

Virtual Meeting – 6:30pm  
July 19, 2021

Commissioners: Bobby Beagan, Mara Huston, Ben Carmel, Laurie Eliason  
Dennis Mannone, Dir. Park and Recreation/Pool, Lynne Ziffer, Pool, Guests: Chrissy Murray

July 19, 2021 Meeting Roll Call: Ben - here, Bobby – here, Laurie – here, Mara – here

**Public Comment:** None

**Comments from Chairperson:** Mara reported multiple meetings have taken place for the Recreation section of new Fairbank Community Center project. Discussions centered on refining locker rooms, program space, bathrooms, office administration space. Mara stated she shared concerns from patrons on loss of natural light at the Atkinson Pool. She stated the architects provided multiple ways they are going to bring natural light into the pool area. Art Reilly, Athletic Dir. at LSRHS, invited Mara to a meeting with field users to discuss scheduling of the fields. The plan is to use a Google sheet to make scheduling easier.

**Director Update:** Dennis stated summer camp is going well along with the Skyhawks program running in conjunction with the elementary school Smile program. He is still waiting for final FY21 revenue/expense numbers from Accounting.

Mara asked Dennis about the outstanding memberships costs that may need to be refunded. Dennis spoke with the Finance Director and was told any shortfall would come out of retained earnings. Laurie asked Dennis about COVID protocols at camp. Dennis said the camps follow CDC protocols, no masks indoors or outside. He said if the Board of Health or state changes the requirements he will make changes at the camps. Ben asked when fall programming will be offered. Dennis said fall programming usually starts in August. He will use the Facebook to post programs and the recreation website along with emails blasts to residents. Commissioners suggested using a Town wide email to send out program information and possible targeted emails. Ben suggested the Commission talk about general community outreach and find out how people are hearing about programs and discuss ways to get the word out on Recreation programs. Dennis said he has concerns regarding youth groups in Town offering programs which compete with traditional Recreation programs. Mara said she would add this topic as a future agenda item. Bobby asked Dennis about staffing and finding the balance between bringing in revenue and increasing staff. Dennis stated COVID definitely impacted the part time staff and programs offered by Recreation and the Pool. He is currently down one full-time employee at the pool and is hopeful that will be resolved in the fall and swim lessons and pool program can be offered again. Dennis agreed part-time staffing is an issue and is a concern if the new building is expected to be open seven days a week, 12 hours a day.

Mara asked Dennis for an update on the shutdown of the pool and testing of the pool. He received notification the pool will not have to be drained and some other type of testing will be done. This will be done during the shutdown, expected to be around August 20 through September 6<sup>th</sup>.

**Eagle Scout Project for Davis Field:** postponed to the next meeting.

**Atkinson Pool Fees:** Three topics discussed; punch passes, memberships including operation hours, lane rentals, Sudbury and non-Sudbury team fees, and discussion on the lane reservation form.

Punch Passes - Mara asked Dennis about expiration dates on punch passes.

He said his plan was not to offer punch passes for the foreseeable future. Mara asked what is currently happening with people who had passes with unused swims. Dennis said he is offering to convert unused swims to a credit in system or a refund. This will be the policy in the fall as well. Laurie asked about expiration dates on the passes. Dennis stated they used to expire after a year, but a few years ago the previous Director decided to remove the expiration date. He said they are more labor intensive to monitor than memberships and users have to swipe a card to take swims off their account.

Mara felt taking away the swim punch pass option is something the Park and Recreation Commission would need to vote on. Mara explained how the punch pass operates to Laurie and offered many people purchase them. Mara shared the spreadsheet Lynne Ziffer presented in the June 2020 meeting. The spreadsheet showed revenue from the punch passes was significant. Her concern is the pool may lose those people. Dennis responded that he has no idea who is going to sign up for memberships or come to swim. He is not against punch passes, but at this time, he did not want to have too many options and would rather have memberships and day passes. He said uncertainty of the new building construction is also something to consider when planning on pool memberships since we don't want to offer something we may have to refund.

Mara recalled Lynn informed the Commission at the June 2020 meeting that punch passes were the pool's sweet spot. Mara shared Lynne's spreadsheet with data from 2019. The revenue from punch passes equaled revenue from recurring monthly memberships. Mara didn't think it was a good idea to remove punch passes at this time, even though the new model is priced to move people to purchase memberships. Ben agreed it would be wise not to jeopardize 31% of the pool revenue by not offering punch passes. Dennis stated the punch passes require more administrative work and he is currently not using part time staff. He is not against punch passes, but thinks it would be best to offer day passes, recurring memberships, and six-month memberships starting in the fall. He does not want to offer yearly memberships because the time frame of the new construction and its impact on the pool is still somewhat unknown. He does not want to deal with refunds if the pool has to be shut down for any reason.

