

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

**Minutes of Meeting
February 22, 2021**

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

STAFF: Stacey Mulroy, Kristen Wright

GUESTS: Penny Grossman

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. COA Liaison

The Commission discussed the partnership between the Council on Aging and the Park and Recreation Commission throughout the pandemic and in the future. Ms. Grossman shared that the current focus of the Center at the Heights revolves around the vaccine, virtual programming, taxes, and waiting to get back to in person activities. Mr. Toolan asked for any feedback from our senior population regarding the pool programming.

2. Director's Report

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

The Commission discussed holding the Field Summit on March 8th and beginning at 6:30pm as well as the field scheduling for the Spring. Ms. Chaston noted that typically the field summit is after a brief meeting of the Commission. Ms. Geddes spoke to the presentations that are usually involved with the field summit. Ms. Chaston discussed having Superintendent Ed Olsen. Mr. Toolan asked if the Commission discussed changing the Youth Sports Spring season to match the MIAA Spring season. Ms. Mulroy did not believe that there should be too many conflicts if we keep the Youth Sports Spring season on a regular schedule especially where NHS Athletics has full access to the fields until 6:00pm Monday – Friday regardless.

Ms. Mulroy provided an overview of the Action Plan for playgrounds. Ms. Chaston stated that once there is a plan that the Commission will discuss how it will go into the Capital Plan for future budget years.

Mr. Gerstel shared updates from the CPC's February 17th meeting.

Ms. Mulroy provided an update to the Commission in regards to the hiring process for the Assistant Director.

4A. Projects

Discussed earlier in the meeting.

4B. Budget/Finance

Ms. Mulroy stated that there was no official update, but no additional questions have been asked.

4C. Programs

Spring and Summer Programs

Ms. Chaston stated that there appear to be notices about 2021 Summer Camps. Ms. Mulroy stated that private camps appear to be moving towards a normal type of summer but on the municipal side of things some are already planned, others are waiting. Ms. Mulroy shared that we are working towards staffing and identifying our access to school buildings. Mr. Williams stated that taking the conservative approach until details are more finite. Ms. Geddes asked if there is a cut-off point where it will be too late in the season to get the appropriate level of staff. Ms. Mulroy is less concerned about the level of staffing but did share concerns about getting the training, especially for our lifeguarding staff.

4D. Facilities

Field Usage w/ St. Joe's update

Moved to next meeting.

Field Updates

Ms. Mulroy and the Commission discussed the conversation about using Memorial Field for NHS Athletics, field plowing, and the potential use of DeFazio.

Mr. Williams stated that he did talk to Mr. Gallelo and he shared concerns about the field getting damaged. Mr. Williams further discussed the shortened schedule that Ice Hockey had and the shorter season that football will also experience.

Mr. Toolan stated that he hopes that the Trustees will meet and have a public meeting to discuss the field use. Mr. Toolan also shared that the concerns being shared now probably would not be the same if the timing were set around the Annual Thanksgiving Day game and would instead be how we could get the snow off the field so the kids could play. Mr. Toolan further stated that this discussion is to the benefit of the student athletes that did not get their fall season and have been dealing with the fall out from COVID-19 at every level of their day-to-day life for nearly a year. Mr. Toolan shared frustration that there has not yet been a public meeting and open discussion about this issue that affects so many.

Ms. Chaston stated that she is sympathetic to the Trustees not wanting to have the fields plowed but agrees that if natural melting takes place that she does not know of a reason to keep the athletes off the field. Ms. Chaston shared removing the snow from the bottom of the hill would hinder the sledding and would impact the community.

Mr. Gerstel stated that he would defer to Superintendent Olsen's recommendation for the proper field maintenance and any version of plowing that he is comfortable with. Mr. Gerstel stated that he is more comfortable allowing NHS Athletics to use the turf fields at DeFazio instead of Claxton

Field. Ms. Mulroy did remind the Commission that the DeFazio parking lot is also used as a snow dump.

