

Recreation Commission Meeting Minutes

Date: 8/7/2018

Recreation Center, 50 Audubon Dr., Acton MA, 7:00pm

Attendees: Edward Holcomb, Commissioner; Stephen Trimble, Commissioner; Joe Will, Commissioner; Cathy Fochtman, Recreation Director; Mary Lou Repucci, Recreation Office Manager; Ayyapillai Murali and Praneel Murali, residents.

1. The meeting was called to order by Chair Stephen Trimble at 7:10 pm. Praneel Murali participated to fulfill a Boy Scouts of America badge requirement to attend public meetings, and in particular to observe the process when agenda items might include contentious issues. He was accompanied by his father, Ayyapillai Murali.
2. Citizen's Concerns:
 - a. Cathy Fochtman responded to an email from Glenn Rifkin asking for an update on his request for a review of NARA Park pedestrian safety. Cathy has discussed this with Town Manager, John Mangiaratti, and will walk the NARA trail to see the situation first-hand.
 - b. Cathy also posed the ideas to John suggested by Steve Trimble to mark areas of the Bruce Freeman Rail Trail (BFRT) merged with the NARA walking path, and to add pedestrian trail signage to the walking trail. Further possible modifications were considered by the Commissioners including the clarification that wheel chairs, as wheeled vehicles, are not excluded from the pedestrian walkway. Steve also mentioned that the BFRT map invites bikes into NARA and that the label should be either removed or revised with a reminder that NARA is a walking park
3. Consent Agenda: July 11, 2018 Minutes accepted as amended, 3:0.
4. Action Item Review from July 11, 2018 Minutes:
Cathy will contact Tac Palmer for his input on how to address citizen concerns over unleashed dogs in NARA Park.
5. Fall & Winter Programs:
Cathy reported that Maura Haberman, Event and Program Coordinator, is compiling a schedule of 2018-2019 fall and winter programs. Maura is partnering with new instructors to offer art classes at the 50 Audubon Drive Recreation Center. She will also offer a series of classes through the Acton Chinese Language School. Indoor versions of the Beach Blast and Studio Two Beatle tribute band are being planned for this winter. Maura also contributed the idea of moving some smaller events indoors to the Recreation Center rather than holding them at NARA.
6. Minimum Wage Increase Impact:
A multi-year ascension in minimum wage to \$15 per hour will begin this January. Seasonal staff currently start at \$11. Cathy distributed the Recreation salary schedule explaining that while she hopes to rehire many summer employees, the grid will need to be modified. A 70-80% return rate is typical with a step increase for rehires. (Staff who change jobs start at a different rate.) Remaining competitive will require corresponding fee increases. Recreation consultant, Pat Savage, will be analyzing the salary chart to

project the impact of the new minimum wage law. Steve suggested automating to eliminate jobs but Cathy replied that funding has not been received for items such as automated machines or an automatic gate. It was discussed whether to overcharge starting in 2019 for two years or to graduate fee increases over time. Cathy and Steve were both inclined toward a gradual scale. Steve also suggesting reducing hours to cut expenses.

7. Reports:

- a. Rail Trails: Joe Will said a ribbon cutting for the Acton/Maynard connection would be taking place in South Acton on Friday. Cathy applied for a grant from Friends of BFRT for portable toilets to be located across from 1000 Main Street (near Rt. 225) and behind the Gould's/Donelan's plaza. The toilets will be in place July through October, with weekly service. Ed Holcomb expressed concern over safety at intersections.
- b. NARA Sports Pavilion: Cathy wrote a letter to Consigli, after its managers had indicated their interest in the Miracle Field, to inquire whether it would be interested in helping with the Sports Pavilion site work. Consigli gave a positive response and a meeting will be scheduled. Septic system components are in place and a CPA grant will cover paving by Allied Paving.
- c. T.J. O'Grady Skate Park: Steve reported the GoFundMe website ready to launch.
- d. Playgrounds: Cathy will be undertaking a playground audit with mulch replenishment; Robbins Brook will need it.
- e. Community Preservation Committee: Steve volunteered to be the new Recreation Commission representative. Thank you, Joe, for serving in this capacity! Joe passed out copies of "Open Space Preservation Goals, Section B., Recreational Resources, Needs and Goals," with suggested new language highlighted in red (see attached).
- f. Community Gardens:
Abundant rain this summer has necessitated more frequent mowing.

8. New Business: Nothing to report.

Meeting adjourned at 8:35pm.

Minutes submitted by Mary Lou Repucci.

