Sudbury Park & Recreation Commission

Meeting Minutes

02/09/26

Commissioners Present: Mara Huston, Laurie Elliason, Granger Atkenson, Bobby Beagan
Commissioners Absent: Ben Carmel

6:34 Meeting called to order

Laurie here, Granger here, Bobby here, Mara here

Public comment: No one present for public comment

Mara presented a Permission to Volunteer application from Heather Halsey, who has volunteered her time toward gardening projects at Heritage Park and would like to do so again this year.

Laurie moved to allow Heather Halsey to perform gardening work at Heritage Park. Granger seconded the motion.

The Commission unanimously voted to allow Heather to perform the work.

Mara asked whether other commissioners had reviewed Ben's updates to the annual report. Granger said he had no comment. Laurie and Bobby said they had not had time to review it.

Granger made a motion to allow Mara and Ben to finish the Town Meeting report for the Commission. Bobby seconded the motion.

The Commission unanimously voted in favor of the motion.

Mara asked who would typically give the director's update. Vivian said it is typically the director, but she—

Vivian reported that the dive well UV system had been installed. There is a new dive well controller, but there have been some issues. They are meeting with the installer weekly.

An email went out to all users regarding May's closure.

Vivian said Sandra and she have come to believe the new pool pack should suffice. The filter room is updated, which is exciting.

Mara said she swims there and that the air seems great, with no smell of chlorine.

Haskell Design

Vivian said she had met with Sandra and Activitas. She said the Commission would be involved and thought Granger and Laurie were involved.

Laurie clarified that Bobby and she had been involved in choosing Activitas and would continue to be involved going forward.

Mara asked Laurie to keep the Commission abreast of any issues that come up because they cannot violate Open Meeting Law. Bobby said updates could be sent, but that they just could not deliberate.

Feeley

Vivian said they would be meeting with the designer and user groups on Friday for an informational session. It was posted on Facebook and the websites.

Mara said the 90-foot diamond dugout would be replaced. Vivian said the insurer would replace it with a wooden structure instead of cinder blocks. Mara asked why they would not be getting a chain-link fence with a rooftop. Vivian said she would bring this up to Victor.

SMILE Playground

Vivian said Victor had shared updates.

Mara explained that the COD was having a meeting and that she was hoping to attend.

OSRP - Adam

A town forum would be hosted on February 26th from 7:00 p.m. to 8:00 p.m.

Mara stated that the Commission should be made aware of these meetings.

Adam Bernie joined.

Mara said she really wanted to hear from Adam about the OSRP.

Adam said the following:

- Town had signed a contract with VSC.
- Town staff met with VSC and outlined expectations.
- The town forum will be on the 26th from 7:00 p.m. to 9:00 p.m.
- This will be a virtual forum and will include the VSC group. It is intended as a primer for people not familiar with the OSRP.
- Adam said OSRPs will now be ten-year plans instead of seven-year plans.
- Adam said he would lay out that the 2009 plan was heavily focused on conservation and land preservation. He wants this plan to include a field needs assessment and to

determine what the Sudbury community is looking for, in order to help Vivian and provide a roadmap for future programming.

- He said this will give Conservation and Park & Recreation a comprehensive look at what the needs will be so that—
- BSC is preparing a survey that will be distributed to the public.
- Over the summer there will be a Q&A.
- In the fall, there will be draft recommendations and review of input.

Mara said she agreed that the 2009 plan was light on recreation.

Mara asked Adam whether there would be Commission members on the working group.

Adam said that for now it would just be town staff, and drafts would be sent out to the committees, which would be able to provide feedback.

Adam said the core group would be Laurie, Adam, Vivian, and Amy.

Bobby asked whether anyone in the group had experience with the grant applications, since the Town had not been able to apply for them due to having an outdated plan. Bobby said he just wanted to make sure all of the necessary components would be covered.

Adam said there is an Open Space Planner's Workbook that anyone can access, and there is a checklist of items that need to be met. He added that one woman at the state is responsible for accepting approval by the Department of Conservation.

Adam explained that it is important to hit all the points the grants ask for and to understand what the competition is like. Adam said it had been a while, but he has had experience with it.

He added that the management analyst in Town is eager to help with the application process.

Mara said the town forum on the 26th is more of a primer.

Adam said it would be recorded and publicized on the Town website, social media, etc.

Mara thanked Adam for coming.

Director Update

Vivian wanted to provide an update regarding the dugout replacement and pointed out that the insurance company is driving the replacement. Amy said it was their opinion to go with wood over concrete. Mara asked whether they had considered the chain-link option, and Amy said no.

Laurie asked about the wood and whether it would be solid versus see-through like the chain-link option. Vivian said—

Bobby made the point that it might make sense to talk to the company doing work at Feeley, because they may have a better recommendation than the insurance company, which may just be taking the simplest route.