Bobby asked for clarification on the actual issues Mara was expecting the Commissioners to review. Mara stated issues to be resolved were management/expiration dates on punch passes, memberships offered in the fall, lane rental pricing and reservation policy for Sudbury versus non-Sudbury teams.

Commission spent a great deal of time discussing pros and cons of punch passes and additional memberships at the pool.

After discussion, Mara made a motion. On September 2021, based on the fees approved in June 2020 Park and Recreation Commission meeting, the Atkinson Pool will offer day passes, punch passes, monthly recurring and six-month memberships. In addition, family day passes will be offered at \$20 an hour (up to five family members) for Sudbury residents and \$25 an hour (up to five family members) for non-Sudbury residents. Couple memberships and annual memberships

will not be offered at this time and punch passes will expire six months from date of purchase. Laurie seconded the motion. Vote: Laurie -yes, Bobby – yes, Ben – yes, Mara – yes.

Operating Hours at Atkinson Pool – Mara stated Dennis presented a business plan in June of 2020 on pool hours. His plan includes closing at four o'clock for swimmers and be open after 4 for rentals. Mara agreed that we should not open the pool if revenue isn't coming in to cover the costs of operation. Dennis stated he is working on determining hours for the fall. He expects the pool to open at 6 and close at either 4 or 6 depending on rentals. He is currently down one person at the pool, so that may impact hours also. During swim team season, the pool will be open later, probably 8 or 9 o'clock. Hours for Saturday and Sunday will be based on rentals, lessons and staffing. Mara did not think a vote was necessary on this topic. Laurie thought there should be some type of offering of hours on the weekend, but wasn't sure of the times. Mara agreed, and stated consistent hours starting in September would be important.

Lane Rental Pricing/Reservation Policy Sudbury/Non-Sudbury Teams – Mara reviewed the old lane rental form and the revised form received from Dennis. Asked for comments from the Commission. Mara commented there was still reference to renting the Colorado Timing System in the revised form that should be removed, in addition to reference about lane rental during the day for instruction only. Primary swim team season is November to March, although some teams do practice throughout the year. Dennis stated the pool lane rental policy is different than the Field Permit policy in regard to seasons. The Town covers half of field operation expenses, but none of the Pool expense. Mara said Sudbury Swim Team and LSRHS are the two Sudbury teams that use the pool. She discussed when the swim season starts and when Dennis needs the requests. Dennis would like the requests by August 1<sup>st</sup>. Mara stated teams should be able to meet that requirement; she would like a policy that accurately reflects what Dennis needs to manage the pool as well as be a document that works for renters. Swim teams should know their practice schedules by Aug, but may not know their meet schedule. Mara asked Chrissy Murray, a parent leader for Sudbury Swim Team, to join the meeting to answer some questions. Mara discussed working towards having the swim teams submit their requests by a deadline date, similar to the field permit requests. After discussion, Ben asked if there was a specific item the Commission needed to act on from a policy perspective. Mara stated she wanted the rental form to accurately reflect the policies that are in place. She would also like to have something in writing regarding policies for the Sudbury Swim Teams. Lynne stated the Sudbury Swim Teams have always received priority over other teams. She said last year was a little different because of COVID since teams did not know their registration numbers as quickly as in the past and in many cases the numbers were down. Lynne stated she and Dennis review all lane requests and then put the schedule together. She said schedules do change so they are constantly moving groups and making the puzzle work, but their goal is to try to meet the lane rental requests. Mara stated an option was to wait for the new Center to be constructed and then deal with a new form. Laurie agreed that flexibility is needed now. Ben agreed, but agreed the Sudbury teams should have priority.

Mara discussed lane rates, and possible different rates for profit and non-profit organizations. She believes non-profit organizations should pay more for lane rental and feels the lane fees for Sudbury teams were raised so high. She would like to see a discount, perhaps a couple of dollars per lane. If the increase had been 15% the lane rental would have been \$36 per hour. She said

incremental changes are easier to deal with for the organizations. She did not know of the large increase until May, when the pool user groups attended the Commission meeting. She would like the reduction to be a recommendation the Town Manager would review and respond to. Commissioners discussed non-profit versus profit teams and how they should be handled. Dennis and Lynne did not think it mattered and expressed concern if teams paid a different rate for the same lane use it could cause a problem. Mara suggested a \$38-dollar lane rental for the Sudbury Teams and other renters would stay at \$40 per lane per hour. Dennis stated the Town does not fund the pool, so any reduction in fee is concerning, especially when the Sudbury Teams get priority and the best hours.

Ben expressed concern about changing any fees without knowing the true impact. Laurie agreed it would be strange to backtrack and reduce fees.

Chrissy Murray stated she had to increase her lane use last year due to COVID and said they lost their usual Tuesday night use to accommodate another swim team. She said they had a 33% increase in their lane rental. Her biggest concern is being able to sustain the expense through another swim team season. She stated she increased the team's member fees up to \$700. Chrissy mentioned a new facility in Wellesley only charges \$30 per lane. Chrissy stated she was frustrated to hear the rates went up because of poor management at the pool in the past.

