

Virtual Meeting 6:32 pm

May 13, 2024

Commissioners: Mara Huston, Laurie Eliason, Granger Atkeson, Ben Carmel-Chair
Dennis Mannone - Dir Park and Recreation

Roll Call –Granger – here, Laurie – here, Mara – here, Ben – here

Public Comment: None

Chair Update: Ben informed Bobby Beagan was unable to attend the meeting tonight. He will share his update on the Lacrosse wall at the next meeting. Ben discussed a few topics he expects the Commission to focus on now that Town Meeting is over, including polices and procedures, developing a capital plan process for the Commission to review user groups requests and understanding the financial issues within the Recreation/Atkinson Pool. Ben read the response he received from the Town Manager on the capital process. Ben suggested the PRC along with the Park and Recreation Director come up with an approval process that works for the Town to entertain new projects. Mara questioned whether the Select Board would need to approve the projects. Ben said usually gifts over \$500 to the Town have to be approved by the Select Board. Lisa Kouchakdjian, Select Board, liaison to the Park and Recreation Commission, emailed the Town's Gift and Grant Policy to Ben. She also encouraged frequent communications with the Town Manager for guidance and questions in regard to the PRC work and she offered her assistance as well.

Director Update: Recreation staff is currently preparing for summer camp. Atkinson Pool article for repairs passed at Town meeting, but it is unclear if the renovations will impact the summer camp schedule or when the dive well leak would be repaired. He is expecting the pool to be shut down for multiple months in the future. An internal candidate was hired for the Aquatic Supervisor full time position in addition to a new part-time Aquatic Supervisor. Pool revenue has been lost due to the closure of the dive well. It is unclear if renters who left will return. Sandra Duran, Combined Facilities Director, said when constructions documents are complete, she will have a better idea what the schedule will be moving forward. They will do their best to work with Park and Recreation/Atkinson Pool to understand programming needs and if possible, pick the least impactful period of time. Sandra added Weston and Sampson is currently testing the dive well to isolate the leak. Leaking has stabilized and appears to be around the equalizers. The Town hired a risk assessor after the EPA complaint to handle any additional questions regarding the leak. Sandra added the new score board is being installed on Wednesday. Mara asked if the summer camp use of the pool would be impacted due the projected work at the pool. Sandra is hoping to stabilize the dive well so it can be used and does not expect any significant work to occur at the pool that would impact the use by the summer camp. She said there is drainage work to be completed in front of the new building, but that is expected to be completed in the fall. The major work at the pool will be planned for next year in the spring or fall. Dennis added pool memberships will have to be cancelled again during the shutdown.

Dennis continued with his update and said he is still working with the contractor to finish the Phase 1 work at Feeley field. He said there is not much left to do, but he is frustrated with the contractor and the continued delays due to weather and other issues. He will be working with Warner Larson to get the final bid documents for the Haskell Smile playground out sometime in the summer for fall construction

or late fall for the bids and then completion in spring of 2025. At this time, the summer camp will be held across the street at the Haskell playground.

Dennis spoke with the Planning Director on the Fields Needs Assessment. He is hopeful to get an RFP out soon now that Town meeting is over. Ben asked if anyone knew if school fields were included in the last Field Assessment. Dennis said yes, since youth groups use school fields for their programs, although not as much as in the past. Sewataro would be in the Open Space and Recreation Plan, not the Field Assessment Plan.

Laurie asked about Feeley field and if girls' softball is running into any issues due to the construction delays. Dennis stated the work left to do is off the playing fields, so the games can still be played. He has to go back to the Town Engineers to write the RFP for Phase 2 and then put it out to bid. Laurie asked about the proposed new handicap parking at Haskell and the accessible pathways. Sandra Duran, Combined Facilities Dir. offered she will be meeting with a landscape architect this week and will walk Haskell Field and discuss the pathway and handicap parking. Once a proposal is received and agreed to, and RFP will be sent out and the project will be on its way to get done. The other issue regarding the easement involving Butler Place is being reviewed by Town Council. Mara requested that Sandra come back to a Commission meeting when she has more information on the design to review and discuss. Sandra said anyone was welcome to join the walk with the landscape architect.