Vivian said she would connect with them and noted that there are no funds beyond what the insurance provides.

Bobby pointed out that the wooden ones at Haskell rotted out, but said they could at least get an opinion from Gale.

Mara pointed out that Warner Larson did the others and could take a look at those on the softball fields. Mara said it sounded like the insurer may be going cheap on this.

Vivian said she and Amy have been doing a great deal of work on restructuring programming.

Amy said they are just scratching the surface at this point. She said they are trying to expand programming to attract more people, though there are some internal challenges occupying them at the moment.

Mara asked about summer camp registration.

Vivian said registration had been very successful and that they have made staff wages more competitive.

Mara asked about after-school programming.

Amy said they have reached out to the schools to get space there. She said busing to the Community Center would be more expensive and more challenging.

Amy said there are many benefits to doing the programs at the schools, such as hiring school staff and parents to help.

Mara said Laurie could help as the liaison to the schools.

Amy said she and Laurie could speak about that.

Laurie said she does not want to completely write off the use of the van to get kids to the Community Center.

Amy responded that the van only takes ten kids, whereas there could be a hundred kids at the school.

Laurie said Sudbury Extended Day was interested in taking older kids to the Community Center and that the school bus used to pick up kids from the schools and bring them to the Community Center.

Mara pointed out that this was before the school time change.

Mara said there used to be around fifty kids on Wild Wednesdays and that it was a good opportunity for kids to meet each other. She said it would be great to bring this back.

Mara said it would be great if Laurie and Amy could talk with Karyn Jones from the School Committee as well.

Amy said she is not ruling out these options, but that doing it in the schools makes things very easy.

Mara asked whether they could get together before the next meeting.

Vivian said it would be great to explore all options, and that having the programming at the school would take transportation issues off the table.

Laurie asked what some of the programming challenges were.

Vivian said she had been looking to meet with Laurie because some issues cannot be shared in this meeting.

Mara asked about rental of rooms at the Community Center.

Vivian said they are meeting and discussing rental of the Community Center rooms. An internal meeting is coming up to try to sort out some of these issues.

Solar Project at Haskell

Mara welcomed Olga Faktorovich Allen and Rami from the Energy and Sustainability Committee.

Mara said there had been no answer from the Town Manager on the legal inquiry about purview.

Mara shared background on how the Commission originally voted not to support the solar canopy project at Haskell. She explained that the Commission was unaware of the project until she read about it in Sudbury Weekly, and that she then asked the Town to share the project details with the Commission at a meeting.

Mara asked Sandra whether there were any updates, and Sandra said there was nothing new.

Granger asked whether there were any renderings, and Mara said no.

Mara said Olga and Rami were there to answer any questions.

Olga said she reviewed the Commission's initial meeting and found herself talking to the screen because she felt the Commission's questions were not being answered. She said the expedited December approach was due to Big Beautiful Bill changes and potential deadlines. Olga said there was no intention to skip over any input from the Commission.

She explained that the vote at Town Meeting in the spring is not on a final design, but simply on a lease agreement with the contractor, Select. She said they are well known to the Town and have completed other solar projects in Town.

Olga said the geotechnical study will specify the final design, and the contractor is willing to pay for it. If there is anything the Town does not like, it would be able to break the lease. Olga gave the example that if the study came back showing there would be only 149 spaces rather than 150, the Town could break the lease.

Olga stated that she listened to the past meeting and that the Commission had a number of very good questions, including drainage and parking spots. She said those questions would be answered once the geotechnical study is completed.

Granger asked whether the Town could break the lease with no fee. Olga said yes.

Olga said the study results would come back to the Town. She said the Planning Board would have to approve the project, and that the PRC should also be involved.

Granger asked whether, if this passes at Town Meeting, the final design would then need to be approved at another Town Meeting.

Rami said it would not have to go back to Town Meeting. He said it would have to go through Planning, the Select Board, their committee, and the Commission.

Olga stated that there is a rough design showing a bird's-eye view, along with details of the panel size and tilt and the amount of energy they will generate, which she said would cover the electricity costs of the Fairbank Community Center.

Olga said that over the life of the agreement it would save $4 million.

She added that the Town could decide to reduce the size of the canopy, which would then increase the cost, and the Town could then decide not to move forward.

Rami said the array at the high school was his project when he was a teacher at LS.

Mara pointed out that the arrays on top of the Community Center will cover the Community Center.

Olga clarified that she was pointing out that the Haskell array could cover the Community Center costs as an example.

Rami said what is going onto the Community Center will actually cover only a fraction. Mara asked how much, and they said they would get back to the Commission.

