

Park and Recreation Commission Meeting

August 25, 2025, at 6:00pm

Present: Christopher Gerstel (Chair), Michelle Geddes (Vice-Chair), Cynthia Chaston (Member), James Rosenbaum (Member), Stacey Mulroy (Director), Hannah Corrigan (Assistant Director) via Zoom, Grace Steeves (Administrative Assistant)

Absent: Dina Hannigan (Member)

Guests: Christine Urban, Meryl Nistler, Charly Nanda, Kate Linzmeyer, Julie Tracey

Call to Order

Mr. Gerstel called the meeting to order at 6:00pm, August 25, 2025

Open Forum Public Comment

Needham residents Charly Nanda and Kate Linzmeyer introduced themselves as representatives for the Auditorium Community Theater (ACT) for Needham committee. Ms. Nanda and Ms. Linzmeyer explained that their mission is to make sure the Pollard school project, and the development of a new auditorium, represent the needs of the performing arts in Needham. They explained that currently all performances are done in the Newman Elementary School auditorium, which is utilized by a number of groups, and often does not have the space to fulfill the needs of productions. Ms. Nanda and Ms. Linzmeyer explained that while the town and schools have been very supportive of these needs, they wanted to create this committee to share what the community feels is necessary for the performing arts. They also shared that the Needham Council of Arts and Culture had previously conducted a study that surveyed residents, including a focus group on students in the Park & Recreation summer programs who stated they enjoyed the arts, but believe a better auditorium is needed. Ms. Nanda and Ms. Linzmeyer asked the Commission for their support on this topic. Mr. Gerstel thanked Ms. Nanda and Ms. Linzmeyer for bringing this topic to the Commission and shared the surprise he had when hearing about this topic. He expressed a shared understanding in how outdated the current facilities are and how high the demand is for a new space based on the current need.

Julie Tracey, a resident of Beech St. who lives across from Mills Field in Needham thanked Park and Recreation for removing the batting cages from the park as it has made a huge difference to the landscape. Ms. Tracey asked if it would be possible to continue to be updated on projects that are occurring at Mills Field, as residents are aware that there have been talks of projects such as a sports park or a dog park that could be put there, and would like to remain in the loop. Ms. Mulroy explained that the Select Board has currently put talks of a dog park on pause as they have since decided based on comments from residents by Mills Field that the location may not be the best spot for it.

Meeting Guests

None

Director's Report

Ms. Mulroy shared that the report with numbers from this summer's pool and camp revenue would be ready by the Commission's October meeting. Ms. Mulroy did share details regarding swim lessons and how they went this summer. The number of participants in each session of swim lessons did decrease from the 2024 season. She explained that in past years, the Needham Children's Center (NCC) brings about twenty children to participate in each session of swim lessons. Unfortunately, they were not able to this year, which was the largest factor in the numbers being lower. Ms. Corrigan shared that while group lessons decreased, adult and adaptive lessons increased significantly, and a lot more people reached out with inquiries regarding them than in previous years. Ms. Chaston inquired about why the numbers for group lessons were so much lower and asked if it could be a result of the time slots for group lessons not being accessible to families. Ms. Mulroy shared that this could have been a part of the problem as many children participate in camps or are at preschool, while many parents are working during the allotted time slots for lessons. Ms. Chaston asked if perhaps swim lessons could be incorporated into the schedule for Park & Recreation camps. Ms. Mulroy shared that in her past experience this is something that she's done, however, the cost of bussing children back and forth between the camps and pool is so high, and the Rosemary Recreation Complex does not have the space to hold camp at its location. Ms. Chaston asked if perhaps the old campsite on Rosemary Lake could be a site to hold camps. Ms. Mulroy explained that while this is an idea that the department has discussed, there are too many factors such as a lack of parking and bathrooms. Ms. Mulroy assured that the topic of swim lessons is an ongoing discussion that the department and commission will continue to explore.

