

RECREATION COMMISSION

Meeting Minutes
November 10, 2020
7:00pm
Zoom Meeting

Present: Hema Santhanakrishnan, Commissioner; Steve Trimble, Commissioner; Joe Will, Commissioner; Melissa Rier, Recreation Director; Mary Lou Repucci, Recreation Office Manager

Also Present: Carolyn Morrison; Andrea Starr; Paul Malchodi; Tom Gillispie; Clare Siska and Cathy Fochtman

Absent: Christopher Hardy, Commissioner; David Martin, Board of Selectman Liaison

Opening: Chair Steve Trimble opened the meeting at 7:10pm.

I. Regular Business

1. Review of Meeting Minutes from October 6, 2020: Joe Will moved, and Hema Santhanakrishnan seconded, to accept the October 6, 2020 Meeting Minutes. Roll call: Santhanakrishnan, yes; Trimble, yes; Will, yes. The motion was approved, 3-0.
2. Citizen Concerns:
 - a. Pickleball: Carolyn Morrison and Andrea Starr attended the meeting to discuss possible locations in Acton for pickleball. Melissa Rier described the existing space at Elm Street where some of the tennis courts have already been lined for pickleball with tape. The sport has been a huge success with courts in daily use and frequent public requests for space to play. Ms. Morrison has been communicating with more than 100 active participants. She emphasized the benefits of pickleball for all ages, youth through seniors; it is especially good during pandemic by enabling people to enjoy activity outdoors with appropriate social distance. Melissa is scheduled to meet at Jones Field this Thursday with pickleball representatives, a private donor and Natural Resources Director, Tom Tidman. They will review the excavated area left over from the playground renovation as a potential location for several courts. Parking concerns were discussed along with other possible locations, including Hart Field, near the Conant School. Melissa reported a generous donation for equipment. The equipment has already been purchased. There was no public comment.
 - b. Bruce Freeman Rail Trail (“BFRT”): Numerous complaints have been voiced by pedestrians on the NARA Park walking trail who have been clipped, or nearly struck by, bicycles entering NARA at high speed where the walking trail and BFRT intersect. Signage has not helped to slow the bicycle traffic down; many altercations between walkers and cyclists have ensued. For this reason several people reported

that they will no longer be using NARA. They are distressed that the situation is “a serious accident waiting to happen.” Paul Malchodi attended the meeting as Acton’s liaison to the Friends of BFRT. He recognizes the problem and has felt for some time that walkers and riders need to be physically separated. He strongly suggested moving the BFRT to the original right-of-way behind Rex Lumber. No construction would be required, simply open the gate to allow cyclists to pass through at a safe distance from those on foot. Any other possible solution, including speed bumps, would not be effective and would present additional considerations including accessibility. A higher authority needs to be involved – the Town Manager, legal counsel and the Planning Department. The next step is for Melissa to speak with Tom Tidman about how to resolve this issue before next summer. Mr. Malchodi will look for more signage to indicate the pedestrian zone. There was no public comment.

c. Acton Dog Park: Tom Gillispie, and Clare Siska, chair and former chair of the Acton Dog Park Committee (“ADPC”), attended along with Cathy Fochtman, volunteer. Their purpose was to update the Commissioners on recent activity: On October 12, 2020, the Board of Selectmen held a lengthy discussion with support from the public, but also concerns of Isaac Davis Way neighbors, over locating the proposed dog park on two Main Street/Route 27 parcels, numbers 348 and 352. The abutters have requested a series of changes and adaptations before they can agree to the location. This is also the site of a future Acton Housing Authority development. Pros and cons were weighed with the result that a vote was deferred until abutter concerns can be resolved. Differences between the two parcels and how they will be used were also discussed. At a follow-up meeting on October 26 there appeared to be sufficient BOS support. The topic should be on the November 16 BOS agenda, at which time there may be a vote of approval. Ms. Fochtman reported on her efforts to obtain a Stanton Foundation grant to cover the cost of the enclosed park area. She stressed the need to apply now for a Community Preservation Act (“CPA”) grant in the amount of \$25,000 to fund a master plan with phased construction rollout. A donor has earmarked \$5,000 in leveraged funds. Ms. Fochtman added that the dog park also needs a “Friends” group to maintain the park for the Town. She is working toward forming a 501c (3) non-profit organization for this purpose. ADPC did not request the Commissioners to vote at this meeting but asked for their approval in moving forward and for any input. It was agreed that a master plan is desirable. Steve Trimble recommended Great Hill as a better location with less resident objection than Main Street. It was asked how the application for CPA funding would dovetail with Recreation’s current CPA applications amounting to almost a million dollars. There was no public comment.

3. Reports:

- a) Fields and Facilities: Fields are open though not in high demand. Field maintenance is in process. An early freeze caused pipes to burst at the NARA Bathhouse; repairs are being done. There was no public comment.
- b) Rail Trails: See I.2., Citizen’s Concerns, above. There was no public comment.

- c) Events: Due to the pandemic all in-person events through the end of the year have been cancelled. The October carved pumpkin display at NARA was a great success with many contributions. Melissa is planning a “Letters to Santa” program for December where children can write to Santa and receive a response. There was no public comment.
- d) Community Preservation Committee: Recreation’s CPA applications due next month were discussed.

CPA Project Updates:

- *T.J. O’Grady Skate Park:* The Skate Park is substantially complete with only few details to finish: Maple trees will be planted soon, new signage added, the memorial bench moved and a statue placed. Approximately \$70,000 in excess funding will be returned to the Community Preservation Committee. A mask dispenser may be added to the Park. There was no public comment.
- *NARA Picnic Pavilion Restroom:* A CPA request will be submitted for \$100,000 needed to commence this project. There was no public comment.
- *NARA Sports Pavilion:* The North Building is complete. Funding in place is sufficient to finish the South Building exterior before winter. There was no public comment.
- *Jones Playground Renovation:* The playground renovation is done and open to the public. A sidewalk to the playground was discussed along with bricks for the walkway. An area that was over-excavated during renovation may be used for pickleball courts. There was no public comment.
- *Gardner Playground Renovation:* Lemon Brooke is working on the master plan. The parking area was discussed; its final dimensions could impact several mature trees. There was no public comment.

II. New/Special Business:

- 4. COVID-19 Update: Our Education Enrichment Center opened last week with two first-grade students attending Wednesdays. One seasonal staff member is assisting. Ways to market the program were discussed. There was no public comment.
- 5. Recreation Volunteer of the Year: Melissa asked the Commissioners to name Robert “Donnie” Sokolowski as Recreation Volunteer of the Year for his hard work indoors and out, from stripping the Sports Pavilion South Building siding to organizing the 50 Audubon Recreation Center for Education Enrichment. With his own tools he has willingly undertaken multiple tasks great and small and his contribution is deeply appreciated by us all. Joe Will moved to nominate Donnie Sokolowski as Recreation

Volunteer of the Year. Steve Trimble seconded. Roll call: Santhanakrishnan, yes; Trimble, yes; Will, yes. The motion was approved, 3-0. Melissa will bring the award to the next meeting. There was no public comment.

III. Consent Items:

None. There was no public comment.

Adjournment: At 8:53pm Joe moved, and Steve seconded, to adjourn the meeting.

Roll Call: Santhanakrishnan, yes; Trimble, yes; Will, yes. The motion was approved, 3-0.