Rami said the height would be a minimum of 13 feet at its lowest point. He said the canopy would be in a V-shape to drain water.

He said that at the high school, water drained into crushed stone in the lot.

Rami said that with the height, it would not really impact the field of view other than the pillars.

He said one of the benefits at the high school was that people competed for spots that were protected from snow and provided shade during warm weather.

He pointed out that he spent a lot of time at Haskell while his two daughters played soccer, and that cars would get extremely hot in the parking lot. He said shade would be a big benefit.

Olga then added that there is thermal damage to asphalt.

Rami said LS had been worried about plowing around the solar canopy, but found that it actually decreased both time and cost.

Rami said the high school project is a money-maker and that it generates about $200,000 per year.

Laurie said she wanted to reiterate the points raised in November. She stressed that the Commission has to accept the fact that these would be very large structures. She said renderings would really help her.

She also said that the view from the Community Center was important.

Laurie then raised safety issues involving small children, pylons, and visibility.

Rami said that based on his experience at the high school, because the structure is so tall, visibility is not impacted. He said it is more likely that a car would obstruct the view of a small child than a pole would.

Olga added that it is already somewhat precarious at Haskell, with cars moving quickly through the area. She said drivers may actually be more careful with pillars present.

Olga said solar arrays are very popular in school parking lots. She said she looked into whether there were any safety issues or accidents and asked the vendor as well, and he did not report any.

Laurie said she would like to know what the lighting would be like. She was concerned that it might be too bright under the canopy at night.

Rami said Bella Wong had worried there would not be enough light under the canopy, and that they can choose how much lighting to have.

Laurie said the site is up against a neighborhood.

Mara made the point that Haskell is not used in the evening.

Olga said the Commission should view the vote as one to move forward to the geotechnical study.

Granger said there would be no checkpoint after that.

Olga said she would argue that the checkpoint is Town staff and the Commission.

Granger explained how the Commission's process normally works.

Olga said that because there is no construction cost to the Town, it does not have to go back to Town Meeting.

Granger questioned who would pay for any additional costs.

Olga explained that the study would come back to the Town with all costs identified, and the Town could decide whether or not to move forward based on cost.

Rami said the Select Board would typically vote on whether or not to move forward, after gathering information from all of the committees.

Rami suggested that there should be a member from each group to help advise the Town.

Laurie raised the size of the arrays again.

Olga said the project can be scaled down, but it still has to be worthwhile to the contractor. She said they try to optimize the amount of sun.

She said the developer will crunch the numbers and that electricity is more expensive because the top has a big off-ramp.

Rami said the Curtis array is a lot smaller and thinner.

Rami said they were working with SPS to take in all the various concerns, including bus turning.

Laurie requested renderings of the views.

Laurie asked whether the Commission had to take a vote, and Mara said absolutely not. Mara said this was just an opportunity for them to share more information and answer questions.

Laurie said she would rather wait to vote until after renderings are available.

Rami explained that the vendor has not finished the renderings, and that they will get them to the Commission.

Olga pointed out that they will be draft renderings because the study has to occur first to get all the data.

Bobby said that the image shown on screen seemed like a mock-up rather than a real design, though he supposed it could be called a design. He said he is at that space every day and that the aesthetic is very important to him.

Bobby said that comparing the high school array to this array is like apples and oranges due to the location.

He said what really frustrated him about the first meeting with the vendor was that there were “hand-wavy” answers for everything. As an example, he said the vendor stated that the parking lot is in great shape, when that is not the case at all. He said every answer was in the affirmative to make the project sound that much better.

Bobby said he understands the value of the project, but that the vendor stating there are no safety issues is not data to him.

Bobby said that the Commission is in the process of a field design, and that if these structures are put in, they will effectively be permanent.

He said that if the Town later wanted to reconfigure the area to fit in a splash pad, or change the old skate park area, the Commission would suddenly be completely hamstrung.

Bobby said Granger’s point concerns him because getting everyone together to decide on the design is not actually how it will work. He said he does not want the Commission to vote to move forward with the design and then just trust that the Town is going to involve the Commission. He said at that point the Town does not have to involve the Commission, and that the Commission should look into that.

Bobby also said that it had been four weeks since the Commission asked the Town Manager to find out from Town Counsel whether the Town would need approval from the Commission, and the Commission had still not heard anything back.

Bobby said the Commission should get an agreement with the Town that it will be involved in the final design.

He said he had reservations from the first meeting, and that he appreciates what they are trying to do for the community and that it is nothing personal or anything against solar. He said his concerns revolve around character, safety, and the impact on future modifications to Haskell.

Bobby said his perspective had not moved at all since the last meeting.

He added that there should be really good renderings after nine weeks to give the Commission a better idea of what things are going to look like.

Olga thanked Bobby for his input.