Mara felt \$700 seemed high for the members, Laurie agreed. Chrissy said members paid because they were desperate for their kids to have an activity during COVID that was safe.

Ben asked Dennis if \$40 per lane is competitive. Dennis said \$40 is definitely competitive with other facilities.

Ben asked what Mara was suggesting the Commission do in regard to the rates. Mara stated she was suggesting a reduction in the fees for the Sudbury Swim team rate to perhaps \$37 per lane per hour.

Ben thought the other team's hourly rate would have to go up to offset the reduction. Mara disagreed and said the rates went from \$30 to \$40 and didn't want to go any higher concerned some teams would leave.

Dennis thought rates should go up a little every year just to keep pace with the price increase of chlorine and other pool services and the minimum wage increase. If fees are reduced, it could impact the overall Pool Enterprise Fund. He thought the best scenario would be to keep the lane rates the way they are and revisit the rates in the future, once memberships are back and we see how much revenue is brought in from them.

Dennis also expressed concern with lost revenue due to potential shut down of the pool during the construction of the new building. Mara said that is something that is unknown at this time and something she will work with Dennis and the Town Manager once they know the construction plan.

Laurie questioned whether this topic is something that should be held and discussed further with the full Commission. Ben agreed, but wondered what, if any, additional information would be gathered during that time.

Dennis and Lynne stated that many of the swim teams that rented during COVID would not be returning. They also pointed out the facility would not be able to offer as many opportunities if the swim meets are no longer virtual this would be a reduction in revenue from last year. Dennis stated he is trying to keep things status quo until he knows if more members will return to swim. He also stated that if the increase was \$5 instead of \$10 per lane, it would probably have to go up by \$5 again this year.

Dennis said the Commission can recommend a change and he will bring it to the Town Manager and Finance Director for review, he would have the final say on any change to the rates.

Dennis and Lynne stated if Sudbury Swim Team moved to a different pool, they would be able to fill their time slot easily since many teams are looking for pool space in the early evening.

Mara stated she felt the pool lane rates were raised too high for Sudbury Teams. Lynne and Dennis were concerned if revenue drops due to reductions, there may not be a pool to run. Dennis said rentals help keep the pool running since the memberships are down. Dennis stated that 60 -70% of swimmers are from out of Town.

Ben and Laurie stated they were not comfortable deciding at this time. Mara asked if there was more data needed to decide.

Dennis suggested waiting to see what the fall brings in terms of memberships and rentals. He stated the pool has gone through significant changes during COVID. The pool is open less hours and staff has been cut in half. He stated the revenue looks better because he was able to rent to more swim teams this year and because the overall expense was down, the pool had a good year in spite of COVID. The big concern is not all the swim teams will come back this year and it is still unknown how many people will purchase memberships.

Commission decided to revisit this topic in December/January timeframe, so there would be more data on the pool expense/revenue.

**Community Programming after COVID** – Ben questioned when the Town will be ready to do activities that were done pre-COVID. He asked for Bobby and Dick’s input on Community Activities done in the past. He said people have questioned when concerts in the park are coming back. Mara mentioned in the past the pool had a movie night. Ben said Natick Recreation has a community activity once a week and Lincoln holds yearly fireworks. Mara stated that staffing is probably a concern. Laurie thought activities will return with the new Community Center and Mara said she would like to see the triathlon return that used to be run at the pool. Mara asked Dennis if there was a plan to offer the Halloween Fun Run again this year. Dennis said not at this time. He said other Towns fund Community events, where many of ours were funded by the Recreation Revolving account. He is currently working on rebuilding that account with revenue from Recreation programs. He said it would be great if the Town would fund the summer concerts. Mara questioned if this should be something the PRC should advocate for in the next budget cycle, perhaps advocate funds for Community based programming.

Dennis agreed that would be something the Commission could do and would be appreciated. Mara suggested the Commissioners should come up with Community type events and an estimated budget.

Ben asked how the funding for summer concerts occurred in the past. Pat H. commented in the beginning the Recreation Department did a fundraiser through the mail to all Sudbury businesses, in addition to going door to door. In addition, small donations were received by those attending the concerts. In the past few years, fundraising was not done and the cost of the Summer Concerts was funded by the Recreation Revolving Fund. Each summer there were six concerts and the cost for each was approximately \$1,000.

The PRC thought there was potential for doing fundraising again for the events, in addition to advocating for funds from the Town.

**Review/Vote on Minutes** – Laurie didn't think she was getting the email. Mara said she was added to the list, but will follow up. No voted on the minutes since there was not quorum to approve them.

Motion to adjourn – Ben – yes, Laurie – yes, Mara – yes  
Meeting adjourned 9:37pm.