Open Space Preservation Goals

- Preserve the existing elements of Acton's rural character, including the natural and man-made features that contribute to Acton's character such as open fields, agricultural lands, woodlands, waterways, and scenic vistas.
- Preserve open space and develop additional public open spaces and parklands including, but not limited to, areas bordering Fort Pond Brook, Nashoba Brook, the Assabet River, and their tributaries.
- Protect and maintain the remaining farmland in Town. Encourage continued or new farming enterprises. Protect existing open fields and meadows.
- Preserve large tracts of undeveloped land.
- Preserve small tracts of undeveloped land that contribute to other open space goals, such as smaller parcels that preserve village center characteristics, are located adjacent to existing protected open spaces, or that preserve corridor linkages between larger open space parcels. Acquire and develop pocket parks/commons in Acton villages.
- Preserve lands that protect the quality and quantity of Acton's water supply, wildlife corridors and wildlife habitat, and/or that restore polluted environmental resources.
- Obtain open space through the outright purchase of potentially developable land as well as through methods such as, but not limited to, acquiring development rights and encouraging property owners to protect and/or preserve their land as open space through conservation restrictions, agricultural preservation restrictions, or other means.

B. Recreational Resources, Needs and Goals

The CPA statute defines recreational use as "active or passive recreational use including, but not limited to, the use of land for community gardens, trails, and noncommercial youth and adult sports, and the use of land as a park, playground or athletic field." The Town's priorities for recreational opportunities and facilities are documented in the 2014-2021 Town of Acton Open Space and Recreation Plan (OSRP). A key goal in that document is to improve Acton's recreational opportunities, recognizing the importance of adequate passive and active recreational areas as critical to preserving the character of the Town and the quality of life for its citizens. More specifically, recreation needs for the Nathaniel Allen Recreation Area (NARA) are documented in the 2017 Town publication, "NARA Park Master Plan 2016-2026."

Recreation Resources

Active recreation is a very high priority among Acton's youth and adults, many of who participate in the Town's athletic leagues. NARA and Acton's active recreation fields, not including fields on school campuses, make up about 63 acres.

CPA funds have helped to improve and expand opportunities for active recreation. Ongoing and recently completed CPA-funded recreation projects are:

- Nashoba Brook water chestnut removal by mechanical harvesting at two impounded sections: Ice House Pond and Robbins Mill Pond (completed).
- Acton Arboretum new kiosk (completed), Cedar Arbor replacement, and culvert replacement.
- Morrison Farm well (completed), irrigation and electrical service installations, to become independent of Town water supply and services.
- Ice House Pond renovations to the parking area, addition of an adjacent small picnic area, and refurbishment of the nearby boat launch.
- Ice House Pond accessible walkway along its west side that one day will be part of a trail system that could link the Morrison Farm/Ice House Pond properties with the adjacent Bruce Freeman Rail Trail.
- NARA Sports Pavilion construction to provide accessible concession and bathroom facilities for NARA patrons and users of the nearby Miracle Field, and office and storage space for Recreation and NARA staff.
- NARA parking lot expansion to provide additional parking near the Sports Pavilion.
- NARA Picnic Pavilion restroom installation, to provide a facility close to the Pavilion for its patrons, and for NARA summer campers who use the Pavilion.
- NARA Amphitheater Stage, accessible access ramp.
- Bruce Freeman Rail Trail Phase 2B to help complete its 100% Engineering Design Plan.
- T. J. O'Grady Skate Park Phase 2 (Skate Plaza) expansion.
- Camp Acton Conservation Land accessible campsite.

Recreation Needs (from the 2014 – 2021 OSRP)

- Provide background and support for the Acton Dog Park Committee.
- For persons with disabilities, ensure accessibility for recreation activities (e.g., trails, picnicking, water-based recreation and camping) at both recreational and conservation areas.
- Improve and expand recreational opportunities.
- Prepare for and address demographic trends.
- Ensure playground facilities are up-to-date, safe, and accessible.
- Enhance the quality of Acton's athletic fields through improved, environmentally-conscious maintenance techniques.
- Optimize the condition and allocation of athletic fields to meet the needs of the Town's growing population.
- Acquire and develop pocket parks/commons in Acton's villages.
- Expand public outreach to better inform the public of available passive and active recreation opportunities.
- Improve communication with residents regarding facilities available, events, and procedures (e.g., for reserving fields and facilities at NARA).
- Improve communication and coordination with neighboring towns, such as information-sharing regarding procedures and coordination of similar events.

- Establish easier access to internet-based resources regarding Acton's passive and active recreational opportunities.
- Identify and communicate which of 18 conservation areas are conducive to specific recreational activities.

Recreation Goals (from the 2014 – 2021 OSRP)

- Provide equipment storage for the Natural Resources grounds crew.
- Expand universal accessibility to open space and recreation sites.
- Improve and expand the facilities at the NARA.
- Develop the Ice House Pond Recreation Area.
- Secure recreational indoor space.
- Improve and update existing facilities.
- Create additional facilities to meet the diverse needs of the town.
- Ensure playground facilities are up-to-date, safe, and accessible.
- Enhance the quality of Acton's athletic fields.
- Acquire and develop pocket parks/commons in Acton's villages.
- Expand public outreach to better inform the public of available passive and active recreation opportunities.