Olga explained that system design does not refer to renderings, since this is an energy project. She said there are models and $3.4 million in cost savings.

She said aesthetics are in the eye of the beholder and that she lives behind Haskell and is there all the time, and that she would not think it is an ugly structure.

Olga said the community can weigh in at Town Meeting.

She added that being future-ready should include heat resilience and shade due to the number of extreme heat days, and that this is being future-ready.

She said the temperature of cars can be 30 degrees hotter than ambient temperature.

She said she loved the idea of a splash pad, but did not think the middle of the parking lot would make sense.

Bobby stated that he never said it would be in the middle of the parking lot, but that if the structures went in, they would limit what the Commission could do.

Olga said she does not know of any safety data showing more accidents, and that she does not know of any accidents at LS.

Olga said everyone wants the same thing and that governance is tricky, but that the community's and the Commission's interests should be aligned.

She suggested to Rami that there should be more collaboration when the final design comes through.

Olga said her final point is that there are enough benefits to justify moving forward with the geotechnical study.

Granger pointed out that he was seeing the data for the first time and that resurfacing the parking lot could eat up all of those savings.

Olga said that anything that raises the price gives the Town the option to break the lease.

Olga said she could not comment on what the Town is currently considering doing to the parking lot as a separate project.

Vivian said she confirmed with the Town Manager that he is meeting with Town Counsel on Wednesday and suggested that the Commission table the conversation for now, with the understanding that guidance is coming.

Mara reviewed some of the good points raised, but said one major question for Vivian was how to make sure the Commission has a seat at the table in all decisions related to the project.

Mara noted that the LS parking lot was designed at the same time the canopy was installed.

She also raised the fact that the Commission has hired Activitas to help design how to enhance this space.

Mara said the Commission does not have a great deal of faith that it will have a seat at the table.

Mara asked the Commission whether any commissioner wanted to ask for a vote. Laurie and Granger both said they would want to—

Olga said they would try to have the renderings by the Commission's meeting and stated that they would try to make sure the Commission would be involved.

Mara said she appreciated that, but that until the Town Manager commits to it—

Mara thanked Olga and Rami for attending.

Bobby apologized to Vivian for adding to the length of the meeting.

Vivian said no problem, and added that Town Counsel sometimes takes time to respond because they want to provide a well-thought-out answer.

Mara asked Amy whether she had a chance to review any of the questions related to capital planning.

Amy explained that she had not had a chance because it had not risen to the top of her priority list, given the many other things she needed to take care of.

Mara asked whether there was any way to get answers to some of those questions.

Laurie pointed out that this may be beyond what Amy has bandwidth for with programming, and that perhaps the Commission could take care of it.

Bobby said he could talk to Dan Lee and try to get those questions answered for LS.

There was discussion about SPS fields and how much they are used.

Bobby said he could get Laurie the names for baseball.

Mara then reviewed the field needs assessment and asked whether Curtis was being used.

Bobby said Haskell was never used.

Bobby said he would take the questions related to baseball and that he could find out how much and how often it is used.

Mara asked Vivian whether she could check with Tina to see whether the Feeley courts would need to be redesigned or simply resurfaced.

Mara asked Vivian whether she was on the PRC email list, and Vivian said she was not sure and would check with Mark.

Liaison Updates

Granger reported that all CPC projects other than Parkinson were voted in favor of.

Mara said the parking lot has always been an issue.

Mara thanked Granger for being the Commission's representative on CPC.

Laurie said good progress was being made on the rail trail, but nothing related to Park and Recreation.

Mara asked about plowing of the rail trail.

Laurie said it was not supposed to be happening and was supposed to be left as is.

Vivian said Town staff are trying to track down who is doing it.

Mara said there is a COD meeting where Victor will present the playground design and asked whether Bobby could attend.

Bobby said he would try.

Mara said Kay Bell had suggested that perhaps the Commission should submit a CPC project under historical preservation to provide kiosks at recreational properties.

Mara asked whether she could speak to the Historical Commission about this project.

Mara stated that she had not reviewed the meetings and that the Commission would hold off on this.

Vivian thanked the Commission for its involvement with the community and asked whether someone could take on the minutes.

Amy explained that AI handles them initially but that they need review.

Mara said the AI version had a lot of issues, though she had not finished reviewing it. She said a fair amount was not caught by AI, and that when it is your turn, you really have to dive in.

Bobby volunteered to do February.

The Commission said Ben would take March, Granger April, and Laurie May.

Bobby noted that he had been counting on Vivian to keep Ben on board, and she explained that she tried.

Vivian said she was trying to schedule meetings with each commissioner.

Mara asked for a motion to adjourn.

Bobby moved to adjourn. Laurie seconded.

The Commission voted unanimously to adjourn.