Dennis stated he is currently down one staff member in Recreation, and the new Aquatic Supervisor is expected to start in June. He is hopeful the open position in Recreation can be filled before the summer, otherwise it may have to wait until the fall. As he mentioned before, he is planning to hold summer camp at Haskell again this summer, since the grass can't be used at the new Fairbank Community building. It is not ideal and poses a logistical nightmare again and adds to the expense of the summer program since more tents are required at Haskell. The camp numbers are fairly low this year, due to more competition in Town; Sewataro and the school's Smile program funded by the Town. The van paperwork is with the Town Manager at this time. Dennis is hopeful everything will be signed off on the van so it is ready for summer use and future after school programs. He said if the Town decides it wants to get in the after-school business, that will impact programs at the new Community Center.

Commission Updates:

Rail Trial: Laurie was not able to attend the last meeting. Both articles were approved at Town meeting. The budget for Phase 3 was approved as well, so everything is moving ahead.

Haskell Pathway: Discussed in the Director update.

Fairbank Community Center: Mara shared the landscape site plan for the building showing the Recreation side with parking lots, lamp posts and basketball court and green space. The fire inspection has been completed and basketball court is in progress. The building is expected to be completed in June. There is an investigation into a ceiling water leak at this time, it appears to be where the new roof meets the old roof of the pool. They are still dealing with structural issues with installing the barn door. They have resolved part of the drainage issues on site, the rest will be completed in the fall. The AV installation is in progress. EV stations will be located in both parking lots. Additional hooks and shelves have been ordered for the locker rooms.

Ben commented on the communication from the Town to the residents on how the new facility can be used once the construction is completed. He asked if there was any new information on this topic. Mara stated the building is still under construction, but agreed there needs to be better communication on how to use the facility. Laurie agreed and questioned how the shared space and multipurpose rooms can be used by the residents and who will be responsible for managing the requests.

Dennis stated the Recreation side is not open fully yet. The gym isn't open at this time on the weekends due to staffing. The pool supervisor can't be responsible for the gym or recreation rooms if they have to be on the pool deck. Programs have been run in the gym, but if enough people don't sign up to cover the cost of staffing then the program would not be able to run. He said the building is not set up as a true Community Center since you can't just drop in and use the facilities for free. He thought perhaps some type of membership program could be created to facilitate usage. The gym is currently set up on more of program-based usage. He said his staff tried an open gym concept, but it didn't work well. He plans to run more programs in the fall. Sandra Duran was in agreement with Dennis in regard to programming and operational challenges of the new facilities. She is in the process of looking at an event management software program that would allow scheduling rooms in the new facility. In addition, she reminded everyone the building is not done yet, and Recreation space has been the most impacted during the entire construction process. The Town needs to fully understand how to operate the building before it can be offered out for rentals and asked the Commission to help spread the message that the goal is to have an open and available center for the entire community, but patience and understanding is needed for a bit until the building is fully open. The building may not be completed until November, since the front drainage construction will take place in the fall. She added the building doesn't really lend itself to complete segregation for rentals, since there are no bathrooms in the shared room section of the building, so they need to give some thought on how to manage the rooms, what support is required and if additional custodial costs will be required.

School Field Discussion: The Commission was looking to understand the budgeting/ownership in regard to the school fields. Mara shared she learned one big issue with the school fields is when can the Park and Grounds staff work on the fields and what lawn treatments can be used on school fields. The Park and Grounds staff day is done at 3-4 o'clock and that is when school gets out. In addition, they can't cut the grass when the school is open and using it for recess and gym. Dennis stated the school fields, front and side fields at Curtis are maintained by Parks and Grounds. He said the concern is that the school fields are not really used that much anymore and the Field Enterprise Funds are paying for maintaining Curtis field for the middle school sports. He said this is part of a bigger discussion moving forward since there really isn't much field permit revenue coming in for use of Curtis Field. He said Noyes field is used by youth baseball but the other fields do not get used as much. He is hopeful the Field Assessment Plan will really vet out what fields are actually used and what is needed. In addition, the overall field maintenance and who is responsible needs to be reviewed. He would like to see some of the Park and Grounds salaries now in the Field Enterprise Fund moved back to the Town Budget. This would free up more funds for overall field maintenance.

Mara stated the Field Assessment will really help the Commission out along with the Open Space and Recreation plan. She added that next fall is the time to start advocacy for any budget changes. She suggested discussing this at a future meeting in the summer.