Mr. Williams asked if the snow is removed or melted, will the field get damaged from being used so early. Ms. Mulroy and Mr. Gerstel stated that it should not damage the field if it is used properly. Mr. Williams stated that he will continue to discuss with members of the Trustees about the larger issues with using Memorial.

Mr. Toolan stated that he agrees with Mr. Gerstel to defer the decisions about field maintenance especially with snow removal. Ms. Chaston stated that she is not necessarily in favor of plowing the fields but would be more comfortable with using the crumb rubber to help melting.

Mr. Gerstel stated concussion protocols will need to be a consideration and the turf fields had a pad put in place during the last construction projects to help with this concern. Mr. Gerstel stated that he would also be against hiring a specialty plowing company and would prefer to let nature take its course.

Ms. Geddes shared her frustration that if the field does not have snow on it, why should there be a different standard between fields under the jurisdiction of Park and Recreation and fields under the jurisdiction of a different Commission.

Mr. Toolan made a motion to allow NHS Athletics to practice on the turf fields at DeFazio if it has been cleared by an acceptable method by Parks and Forestry and has been deemed safe for play. Mr. Toolan further moved that if the method to be approved by Parks and Forestry involves plowing, that the Commission hold a separate meeting and vote on allowing that method to be used. Mr. Gerstel seconded the motion.

Mr. Williams asked if the Parks and Forestry does not plow all the way down to the turf level, but plow above the field line, that would be acceptable. Ms. Chaston stated that method that was used at Claxton was appropriate for grass, but not synthetic turf fields. Ms. Chaston stated that the Town does not own equipment that is suitable for the synthetic turf.

Mr. Gerstel amended the prior motion to state that the Park and Recreation Commission will allow NHS Athletics to use the turf fields at DeFazio for practice if it is the only field space that is made available to them, and that it will only be used if it is cleared by an acceptable method, determined by Parks and Forestry to accurate the melting process that does not involve plowing. Mr. Gerstel's amendment included Mr. Toolan's original stipulation that if plowing is the recommendation of the Parks and Forestry Department, that a secondary vote of the Commission will be required prior to the plowing to be completed. Mr. Toolan seconded the motion and it passed 5-0.

Field Summit

Discussed earlier in the meeting.

4E. The Pools at RRC

Memberships for 2021

Ms. Mulroy stated that there is not a recommendation at this time, but hopes to have one in the future and this topic will remain on the agenda until the guidance has been clarified by the state.

2020 Pool & Revenue Report (Final)

The Commission discussed the report and would like to plan in the recommendations listed.

5A. Special Event Approvals

None presented.

5B. Program Pricing Approvals

None presented.

5C. Meeting Minutes

February 8, 2021

Mr. Gerstel made a motion to approve the meeting minutes from February 8, 2021. Ms. Geddes seconded the motion and it passed 5-0.

5. Topics for Future Meetings

Mr. Gerstel stated that the parking lot at Claxton needs better signage to indicate the designated 'IN' and 'OUT' pathway.

Mr. Gerstel stated that there has been a candidate running for the Park and Recreation Commission and they have turned in her paperwork to the Town Clerk.

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

Mr. Gerstel wanted an update on Ice Skating. Ms. Wright stated that there will continue to be updates on the website and social media. Mr. Williams stated that there used to be a hotline. Ms. Wright stated that it does not exist any longer. Ms. Wright stated that she will add the updates directly to the main web pages slideshow. Ms. Mulroy stated that the Parks team will put up the 'DANGER' signs once the ice is no longer safe.

7. Next Meetings

The Commission reviewed the next meeting dates.

8. Adjournment of Business Meeting

Mr. Gerstel moved to adjourn the February 22, 2021 Park and Recreation Commission meeting at 8:49pm. Mr. Toolan seconded the motion and the meeting adjourned at 8:49pm.

Respectfully submitted,

Kristen Wright
Administrative Specialist