

**COMMUNITY PRESERVATION COMMITTEE
TOWN OF NEEDHAM, MASSACHUSETTS**

**Minutes of Meeting & Public Hearing
September 11, 2024**

LOCATION: Hybrid Meeting, Charles River Room, PSAB, 500 Dedham Avenue, Needham and via Zoom

PRESENT: Dave Herer (Chair), Maureen Callahan (Vice Chair), Reginald Foster, Paul Dawson, Adam Block, Marshall Davis, Jim Rosenbaum, Keith LaFace

GUESTS: Stacey Mulroy, Director of Needham Park and Recreation Department (remote)

STAFF: Cecilia Simchak (remote), Lauren Spinney

D. Herer called the meeting to order at 7:02 p.m. and completed a roll call for members of the Committee and staff, the results of which are noted above.

COMMITTEE CHAIR UPDATES

None.

MEETING MINUTES

P. Dawson moved to approve the meeting minutes of July 31, 2024. K. LaFace seconded the motion. The vote was as follows: D. Herer (aye); M. Callahan (aye); R. Foster (aye); P. Dawson (aye); A. Block (aye); M. Davis (aye); K. LaFace (aye); J. Rosenbaum (aye). Motion carries 8-0.

PUBLIC HEARING

D. Herer opened the Public Hearing and invited Stacey Mulroy, Director of Needham Park and Recreation Department to present the FY2025-04 Needham High School Tennis Court Project.

The Needham Park and Recreation Department requested \$1,400,000 for construction costs associated with replacing the existing four tennis courts at Needham High School and adding four additional courts. The courts will be constructed with post-tension concrete which is the new industry norm. Post-tension concrete currently carries a 25-year warranty, and it looks like the lifespan is moving towards 40-50 years. This will reduce the amount of maintenance that will be required. The plan includes stormwater retention with the neighborhoods on the north and east sides of the courts in mind. As requested by the Planning Board, the project also includes additional landscaping to act as a sound barrier and increased setbacks for the new courts. The entire project will be ADA accessible.

S. Mulroy also noted that play on these courts will be restricted to tennis only, no pickleball will be allowed. As of January 1, 2025, all tennis courts in Needham will follow the noise ordinance and be open for play from 7:00 a.m. to 8:00 p.m.

PUBLIC COMMENT

Geoffrey Zhang, a third-grade student at Elliott School, expressed his support for the project. As an avid tennis player, Geoffrey won third place at the North Regional Little Mo Tennis Tournament in NYC last year. This year, he was one of two players representing Boston at the national UST Foundation event in Washington, DC. His dream is to bring a state championship to Needham, but he has to travel to other towns to play. Geoffrey believes that many people in town will benefit from the construction of new courts.

Howard Silverman expressed support for the project. He grew up in Needham and played on the NHS team. His son played in the 2011-2012 championship teams. Needham was the only team in the Bay State League with four courts, which should not be the case for a championship system like Needham. It is also valuable for junior varsity players to practice with varsity. He has watched other sports expand and grow within the town while the number of Needham courts has shrunk, especially with the growth of pickleball.

Niraj Sharma spoke on behalf of his family who are in favor of expanding the number of courts. As parents of a student on the junior varsity tennis team, he and his wife have had to take time off from work to drive her to practices and matches. From a practical point of view, it is incumbent upon the town to renovate and expand the courts at the high school to make it easier for student athletes to get to practice after school and to have facilities on par with surrounding towns.

Sam Williams's daughter is currently on the Needham team. Tennis is a life sport for ages 3-80. There have been instances where the high school teams arrived for practice and had to ask people who were playing socially to vacate the courts. In instances where matches ran long, community members had increased wait times for the courts. Having all of the high school courts in one place allows students to funnel down and watch matches, creating a more supportive environment for student athletes. Both teams are in the top 15 in the state every year, so the program is healthy and growing. We need to grow with it.

Sue McLaughlin is a resident in Needham with four children, three of whom have played on teams. The whole family plays so she strongly agrees that this project impacts a wide range of ages across town, not just the high school teams. She also agrees with Dr. Sharma that transportation of younger players to other courts in the middle of the day is problematic. As this is a life sport, increasing the number of public courts benefits the whole town.

Kieran Smith & Carolyn Gutilla both spoke in support of the project. They have daughters who play, or have played, on the NHS teams and highlighted the importance of mentorship between varsity and junior varsity players. Younger athletes benefit from watching older athletes play, as well as having opportunities to play with them. This includes the development of leadership skills through observing and interacting with older athletes, and the support of having other students watch them play. They echoed Dr. Sharma's point regarding the burden of transporting freshman, sophomore and junior players who cannot drive.

