

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

**Minutes of Meeting
May 11, 2020**

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

GUESTS: Timothy McDonald, Director of Health and Human Services
Edward Olsen, Superintendent of Parks and Forestry

Mr. Gerstel called the meeting to order at 7:02 PM remotely using Zoom.

Mr. Gerstel thanked everyone for joining the meeting and welcomed both Tim and Ed to the meeting.

1. Director's Report

The Commission reviewed the written report. Ms. Mulroy discussed that the team continues to work remotely. *Attachment A.*

Ms. Mulroy discussed a request from Town Engineer Anthony DelGazio and Town Manager Kate Fitzpatrick to extend the permits for the Rosemary Sediment project for an additional week to allow for the contractor to remove more sediment. Mr. Toolan stated that this is the third request to extend the project and that they have significant time. Ms. Geddes asked if any user groups were given a timeline about when they can begin using Chambers Cove. Mr. Gerstel stated that he did not believe there was a listed timeline, but the initial date of completion was originally scheduled for May 1. Mr. Gerstel stated that the Commission would allow the Town to extend the project an additional week to allow more sediment to be removed.

Ms. Chaston asks about staffing for the summer, specifically Aquatics Specialist Devin Cashman. Ms. Mulroy stated that he has jumped on a few of the Zoom meetings, but he has not completed significant work for the season yet.

2. Program Report

The Commission reviewed the written report. *Attachment B.*

Ms. O'Connor and Ms. Mulroy discussed a proposal for Activity Boxes. Mr. Toolan stated that he loves this idea and his suggestion was to figure out to engage in the activities. Ms. Geddes stated that perhaps only providing some of the items in one bag and other activities in another bag to be distributed at a later time.

5B. Action Item: Activity Box Fees

Ms. Chaston moved to approve the Activity Box fees to be \$30 - \$45 per box. Mr. Toolan suggested not exceeding 15% of the overall cost of the box which would allow the department staff to adjust the price, as necessary. Ms. Chaston amended her motion to approve the Activity Box fees to not exceed 15% over the overall cost of the items in the box. Mr. Toolan seconded the motion. The motion passed unanimously.

4C. Discussion Item: Fields and Parks

Mr. Gerstel stated that there was a chairs meeting between the Select Board, as well as Town staff to discuss opening the fields in Needham.

Ms. Mulroy stated that as the state opens there is continued discussion of opening the fields for passive recreation. Ms. Mulroy stated that Town Manager Kate Fitzpatrick reached out to others in the community to see what they were doing. Ms. Mulroy stated that there were two concerns that came up after the initial meeting this morning; the first being the bathrooms and the second is the field maintenance.

Ms. Mulroy stated that the feeling from the staff is that the bathrooms will not be opened at this time. Mr. Toolan asked about the water fountains. Ms. Mulroy stated that if they are on, they should be turned off and if they are off, they should remain off. Director of Health and Human Services Timothy McDonald stated that the meeting held in the morning was positive and that he has also been speaking with his colleagues in other communities and they are working through the same scenarios. Mr. McDonald stated that the transmission rate during passive recreation or two people outside that pass each other is lower. Mr. Toolan asked about playgrounds and basketball courts. Mr. McDonald stated that yes, basketball does not lend themselves for safe distancing and similarly, play structures do not promote safe distancing. Superintendent Ed Olsen stated that Cricket was repaired over the weekend, but it still needs a few weeks to heal. Mr. Olsen stated that he is open to discussing opening the field but would like to discuss the timeline as the Parks and Forestry team is working at reduced staffing still and storm related tree damage has been consistent for the last four weeks. The fields have a lot of work to be done before they can be opened for use. Mr. Olsen stated that another concern to discuss is the trash plan. Mr. Olsen also stated that the messaging needs to be clear as well as the maintenance needs to take priority. Mr. Olsen stated that we are about a month behind on fertilizing the fields as well and people need to remain off the field while these applications are going down. Mr. Toolan asked that the work being focused on non-permitted user groups and recommended a phased approach. Mr. Olsen stated that he is less concerned about the getting out there with a rake but he is more worried about the hole in the field that they haven't come across yet because they have been out on the fields. Ms. Chaston thanked Mr. Olsen and the entire Parks and Forestry team for all the work they have done throughout Town during the storms. Ms. Chaston asked if artificial turf could be opened quickly and as allow people to get on the track. The idea from this morning was to give a place to go to get them off the streets and sidewalk. Ms. Chaston stated that in this morning's meeting that playground would remain closed because of sanitization, that Tennis would be available for singles play and basketball was not going to be permitted. Ms. Chaston stated that trash is a large concern. Ms. Gerstel stated that opening in phases would be the best way and support this using the field status update emails. Mr. Olsen thinks that messaging would help. Mr. Gerstel stated that while DeFazio is opening that the parking barriers will also have to go up. Mr. Toolan asked about enforcement as many user groups will take liberties using passive recreation to get a baseball team on the fields. Ms. O'Connor stated that other communities employ park monitors to promote social distancing and safety. Mr. Toolan stated should discuss this with Memorial Park Trustees. Ms.

