



RECREATION COMMISSION

Meeting Minutes
May 7, 2020
5:00 p.m.
Zoom Meeting

Present: Christopher Hardy, Commissioner; Hema Santhanakrishnan, Commissioner; Joe Will, Commissioner; David Martin, Board of Selectman Liaison; Melissa Rier, Recreation Director; Mary Lou Repucci, Recreation Office Manager.

Also in Attendance: Tom Gillispie, Acton Dog Park Committee chair; Karen Martin, Acton Dog Park Committee vice chair; Kate Smith, Boxborough resident.

Absent: Ed Holcomb, Commissioner; Stephen Trimble, Commissioner.

Opening: Joe Will opened the meeting at 5:11pm and recited the Opening Script.

I. Regular Business

1. Review of Meeting Minutes from March 3, 2020: Minutes from the Recreation Commission's March 3, 2020 meeting were reviewed and approved by a roll-call vote of 3-0, as amended.
2. Acton Dog Park: Tom Gillispie introduced himself as chair of the Acton Dog Park Committee ("ADPC") and then handed the discussion over to Karen Martin, Acton Dog Park vice chair. Karen made welcoming remarks, clarifying that the purpose of the Committee's attendance at this meeting was to update the Recreation Commissioners on progress since its last meeting with the Commission in November 2019. ADPC's purpose was informational; the Commissioners were not asked to vote to approve a location at this time but ADPC would like to have their input and support. ADPC is focused now on the 348 and 352 Main Street property, and has developed a specific vision with detailed pictures and sketches. Tom gave a PowerPoint slide show titled "Acton Dog Park Committee Presentation to Acton's Recreation Commission, May 7, 2020" (attached). The presentation gave a thorough briefing of ADPC structure, history of its preliminary research, Board of Selectman approval of its charge in August 2017, vetting of multiple possible locations, and the reasons why the Main Street property was identified as most desirable of many potential locations. He emphasized that more work will be done, that abutting neighbors are in the process of responding and that adjustments to the proposed plan will be made. Details of the plan were discussed including parking, fences, shrubbery, and leashing. The coronavirus pandemic has delayed progress but BOS has given ADPC good feedback with the provision that more work needs to be done.



Various possible funding sources were discussed. The Commissioners indicated their unanimous informal support of the Main Street location. There was no public comment.

3. Citizen Concerns:

- a. Indoor Basketball Courts: In March, prior to the coronavirus pandemic, Melissa Rier received a letter from an A-B sophomore student asking whether the Town plans to purchase the KMart property, and if so could it build a recreation center featuring year-round indoor basketball courts. The letter had no return address but Melissa was able to locate the student through his guidance counselor. David Martin said it is unlikely the Town could purchase the property since it can pay only the assessed value and the potential for commercial use would be higher. The student finds it hard to get court time at school but does not want to use Recreation's outdoor courts at Elm Street. David added that the elementary schools have indoor courts so that indoor access probably already exists. There was no public comment.
- b. Drive-In Movie Nights: Recreation received an email from a resident requesting drive-in movie nights. With NARA concerts and events cancelled through July 15, this could be an alternative way for people to congregate. Maura Haberman analyzed the costs involved and what would be required to hold such an event. Collecting money for admission without social contact was considered along with how to space vehicles for social distancing. Possible locations were discussed and how to bring electricity to a large field. It was concluded that the cost of mounting such an event would be prohibitive, especially given that the movie nights Recreation has hosted in the past have all lost money. Recreation is not bringing in revenue at this time and cannot afford a major expense. The resident wants to have this type of event now, but the idea will have to be postponed. Melissa will consider it as a possible future event. There was no public comment.
- c. NARA Park Closure: NARA Park is closed until further notice. Recreation has received many emails from citizens who have witnessed abuse of Park rules. Acton Police has increased its NARA patrol but cannot stop every person. The decision when to re-open NARA is under jurisdiction of the Board of Health and BOS; Recreation will abide by their plan. Melissa expects NARA to re-open with restrictions, but the date has not been set. Joe Will said that the Recreation Commission should have been consulted first about steps taken to close; Melissa replied that she put forth a memo to Town management suggesting complete closure because the situation was out of control. Mary Lou Repucci clarified that the Commissioners were not deliberately excluded -- the present meeting was the first opportunity for the Commission to meet online. Due to the necessity of social distancing it would have been impossible to conduct a meeting at the time the emergency decision to close NARA in the interest of public health was being made. There was no public comment.



