motion to approve the Special Event Request from Broadmeadow PTC, pending approval from the Board of Health, to hold their Kindergarten Pumpkin Patch event. Mr. Toolan seconded and was passed, 4 – 0.

7. Adjournment of Business Meeting

Mr. Gerstel moved to adjourn the October 13, 2020 Park and Recreation Commission meeting at 8:50pm. Mr. Toolan seconded the motion and the meeting adjourned at 8:50pm.