Mulroy asked if the artificial turf is safe as they are plastic, not grass. Mr. McDonald stated that yes, they are safe. Ms. Mulroy asked about wearing masks outside, or if they must have them or have them on their person while they are on the fields and asked the Commission about having specific language regarding masks. Mr. McDonald stated that the Governor's order on masks and the order implemented by the Needham Board of Health were slightly different whereas the Needham Board of Health stated that while inside, masks absolutely have to be worn but while outside they aren't required. The Governor's order requires them inside all the time, but outside they are to be worn unless they can guarantee six feet of social distance. Ms. Geddes stated that it will be difficult to regulate the fields and in the beginning they while few fields are open they may find it more difficult to stay socially distant and would the fields be closed if they aren't following the guidelines. Mr. Gerstel stated that it is a part of the discussion that if they are abusing the privilege that we close them back down. Ms. Geddes stated that she is concerned more about the families that are not looking to abuse the privilege losing the access. Mr. Gerstel stated that the net should be taken down and locked up to reduce the pick-up game. Ms. Mulroy stated that if the fields are open that we would have to chain the nets and noted that other communities have taken down the nets at basketball courts. Mr. Toolan stated again his concern about enforcement and the liability of the Town. Ms. Chaston is that the idea is to encourage passive recreation not for user groups and this can only be accomplished if we have cooperation. Ms. Chaston defers the timeline to Mr. Olsen to ensure the safety of the fields over opening them for the sake of opening. Mr. Gerstel asked if there is a possibility to open turf fields this weekend. Mr. Olsen stated that he is more concerned about the youths and does not recommend opening this weekend and would like to work with the surrounding communities. Mr. Toolan stated that he agrees that this weekend does not make sense and that we would be ahead of the Governor's announcement scheduled for the 18th and we should tie our message to the Governor's plan. Mr. Toolan stated that opening with our own phases would also be the best approach. Mr. McDonald stated that there is value in hearing what the Governor has to say and there may be some more guidance at the end of the week that will address some of these items. Mr. McDonald stated that it may come down to perception as many surrounding communities have closed their parks and the parks remain closed, but the Board of Health would feel comfortable looking a plan from the Commission to open for passive recreation. Mr. Gerstel asked Mr. Olsen if a list could be put together to identify the phases. Mr. Olsen stated that he could get the list together. Mr. Toolan stated that we have to message trash, bathrooms, and water during all of our opening plan. Ms. Mulroy stated that she would like to keep in middle location of the fields to make sure they are being opened equally throughout Town. Mr. Gerstel stated that we will work on our phased approach and wait for the Governor's guidance. Ms. Mulroy stated that we should talk to the Memorial Park Trustees. Mr. Toolan asked that we also reach out to the School Committee to discuss fields at the Schools. Ms. Chaston asked Ms. Mulroy to please communicate this decision with the Select Board to be shared at their meeting tomorrow and Mr. McDonald to share this information with the Board of Health. Mr. Olsen stated that if artificial turf is opening, that the trash packers will need to start picking up the trash at those locations as well. Mr. Gerstel thanked Mr. McDonald and Mr. Olsen for attending tonight's meeting.

4A. Discussion Item – Pool Membership Policies

Ms. Mulroy stated that a discussion about refunding 2020 membership fees. Ms. Mulroy asked if the Commission wanted to roll-over the fees and handle how we register for time slots for the 2020 summer. Ms. Chaston asked about the status of the fiscal year and if we have to give refunds they have to be requested by June 30th and asked for a recommendation from the staff. Ms. Wright stated that the importance with this and with anything that we are doing will come down to the messaging. Ms. Wright stated that we provided a letter to the community outlining their options and that decisions will have to be in writing. Speaking about the 2018-2019 season, many members did roll their memberships and because of how we rolled it out we did receive positive feedback from the Community. Mr. Gerstel stated that he agrees with rolling the memberships to cover both the 2020-2021 and then the 2020 season would be 'pay-to-play'.

Mr. Toolan asked for an update about the information we are hearing. Mr. Toolan also stated that he would also like to discuss what it means to have a membership in 2020 if they still have to pay or a time slot during the season. Ms. O'Connor stated that the CDC released new information recently and that she is reviewing it and working with the Board of Health to apply those regulations to our facility. Ms. O'Connor stated that others in neighboring communities are constantly in discussion about the regulations and how they can be applied and what can be done to meet the requirements to potentially open this season. Ms. Wright stated that within the system could not charge members of the facility for time slots and we could also sponsor a delayed registration for non-members. The ultimate decision about what we would like to move forward with in terms of pricing and registration timelines would be at the discretion of the Commission.