Review of FY2025 Budget: Dennis sent out the FY25 Budget for the Commission's review. Mara presented a FY25 Recreation in the Town Budget presentation to the Commission. She started with the overall Town budget and drilled down to Recreation within the Town budget. She noted that Recreation programs are funded through fees which help to cover expenses. As of last year, the Recreation Budget was funded with \$15,000 for general expenses. The equivalent of 3 full time Recreation salaries are funded in the Town budget, the rest is funded out of the Revolving Fund. The Field Enterprise Fund covers a portion of field maintenance expenses and one half the salary and benefits of the Park and Grounds staff. Revenue for this fund is generated from field permits. The Pool Enterprise Fund revenue is generated by membership fees, rental fees, program fees and swim team rentals. No tax dollars go to the Field Enterprise or Pool Enterprise Funds. Mara stated only .21% of tax revenue goes to the Recreation Budget. Dennis was in agreement with Mara's presentation. He said it can be a juggling act to balance the revenue coming in for programs and the expenses going out. And if programs/memberships/field permits don't generate as much revenue as expected, the bills still have to be paid. He has to manage the fees as outside expenses continue to rise, which will intern cause the fees to increase.

Mara offered if the Park and Recreation Commission wants to focus on an area of advocacy it could be support for the Town to fund the Recreation staff rather than have fees fund some of the salary. Ben suggested another area would be moving some of the Park and Grounds salaries back to the Town budget. Dennis said he has had some preliminary discussions with the Town Manager and Assistant Town Manager regarding Recreation and the Pool. His discussion centered on how can the department be better organized and staffed in regard to the budget and programming in the new Community Center.

Dennis said part of the frustration is he is still trying to figure out the costs to operate the Pool and Recreation Departments in the new Community Center and deciding if he needs to raise fees. In addition, the dive well is still leaking and the pool will be shut down for 3 months next year. The frustration with the Field Enterprise Fund is half of the Park and Grounds salaries plus benefits is taken out along with \$10,500 for the Stabilization fund every year, before any expenses can be planned to run the fields. He also has to worry about the fixed field costs including utilities, bathroom cleaning and field irrigation maintenance.

Ben stated this was not something that going to be fixed overnight, but thought Mara's information should be available for review. Mara will send her presentation to the Recreation office for inclusion with the minutes when they are posted. The Commission thought it was important for residents to be aware that only \$40 to \$110 of their tax dollars go to fund Park and Recreation activity.

Fee Review/Advancing Priorities: Dennis suggested waiting until the FiY24 numbers are available to determine if fees will need to be increased. He also suggested having a meeting with user groups to discuss needs and fees associated with running the pool and fields. Dennis said the Field Assessment Plan when completed will help with understanding the needs of the user groups and match that with the field inventory in Town. He said he has received calls from cricket groups, girls field hockey and more flag football groups which may impact the field requests.

Ben suggested September/October for a Field User Group meeting. Dennis said it will be good to have discussions on the Field Enterprise Fund. He said it would also be good to figure out who is responsible for what on the fields. He said Sandra's ADA pathways on the fields will need to be maintained. Is that a

Park and Grounds expense or facilities? He said the same thing needs to be figured out in regard to the bathrooms and concessions stands that are located at the fields.

Mara stated it appears there isn't clear communication on who is responsible and suggested creating a list or framework of different issues and then invite the Town Manager to attend a meeting and have an open public conversation. Ben said he will start to build the framework of issues from the meeting and invite the Town Manager a meeting. Laurie offered to help Ben with the framework.

Mara questioned the status of the letter the Commission decided to write to the Select Board advocating for a Town Manager Working Group to address after school care issues. Ben thought a letter was sent to the Town Manager in February with a plan to follow up after Town meeting. Laurie added the issue is not only after school care but the need to maximize the use of the new community center.

Mara will follow up on the letter drafted in February and send it again now that Town meeting is over.

Next Meetings: Next meetings are scheduled for June 3 and July 8.

Mara made a motion to approve the April 1st minutes with corrections. Second by Granger. Vote: Mara – yes, Granger – yes, Laurie – yes, Ben – yes. Vote passed in favor 4-0.

Mara stated minutes from the Haskell walk still need to be approved.

Mara made a motion to adjourn, seconded by Granger. Vote: Mara – yes, Laurie – yes, Granger -yes, Ben – yes. Vote passed in favor 4-0.