PARK AND RECREATION COMMISSION
TOWN OF NEEDHAM, MASSACHUSETTS

Minutes of Meeting
February 8, 2021

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

STAFF: Stacey Mulroy, Kristen Wright

GUESTS: Karen Mullen, Dave Rutley, Nancy White

Ms. Chaston called the meeting to order at 7:02 PM remotely using Zoom. Ms. Chaston read a statement regarding public meeting process due to COVID-19.

1. Open Forum – Public Comment

None presented.

2A. CATH Liaison

Moved to the next meeting due to a scheduling conflict.

2B. Youth & Family Services Liaison

The Commission discussed the partnership between Youth and Family Services and the Park and Recreation Commission throughout the pandemic and in the future. Mr. Toolan discussed having Youth & Family as a part of our design process and potentially provide an opportunity for additional mural projects at parks throughout Town.

2C. Playground Inspections of New England (PINE)

The Commission reviewed the report submitted by Nancy White and Ms. White presented on the report with her overview.

Ms. Mulroy stated that within the first few weeks of her beginning within the department she had started the discussion with the schools about opening the lines of communication regarding the playgrounds. Ms. Mulroy stated that the conversations are beginning again, after the COVID pandemic paused any efforts that were not mandatory to overall Town operations.

Mr. Gerstel asked if there was any way to identify which playgrounds were at the top of the 'worst' list and which were at the top of the 'best' list and how those playgrounds were identified. Ms. White discussed the process and the reasoning behind her ratings. Mr. Gerstel asked about the playgrounds at Cricket Field and Greene's Field as they were not on the list. Ms. White reviewed those two locations and why they were not listed.

Mr. Toolan thanked Ms. White for her presentation and helping the Commission move the plan forward. Mr. Toolan asked about the top priorities for the department going forward. Ms. White stated that it would depend on the Commission's interests and the funding that is available, but her focus would be on DeFazio and Perry Park due to the amount that they are used. Ms. White stated that the biggest component would be to create a Master Plan from this report and the overall priorities of the Commission.

Ms. Geddes discussed the standards and policies that continue to change and how we can best address them. Ms. White stated that the only way to overcome or at least keep up with the changes is to continually have a plan in place to address the changes. Ms. Mulroy stated that identifying the problems and creating the timeline to address them is the way forward.

Mr. Williams discussed his successes and failures within his own family structure and the playgrounds throughout Town. Ms. White stated that the ADA standards at all the playgrounds do need to be addressed.

Ms. Chaston stated that the next steps are to create a plan, stick to the plan, and continually monitor and adjust the plan, as necessary. Ms. Mulroy stated that creating the Master Plan is our next step in the process and the assessment from Ms. White will be critical for its development. Ms. Chaston thanked Ms. White for her presentation.

2. Director's Report

Ms. Mulroy presented the Director's Report. The Commission reviewed the report.

Ms. Mulroy proposed hosting the field summit before the next Commission meeting from 6:00pm – 7:00pm. The Commission discussed and suggested a 6:30pm start time.

Ms. Wright presented the Field Permit Submission process proposed for the Spring and Summer seasons, and the updated Special Event Requests. Mr. Toolan suggested that another statement regarding that field requests are not guaranteed, and the Commission discussed added language that addresses that point. Ms. Chaston asked about sharing this information and change of format with the Trustees of Memorial Park. Ms. Mulroy stated that she will reach out to the staff liaison for the Trustees.

Ms. Mulroy discussed various concussion protocols and provided the Commission with links that have helpful information when creating or updating their policy.

Mr. Gerstel provided an update about the Walker Pond project that presented to the CPC at their last meeting. Mr. Gerstel also discussed the other CPC projects that the Park and Recreation Commission is involved in.

Ms. Mulroy stated that the Assistant Director position is posted and will close on the 11th.

4A. Projects

Discussed earlier in the meeting.

4B. Budget/Finance

Ms. Mulroy reviewed the meeting with the Finance Committee with the Commission. Ms. Mulroy stated that there was a few follow up items requested from the Finance Committee but overall, it went well. Ms. Chaston stated that the staff did a great job presenting the financial needs of the Department.

4C. Programs

Summer Programming Statement

The Commission reviewed the statement that will be made about summer. The Commission thanked the staff for a thoughtful explanation of the current position of the Commission and Department.

2020 Programming Revenue Report

Ms. Wright discussed the financial picture of the Summer programs and highlighted that given the restrictions, expenses and payrolls were kept in line with the amount of services that we were able to offer.