Ms. Chaston would want to roll over the 2020 memberships to include the 2021 and everyone entering the facility would have to have a pass to use the facility this year. Ms. Chaston stated that if the Commission decides to raise the fees for the 2021 season, then the members that registered in 2020 would receive a greater benefit from registering for this season. Ms. O'Connor stated that the CDC is recommending that patrons are local so the pre-registered non-residents would not be able to come to the facility this year. Ms. Chaston stated that the non-residents should just be refunded. Mr. Toolan defers to the staff but also thinks that refunding non-residents would be a cleaner option. Ms. Mulroy stated that 2021 is still a mystery and who is to say non-residents will be allowed back next week.

Ms. Mulroy would like to conclude about rolling the memberships. Mr. Toolan agrees with rolling, but we need to come to a decision about our opening by June 15th to ensure refunds can be requested by June 30th.

Mr. Toolan stated that he is in favor of rolling it like the 2018-2019 season and he agrees that members having early access to spots would be favorable as well as members not paying additional fees.

Ms. O'Connor stated that the spray deck would not be open this season and will serve as our exit from the facility. The diving board, the slides, the bath houses, and locker rooms will also be closed for the season. Mr. Gerstel asked if there would be chairs and tables at the facility. Ms. O'Connor stated that we would not have chairs or tables supplied this year.

Mr. Toolan moved that 2020 memberships will carry-over for use during the 2021 season, that refunds or credits are also allowed for the memberships if the registered members prefer those options, that there is a preference in registration for members of the Pools at RRC, and that we follow the recommendations from the CDC when considering access to the Pools for non-residents of Needham. Ms. Chaston seconded the motion and it passed unanimously.

4B. Discussion Item – Summer Programs:

Ms. Mulroy suggests that we wait for further guidance before discussion offering summer programs for this year. Ms. O'Connor stated that a major concern would be the cleaning aspect and the staffing levels.

Ms. Chaston asked if there is a skeleton plan. Ms. Mulroy stated that there are still too many unknowns and that a neighboring community just launched a survey to get the feeling of the community. Ms. Chaston asked about overnight camps and if they are not running this year, we may have an increase in need. Ms. Mulroy stated that every camp that she is aware of has been cancelled. Mr. Toolan stated that my help with available staff resources. Ms. O'Connor stated that we have several staff that are still looking to work this summer. Mr. Toolan asked about the hiring freeze. Ms. Mulroy stated that the Town is currently not hiring any personnel at any level and concerns about having a conditional offer that could trigger unemployment. Ms. Mulroy stated that there is a discussion about reallocating staff within the Town to handle some of the job functions. Ms. O'Connor stated that with the Pools that returning staff will receive preference.

4D. Discussion Item – Project Updates

Rosemary Lake Sediment project update was discussed earlier in the meeting.

4E. Discussion Item – Celebrations & Events

Needham Exchange Club cancelled the 3rd of July fireworks and 4th of July parade.

Mr. Gerstel stated that he shared the tier costs for opening the Pools with other members of the Commission.

5A. Action Item – Approval of the Meeting Minutes

Ms. Chaston moved to approve the minutes from the March 2, 2020 meeting with edits. Mr. Toolan seconded the motion and they were approved unanimously.

6. Issues Not Reasonably Anticipated by Chair within 48 Hours

Ms. Chaston asked for an update on the Cricket Field damage and if a party was identified. Ms. Mulroy stated that she had not receive the official report yet. Ms. Chaston asked about filling the vacant seat on the Commission. Mr. Gerstel said he would discuss that in a moment.

Mr. Gerstel asked if there was an update regarding the upcoming election and the RRC remaining an election location for two precincts. Ms. Wright stated she had met with the Town Clerk and the logistics team about entry and exit points and the Building Maintenance team would be setting up 6-foot markings.

Mr. Gerstel asked about the Walker Pond project as the Walker Pond Association reached out to him regarding the focus group for this project. Ms. Mulroy stated that she will be meeting with them on June 3rd.

Mr. Gerstel stated that both he and Ms. Chaston reached out to Commissioner Toolan to finish the term that was left vacant by the passing of Commission DiCicco. Mr. Toolan accepted the appointment. Ms. Chaston stated that she is very happy to have Mr. Toolan stay on and to have a full Commission until the 2021 election.

C. Adjournment of Business Meeting

Mr. Toolan moved to adjourn the May 11, 2020 Park and Recreation Commission meeting at 9:17pm. Ms. Chaston seconded the motion and the meeting adjourned at 9:17pm.

Respectfully submitted,

Kristen Wright
Administrative Specialist