

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

**Minutes of Meeting  
March 30, 2020**

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

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

Mr. Gerstel thanked everyone for joining the meeting and provided recognition to the Park and Recreation staff for working during this time. Mr. Gerstel stated that the Commission lost a member of its family recently with the passing of Mr. David DiCicco. Mr. Gerstel further stated that once we can, we will pay a special tribute to Mr. DiCicco and that our thoughts are with his family during this trying time.

**1. Director's Report**

The Commission reviewed the written report. Ms. Mulroy discussed that the team is working remotely with very little access to the physical office, with daily virtual staff meetings.

Ms. Mulroy discussed a conversation with Parks and Forestry. Ms. O'Connor stated that the Parks team is working on an A/B shift and they are currently locking all parks, fields, and playgrounds. Ms. O'Connor stated that they are getting construction fencing to put up around facilities that do not have gates and they will be also barricading the parking lots to reduce the access even further. Mr. Gerstel asked how they are managing larger facilities that may have a lot of foot traffic. Ms. O'Connor stated that it will be policed. Ms. Chaston asked about the Reservoir trail and the ability to fish there. Ms. O'Connor stated that trails are still open, and fishing is allowed. Ms. O'Connor stated that she is working with Karen Shannon from the Public Health department to start a youth campaign to promote social distancing to keep teen groups off the fields. Ms. Chaston asked if the Reservoir was stocked. Ms. O'Connor stated that she had not heard that it had been stocked and the last conversation she had with the Mass. Wildlife group did not provide a specific date for stocking. Ms. Geddes asked about the messaging and the ability for people to use fields responsibly. Ms. O'Connor stated that no one is allowed on the fields because gatherings, even if some groups are being responsible, brings more gatherings and not all groups are being responsible and with the Stay-at-home Advisory, no gatherings can be permitted. Ms. Mulroy stated that the guidance is 6 feet of social distance, when you must go out for essential needs. The CDC is not recommending non-essential congregating of any kind, regardless of staying socially distance. Ms. Mulroy stated that neighboring Towns are making some trails one-way to reduce the number of opportunities people must encounter while using the trails. Mr. Gerstel agreed that it would be a start but thinks it would be difficult for trails, like the Rail Trail, that are not circular. Ms. Mulroy agreed this would be easiest on circular trails. Mr. Toolan asked if we are barricading the playgrounds at the Schools. Ms. O'Connor stated that the Needham Department of Public Works is formulating their plan to be similar to the City of Boston's plan in terms of reducing public access while the facilities are closed. Ms. Mulroy stated that this is just another level of communication, but the messaging is the same; parks, fields, and playgrounds are closed for public use due to the current outbreak of COVID-19. Mr. Toolan stated that he agrees that we need stronger

communication as people are not currently heading the message that these facilities are closed. Mr. Toolan shared concern of what a kindergartener or young elementary school student would think if they saw their school playground barricaded where they cannot fully comprehend the situation and have gone through many changes already. Ms. O'Connor stated that if we can source enough jersey fencing, that the hard barricades will be limited to the parking lots of the schools and not necessarily placed specifically around the playgrounds themselves. Mr. Gerstel asked about the Tennis Courts. Ms. O'Connor stated that the Tennis Courts will be locked beginning tomorrow, April 1<sup>st</sup>. Ms. Mulroy stated that the number of new cases is still increasing drastically and that we are now working in the best interest of the community to help prevent the spread. Ms. O'Connor stated that these measures are being implemented by the Health Department and the Town's Emergency Operations Center (EOC) and we have to comply for the safety of the Town. Mr. Gerstel asked if the EOC was still using the Rosemary Recreation Complex (RRC) to meet. Ms. O'Connor stated that the four main members of the EOC were still using the RRC and other members of the EOC were working remotely with some in-house meetings. Ms. O'Connor stated that the trail around Rosemary Lake is being heavily used and it is really great to see. Mr. Gerstel stated that public feedback can be expected but the measures are well thought out and are what is best for the overall Town. Mr. Toolan stated that the virus is suspected to remain on surfaces for a period of time and asked if the artificial turf or the track were considered to be surfaces that the virus can survive on. Mr. Toolan stated that those types of surfaces, and those on playgrounds, are not what people are necessarily thinking of when they hear surfaces. Ms. O'Connor stated the really trouble with playgrounds is that they are made of metal and currently the virus appears to remain on metal for 9 days after being infected. Ms. O'Connor continued to say that it does not appear to adhere to rubber, like the surfaces of the track and artificial turf, for as long. Mr. Gerstel stated that this is the world we are currently living in and for now, these are the measure we have to take.

Ms. Mulroy discussed the outstanding bids for the Pools; one for chemicals and one for the start-up of the Pools. Mr. Gerstel asked if there have been any conversations with the potential bidders of these services. Ms. Wright stated that for the start-up bid Weston & Sampson have submitted their acknowledgement of the bid and that there have been questions from other vendors, but no additional acknowledgements. Ms. Wright further stated that for the chemical bid there have been three vendors that have submitted acknowledgements but the chlorine vendor that was used in 2019 was not one of them. Mr. Toolan asked when we have to make a decision about opening the Pools and protections in these contracts if we decide to not open the Pools. Ms. Wright stated that both bids have had at least two addenda published with changes to the original bid and depending on what we know and when we know it, we will continue to publish addenda to ensure the Town is effectively updating the scopes of each bid to be clear, consistent and fair. Ms. Wright stated that during the pre-bid meeting it was discussed that three weeks was needed to perform the start-up procedures of the Pools, and that timeline was worked into the original schedule of opening the pools, but as times continue to change, it may take longer depending on what restrictions are placed on the staffing allowed to be at the facility at one time. Mr. Toolan asked if we were given any sort of priority to ensure that when we are able to begin the start-up procedures, we are not delayed because other facilities scheduled their start-ups first. Ms. Wright stated that the original bid had very specific

timelines and that if we have to continue to shift the timing of the bid opening and the ability for personal to be on Town property, the amount of time will be known when the bid is being signed and the awarded vendor will be agreeing to that timeline. Ms. Mulroy stated the same type of language is being used when we are talking to staff during their interviews.