Colin is a Needham resident with two children and his daughter loves tennis. The current condition of the Needham courts is embarrassing. He drives his daughter to the Wellesley and Newton courts to play. The town should do better, and he agrees with the parents that spoke before him. Having eight courts will allow student athletes to play together and learn from each other.

Ethan Gettman has a son who is a freshman at NHS with a goal of bringing Needham to the State Championships.

Jeremy Chao is a tennis instructor for Park and Recreation. He teaches youth tennis for grades 1-8. He can personally attest to the exploding interest in learning tennis at the youth level, as group courses for youth tennis at Park & Rec are overbooked in every session. It is imperative that they have new, safe courts to teach these children.

L. Spinney shared that there were two emailed comments from the public. One was fully in support of the project. The second was a lengthy email from Andrew Thoresen with concerns primarily regarding stormwater runoff and management.

S. Mulroy stated that the consultant, Activitas, worked diligently with their stormwater people and with the Town's engineers to develop a great plan to make sure the water is moving away from the neighborhoods and into the current catch basins, making it a more robust stormwater plan.

A. Block, Planning Board representative to the CPC, shared that this matter came before the Planning Board and the Board issued its decision to approve the application. The public hearing and separate application process included a review by the Town Engineering Department. A new stormwater management system is going to be installed, and the applicant is required to adhere to the latest code to ensure the highest possible standard. He recognizes that this is a sensitive issue across a great many neighborhoods. The town has done its due diligence to satisfy itself and the applicant will adhere to the decision of the Planning Board.

R. Foster asked if any other conditions were imposed by the Planning Board that may impact the Committee's decision on whether or not to approve funding for this project. A. Block suggested that the Planning Board's written decision was the best resource to understand all of the conditions placed on the project. Some examples include limitation on the hours of play, the prohibition of pickleball on the site, signage, increasing the height of the fencing, and public safety access.

A. Block moved to close the Public Hearing at 7:35 p.m. The motion was seconded by P. Dawson. The vote was as follows: D. Herer (aye); M. Callahan (aye); R. Foster (aye); P. Dawson (aye); A. Block (aye); M. Davis (aye); K. LaFace (aye); J. Rosenbaum (aye). Motion carries 8-0.

MATTERS NOT REASONABLY ANTICIPATED BY THE CHAIR 48 HOURS IN ADVANCE:

R. Foster shared that following its RFP process, the Needham Housing Authority Board of Commissioners met last Thursday and received a report from the proposal evaluation committee. The RFP for a development partner for the Linden Chambers Redevelopment went out last June.

Three well-qualified proposals were received and one of the three was most advantageous to the Needham Housing Authority. The Board voted unanimously to award the engagement to Affordable Housing Services Collaborative (AHSC) Peabody Developer, LLC.

C. Simchak shared Town Counsel's opinion that the Committee could not grant funding for the NHS Tennis Court Project out of the Open Space Reserve. He previously opined that it was an eligible project under Recreation, which can be funded out of free cash and general reserves.

MEETING SCHEDULE

The next CPC meeting is scheduled for September 18. The Committee will also convene for Town Meeting on October 21.

CPC APPLICATION WORKSHOP

The Committee provided a presentation on the eligible uses of CPA funds, the application process and timeline, the CPA Plan goals, and factors for consideration which inform the Committee's decision making in determining whether or not to recommend a project for funding. A copy of the presentation may be found in the meeting packet for this meeting, as well as on the CPC website.

Jeanne McKnight is interested in pursuing an application for funding to construct a boardwalk through Sweet Preserve and a large parcel of wetlands by the Hillside School. She visited the site with landscape architect, Nelson Hammer, who suggested that the Sweet Preserve parcel has limited frontage and limited parking opportunities. The better site for boardwalk access is the larger wetland which is under the jurisdiction of the school committee. D. Herer suggested that the Conservation Commission would likely support the project and the first step towards a viable application is to obtain the permission and support of the school committee.

ADJOURNMENT

A. Block moved to adjourn the meeting at 8:33 p.m. The motion was seconded by J. Rosenbaum. The vote was as follows: The vote was as follows: D. Herer (aye); M. Callahan (aye); R. Foster (aye); P. Dawson (aye); A. Block (aye); M. Davis (aye); K. LaFace (aye); J. Rosenbaum (aye). Motion carries 8-0.

For more information, the meeting materials are available at:

<https://www.needhamma.gov/Archive.aspx?AMID=&Type=&ADID=13082>

Respectfully submitted,

Lauren Spinney
Administrative Coordinator