Ms. Mulroy also touched upon tennis courts, specifically the court projects at Claxton and the high school. Construction at Claxton hit a few roadblocks after the generator for the irrigation system broke down one weekend, resulting in the summer heat frying the new sod of the court and turning it to hay. Ms. Mulroy praised Mr. Edward Olson, the Superintendent of the Parks and Forestry Division, for all the work him and his team have done to overcome this obstacle. While the grand opening of Claxton has yet to be determined, the team is working on the finishing touches. Mr. Gerstel shared that he had visited Claxton earlier that day and despite the few finishing touches missing, Claxton looked great. Ms. Mulroy also shared that construction at the Needham High School courts was on track to finish on time, which will be the first week of September. Ms. Chaston asked Ms. Mulroy if the school would be utilizing the new high school courts for fall tennis, and Mr. Gerstel inquired if anyone would be allowed to use these new courts during the fall, or if they would wait to open them to the public until the spring. Ms. Mulroy stated that the hope is to get the courts open as soon as possible to the public, including wellness classes at the school who are interested in using them, and the department's Recreation Supervisor. Mr. Gerstel also asked if Ms. Mulroy believes that the numbers for camp will return to normal next year with the ability to run tennis camp. Ms. Mulroy shared that she believes

there will be a large increase in camp registrations with the ability to run tennis camps. She also shared that it seemed typical across towns in Massachusetts that many numbers in summer programming and recreation were lower than usual.

Ms. Chaston also wanted to thank the staff at the pool over the summer. She stated that she received calls from people utilizing the pool regarding poor actions displayed by others, however, staff at the pool were able to handle these situations efficiently and effectively to ensure every person utilizing the pool had a good experience. She also stated she received requests from residents to make day-passes available for residents only. Ms. Mulroy acknowledged that she has also heard this request and while this is the Commission's decision to make, she believes that eliminating availability to purchase a day pass as a non-resident would reduce the revenue made by the pool significantly. She also acknowledged that Google has our hours displayed online wrong, however, despite the department's efforts to fix it, they have not been able to. Ms. Mulroy urged all people to utilize the Needham website for the most up-to-date and correct information on hours. Ms. Mulroy also wanted to thank Devin, the Rosemary Recreation Complex's Pool Maintenance Technician, for all the hard work he put into keeping the pool up and running all summer long.

Discussion Items

The Commission moved their meeting forward to 6:00pm in order to attend the Pollard Middle School Permanent Public Building Committee (PPBC) meeting at 7:30pm on August 25th, 2025. While this meeting was not an open forum, Commission members planned to be in attendance to provide any information or answer any questions needed. Commission members looked over the packet for the meeting that night, specifically the preliminary options that the PPBC has identified. Ms. Geddes discussed the changes made to preliminary options since the Commission last talked with the PPBC. They discussed impacts on DeFazio and what construction would affect. The Commission also discussed the options matrix within the PPBC packet, and they believed that some of the impact scores did not align based on their experience with programming at DeFazio. Commission members looked over the comparative probable cost analysis as well. Ms. Chaston asked members if they felt it was the right time for the Commission to make a statement of their stance on this project. They discussed other issues that may be faced by having the school site on DeFazio, including the displacement of space for the Department of Public Works to utilize, recent projects such as new fencing done by Park and Recreation that would be taken down, and the effect on user groups of the fields. Based on the timeline of the PPBC which shows a site decision will be made in early December, Commission members felt that they did not have the opportunity to ask enough questions or voice their concerns. **Ms. Geddes made a motion for the Park and Recreation Commission to take a formal stance on the Pollard project to share with the School Committee and PPBC. Mr. Rosenbaum seconded the motion. The motion passed unanimously by a vote of 4-0.** Mr. Gerstel offered to draft the formal stance, and the Commission decided to inquire with the PPBC and School Committee when it would be needed by at the meeting that night.

Action Items

- A) Special Event Approvals – None
- B) Policy Approvals - None
- C) Fee Approvals - None
- D) Meeting Minute Approvals - None

Chairs Updates and Issues Not Reasonably Anticipated by Chair within 48 Hours

The Park and Recreation Commission asked Mr. Rosenbaum to be the representative from the Commission for the Trails Advisory Committee.

Topics for Future Meetings

- Pollard Middle School Project
- Car Washes
- Policies
- Goals

Next Meetings

September 9th, 2025

To be determined - Second meeting in September and first meeting in October

Adjournment

Cindy Chaston made a motion to adjourn the meeting at 7:12pm. Ms. Geddes seconded the motion, and it passed unanimously.

Respectfully Submitted,

Grace Steeves

Administrative Assistant