Archery

The Commission reviewed the proposed schedule from the Archery program vendor with the start date in mid-March. The Commission feels that the weather would not permit for this activity during that time of the year. Ms. Mulroy reminded the Commission about their stance for allowing the track to be used earlier than April 1st. Mr. Williams suggested that it may not be realistic to hold an outdoor program of this nature in mid-March. Ms. Geddes stated that the Quarry area, which is the proposed location for the program, is not a field and perhaps allowing the program to run, weather permitting, could be a consideration. Ms. Chaston stated that staying consistent may be in the best interest for the department.

4D. Facilities

Fall 2 Sports & Concussions

The discussion about concussions was held earlier in the meeting.

Ms. Mulroy discussed the guidance released by MIAA regarding Fall 2. Ms. Mulroy has had discussions with Athletic Director Dan Lee, but no final decision has been made. Mr. Gerstel stated that an email went out earlier this evening stating that Needham will be hosting football, Boys and Girls Indoor Track, Cheerleading, Dance, Girls Volleyball, and Unified Basketball with a start date of Tuesday, February 23rd. Mr. Gerstel stated that it was all pending Board of Health approval. Ms. Mulroy reviewed the cost of snow removal on the turf fields and the planning that will have to go in to host practices and games on turf field. Mr. Toolan also address the large sledding hill at Memorial. Mr. Toolan also stated that the Trustees would have to be formally asked. Ms. Mulroy stated that everything is dependent first on the Board of Health, if they even allowed to have their season, and then which fields could be used will be in consideration. The Commission discussed

Ms. Mulroy shared a question from attendee Dave Rutley "In terms of a Fall 2 sports season is the Commission open to allocating field space to groups like football which are typically not part of the spring schedule?" Mr. Toolan asked if he was referring to Fall 2 or Spring. Mr. Rutley provided a schedule from March 13 – May 23 which overlap the MIAA Fall 2 and Spring seasons. Mr. Toolan stated that it would be difficult to accommodate that as well as the determination to not allow spring requests to begin prior to April 1. Ms. Mulroy stated that MIAA runs Fall 2 from February 22 – April 23 and Spring will be from April 23 – July 3. Mr. Gerstel stated that Needham Athletics would get preference. Mr. Toolan stated that there also may be restrictions to our light zoning as well. Ms. Chaston stated that she does not see how to move forward with this, but we should follow up at the next meeting with any updates. Mr. Toolan asked about the turn-around time for the fields to be plowed and useable after a snowstorm. Ms. Mulroy stated she would provide more information at the next meeting.

Field Usage w/ St. Joe's update
Moved to next meeting.

4E. The Pools at RRC

Memberships for 2021
The Commission and staff discussed potential membership scenarios.

2020 Pool & Revenue Report (Final)
Moved to next meeting.

5A. Special Event Approvals
None presented.

5B. Program Pricing Approvals

Tennis Memberships
Ms. Mulroy and Ms. Wright recommended keeping the 2020 protocols and fees for Tennis Badges for the 2021 season. The fee structure for 2020 was $45 for a family membership, $30 for an individual, $15 for a senior over 60, $60 for individuals that work within the Town but do not reside within the Town.

Mr. Toolan made a motion to approve fees as recommended and the recommended protocols for Tennis Courts with amendments from the Board of Health as necessary. Mr. Williams seconded the motion and it passed 5-0.

5C. Meeting Minutes

January 25, 2021

Mr. Gerstel made a motion to approve the meeting minutes from January 25, 2021. Ms. Geddes seconded the motion and it passed 5-0.

5. Topics for Future Meetings

Ms. Geddes wants to determine what will be discussed at the Field Summit especially with the remaining questions about Fall 2. Ms. Mulroy agrees that perhaps March 8th may be a better date to hold the summit as well as send an informational email prior to the summit to the field users.

Mr. Gerstel would like to continue to discuss candidates for the open seat on the Commission in the upcoming election.

6. Issues Not Reasonably Anticipated by the Chair within 48 Hours

None presented.

7. Next Meetings

The Commission reviewed the next meeting dates.

8. Adjournment of Business Meeting

Mr. Gerstel moved to adjourn the February 8, 2021 Park and Recreation Commission meeting at 9:32pm. Mr. Gerstel seconded the motion and the meeting adjourned at 9:32pm.

Respectfully submitted,

Kristen Wright
Administrative Specialist