Ms. Mulroy stated that she reached out to Town Engineer Anthony DelGaizo about the Rosemary Sediment project to see if there were any additional updates outside of the published report and at time of this meeting she had not heard back to him. The Commission noted the continued work of the project that seems to have increased since their last in person meeting. Mr. Gerstel stated that the hope is that they are still in line to finish their project prior to our team beginning the start-up procedures at the Pools and it is important to hold them accountable to these timelines and the conditions in which they leave both the beach and Chamber's Cove.

Ms. Chaston asked if there is a date, where if we are still in this current situation, that decides whether we can open the Pools this year. Ms. Mulroy stated that that will be a future conversation, but it is important to note that a conversation about that date is necessary. Mr. Toolan asked what is being communicated to the public about canceling either the Pools season or the summer programs. Ms. Mulroy stated that we cancel, you can choose to get your money back, or donate to the scholarship fund for the programs and for the pools, the option to roll-over would be given as well. Ms. Wright stated that when we had to delay the Pool openings the first year, the option was refund or extend and it was received well by the community. Mr. Gerstel agreed that if we came to a point where we were considering shortening the pools season, that the same structure should be in place. Ms. Mulroy stated that if we have to refund, we need to do so before June 30<sup>th</sup>. Ms. O'Connor stated that another factor to keep in mind when thinking about opening is the time it will take to train our guards. Ms. Chaston asked what date would be comfortable to make a final decision about opening considering the training. Ms. O'Connor stated that right now it looks like the end of May will be when they will start but completing the hiring process also takes time and will need to be considered. Mr. Toolan stated that, due to COVID, there are going to be a lot more applicants as many places have already cancelled their programs. Ms. Geddes stated that internships are also being cancelled for the summer which will provide another set of applicants that we would not generally have.

## **2. Program Report**

The Commission reviewed the written report.

Mr. Gerstel congratulated Ms. O'Connor, Mr. Burnham on the campaigns that have been hosted on social media and asked how the community was responding to the cancellations of the spring programs. Ms. Wright stated that she and Ms. Parsons are working through the cancellations and following the current policy of refunding the programs that have been cancelled and crediting the programs that were partially cancelled. Ms. Wright stated that everyone was being very understanding and that there were a few programs that were not yet cancelled, and those participants were happy to hear that as well.

### **3. Discussion Items**

Both items A and B were discussed during the Director's Report review.

### **4. Issues Not Reasonably Anticipated by Chair within 48 Hours**

Mr. Gerstel stated that items for discussion that are not on the agenda are the Community Preservation Committee (CPC) articles that have been moved to Town Meeting in October at the request of Town Management. Mr. Gerstel reminded the Commission that among the CPC articles that were pushed were three articles that has Park and Recreation input: Claxton Field Renovation, Resurfacing of DeFazio Track, and Trail Improvements. Mr. Gerstel also stated that another article in the Town Meeting Warrant regarding Walker Pond, but that is unrelated to the Walker Pond Association that was looking for Pond remediation earlier in the year and is a standalone citizen's petition regarding a sewer connection to a property along Walker Pond.

Mr. Toolan asked for the status of Town Elections. Ms. Wright stated that it is postponed to May 26<sup>th</sup>. Mr. Gerstel and Ms. Chaston stated that Mr. Toolan was stuck with the Commission until further notice. Mr. Toolan expressed his wishes to, when we can, properly honor Commissioner Dave DiCicco and how we can move forward with that.

Ms. Chaston extended her thanks to the Park and Recreation staff for the work that they were doing during this difficult time. Ms. Chaston asked if the new Assistant Town Manager had started. Ms. Wright stated she is set to start on June 1<sup>st</sup>.

Mr. Toolan asked about spring maintenance on the fields to hopefully host spring or summer sports and the time it will take to ready these fields. Ms. Mulroy stated that Parks and Forestry will need a few weeks once they were cleared to begin work.

Mr. Gerstel stated that the President of Needham Baseball & Softball reached out to other user groups and the consensus was that they would work towards consistent messaging.

Ms. Mulroy stated that hopefully the state will be consistent with announcing when things will close and hopefully that will continue. Ms. Mulroy asked when the Commission to meet again. Mr. Gerstel stated that he would like to get back to the bi-monthly schedule for meetings.

Mr. Gerstel asked what happens if we do not open the Pools this year. Ms. Mulroy stated that she will check with Weston & Sampson to see what maintenance should be done this summer regardless if we open to the public. Ms. Chaston stated that there is an outstanding list of maintenance projects that also must get done on the pool deck. Ms. Mulroy stated that if we did not open the pools or run programs, we would have the opportunity to look into different registration systems.

### **5. Topics for Future Agendas**

From earlier in the meeting Ms. Chaston and Mr. Toolan would like to discuss future postponements or cancelling of the 2020 Pools Season and the timelines necessary to open the Pools this year.

**6. Adjournment of Business Meeting**

**Ms. Chaston moved to adjourn the March 30, 2020 Park and Recreation Commission meeting at 7:58pm. Mr. Toolan seconded the motion and the meeting adjourned at 7:58pm.**

Respectfully submitted,

Kristen Wright  
Administrative Specialist