4. Reports:

- a) Fields and Facilities: All fields are closed until further notice. NARA Picnic Pavilion rentals through July 15 are being refunded. It was clarified that Recreation no longer manages the Community Gardens which have been the responsibility of Natural Resources since 2018. There was no public comment.
- b) Rail Trails: The Bruce Freeman Rail Trail through NARA is open. There was no public comment.
- c) Events: All events are cancelled through July 15 including the Independence Day Celebration on July 4th. The rest of the season is not cancelled, we are waiting to see. Recreation is considering how it might implement social distancing guidelines for outdoor concerts. NARA Summer Camp is expected to run but with different organization: small groups; no field trips; and new cleaning and disinfecting procedures. There was no public comment.
- d) Community Preservation Committee:
 - CPA Projects: Melissa compiled a memo to CPC detailing each project.
 - *T.J. O'Grady Skate Park:* Town Counsel approved the new Skate Park design. Recreation is waiting for the state of emergency ban to be lifted at which time construction will move forward. There was no public comment.
 - *NARA Picnic Pavilion Restroom:*
\$10,000 has been spent for the services of architect Andy Brockway. Additional funding is being sought. An AARP grant application has been submitted. There was no public comment.
 - *NARA Sports Pavilion:*
Melissa reported a large amount of in-house construction work under way. A construction company has been selected and the contract being negotiated. The north building will be completed this year along with the exterior of the south building. There was no public comment.
 - *Jones Playground Renovation:* The playground renovation is ready to go. Highway is working on the parking area on Stow Street. Melissa asked the Commissioners for their thoughts about building the playground now - only to close it to public use until the pandemic is over, or waiting. Most recreation departments are keeping their playgrounds closed all summer due to inability to sanitize the equipment after every use. The Commissioners expressed that the project has been a long time coming,



many people have put in a lot of hard work, and to stall it now would be discouraging. Better to build now in hopes that by the time it is finished the constraints of social distancing will be relaxed. Funding is in place; we just need the green light to commence the build. The likely financial drawbacks of waiting were considered. Melissa explained what is meant by a “universal” playground. A citizen group prefers a community build for this project but social distancing would prevent that at this time. Delay would probably result in greater cost of materials and labor. It would be better to show CPC that Recreation can complete the build on a timely basis, to boost their confidence in the department’s ability to see a project through, but the Board of Health should be consulted. Chris Hardy moved that the Recreation Department proceed with construction of the Jones Playground contingent upon Board of Health approval. Joe Will seconded. The motion was carried by roll-call, 3-0. No further discussion from public.

- *Gardner Playground Renovation:* Recreation is seeking three quotes for a feasibility study for this project. There was no public comment.

II. New/Special Business:

5. COVID-19:

Recreation staff are working remotely and are coordinating limited use of the 50 Audubon Drive office. All parks and fields are currently closed to public use until further notice. Melissa is working with Town management to develop a phased re-opening plan in accordance with state and local guidelines. Mary Lou has volunteered to be an operator for the Town Services Hotline, providing answers to questions from callers on a range of topics related to the pandemic specifically as well as municipal operations in general. Maura Haberman is in the process of setting up online programs. The Department is also offering a series of uplifting free daily and weekly activities for families to enjoy. Recreation is not presently taking in any revenue; programs and facility rentals are being cancelled and refunded.

III. Consent Items:

None

Adjournment: At 6:58pm it was moved and seconded to adjourn the meeting. The motion was approved 3-0.



Documents and Exhibits Used During this Meeting:

- March 3, 2020 Recreation Commission Draft Meeting Minutes
- Acton Dog Park Committee PowerPoint presentation:



RecComm Final.pptx