

City of Newton



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Community Preservation Committee

APPROVED MINUTES

February 14, 2023

The virtual meeting was held online on Tuesday, February 14, 2023, beginning at 7:00 P.M. Community Preservation Committee (CPC) members present included Dan Brody, Eliza Datta, Byron Dunker, Susan Lunin, Robert Maloney, Jennifer Molinsky and Judy Weber. Committee Members Mark Armstrong and Martin Smargiassi and were not present for the meeting. Community Preservation Program Manager Lara Kritzer was also present and served as recorder.

Chair Jennifer Molinsky opened the Community Preservation Committee's public meeting and introduced the CPC members present at this time.

Update on Current and Future Recreation Projects from the Parks, Recreation, and Culture Department

Commissioner Nicole Banks and Director of Parks and Open Space Luis Perez Demorizi presented the Committee with the Parks, Recreation, and Culture Department's Comprehensive Improvements and Maintenance Plan Update. Mr. Demorizi explained that they would also provide a quick update on the progress with the Athletic Fields project, Levingston Cove, and the upcoming groundbreaking for the Marty Sender Path. He noted that 62% of the open space in Newton is dedicated to public use and reviewed those public owners. Mr. Demorizi explained that the Citywide Open Space Analysis had looked at the amount of space needed for athletic fields versus other open space needs and found that only 8% of all open space in Newton is dedicated to athletic fields, while an additional 25% is school and municipal public land. He noted that there is a growing need for more multipurpose fields but that the remaining open land has difficulties. Much of it was located in low lying areas that needed to be drained and there was little flat land available so the City needed to get creative as to how it would proceed. Mr. Demorizi next reviewed their proposed implementation strategy and five plan objectives.

Mr. Demorizi explained that they had developed this project using prioritization criteria. The first of these was to increase ongoing maintenance by putting in more effort and budget into the fields. He noted that the Parks and Recreation's maintenance budget has grown 757% since 2019. Second, they had looked at their capital project management work by creating a new Parks and Open Space Division within the Department. In addition to having new staff available to work on these spaces, they also were working to standardize materials and processes. Mr. Demorizi noted that they Department was also considering how to expand synthetic field use by installing them at two new locations and were planning to install new lighting systems throughout the City to expand playing

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opportunities at both large and small facilities. He explained how the City was also managing the field usage now so that it did not need to worry about wear. Lastly, Mr. Demorizi explained how they had managed this work while also continuing to address other multi-year projects included in the City's Capital Improvements Plan (CIP). He noted that they had recently completed the installation of new lighting at Newton South High School and would be installing lighting at Newton North High School over the summer.

Mr. Demorizi next moved to a review of the three sites that were anticipated to be included in the upcoming CPA construction funding application. He explained that the work at Albemarle Park had been broken into two phases – Phase I in the north half of the park and Phase II in the south half. Phase I proposed to modify the northern half of the park by repositioning the baseball field to allow for more multipurpose space. They would also be removing and replacing the existing sports lighting and installing new lighting at Murphy Little League Field. This Phase I work was anticipated to cost \$7.1 million with both equipment and amenities including lighting, synthetic turf, contingency funds, etc. The Burr School fields were currently very sloped and were not considered to be a safe place to play. Work in this location would include leveling the site to expand its useability and adding a perimeter walking path and landscaping. The new fields would allow for flexibility in future uses and would cost \$1.62 million. Mr. Demorizi noted that they hoped to be able to use sustainable fill that was already stored at another City site. The third site, McGrath Field, currently had four fields which were considered to be unsafe due to limited run out zones. They were planning to remove the baseball diamond and install three new fields with new walking paths and trees at a cost of \$769,340. He noted that elsewhere they were primarily altering land surrounding baseball diamonds and that they would leave as much land untouched as possible. The overall cost for all three sites was anticipated to be \$9,487,983.

Commissioner Banks noted that for Albemarle Park, they would be decommissioning the existing tennis courts and installing new pickle ball courts. Ms. Molinsky asked about the basketball courts and was told that they would remain in place. Mr. Demorizi explained how that area would be reorganized and reconfigured. Ms. Molinsky noted that the southern half of Albemarle Park was not included in the proposal and Commissioner Banks confirmed that that half would be completed separately in the future.

Ms. Lunin asked about the lacrosse facilities at McGrath park. Mr. Demorizi explained that they planned to fundraise for a lacrosse practice wall area to be installed there. Ms. Molinsky asked about anticipated lifespan of the fields assuming appropriate maintenance. Mr. Demorizi answered that a grass field can last 30 years before needing a full depth renovation while a synthetic turf field needed to be renovated every 10 years. For synthetic turf, the carpet needed to be replaced every ten years while the infill/pellets could be used twice. He also noted that the lighting fixtures had a 25 year warranty but were anticipated to last 50 years and that the pool was anticipated to have a 50-60 year lifespan.

Mr. Brody asked about the other three sites that had been included in the preliminary planning work. Mr. Demorizi stated that Forte Park, Braceland Park, and the Brown/Oak Hill School fields were being planned for the next phase of construction. Mr. Demorizi explained that the upcoming work on finalize the design and construction for Albemarle Park would help to guide how they proceeded with the remaining three sites.

Mr. Brody thought that the Committee would need to issue bonds to pay for these projects and thought that it would be helpful to have a ballpark number for work at those last three sites as well. He asked when the Department planned to finalize the Gath Pool project and Mr. Demorizi answered that they planned to have a full application ready for the March meeting. Mr. Brody thought that the Committee would need these numbers before it could send any bonding recommendations to the City Council for approval. He thought that the length of the bond would come back to the lifespan of the elements involved in the project and thought it would be useful to have a recommendation from Parks and Recreation on the potential length of the bond. Commissioner Banks stated that she wanted to meet with the City's Financial team and Ms. Kritzer to discuss how the bonding could be structured. There was agreement that Gath Pool was the greatest need at this time and that it made sense to complete the work on Albemarle North at the same time. She explained that the other sites could potentially be staged and explained how they were planning to address the needed work. For example, the Burr fields were important to expanding the available field play space and so would be done early in the plan. For the remaining three fields, they were in early discussions on what made sense to do next but had not worked out the details or completed any high level numbers on those yet.

Ms. Datta asked if there were any benefits or efficiencies in combining all of the fields into one package and doing them at the same time. Mr. Demorizi stated that their goal was to find efficiencies in the process and that they were looking to have some funding allocated to each of the proposed sites so that as soon as they were done with Burr they could move to McGrath and so on. He explained that they had to balance which fields would be open and closed and felt that they were developing a good sequence for that work. Ms. Datta noted that McGrath Field had some matching funds and asked the applicant to provide more detail on that funding in the pre-proposal. Mr. Demorizi stated that that information would be included and that they were continuing to have conversations on those and other matching fund opportunities.

Mr. Maloney stated that he had a follow up bonding question about the other fields that were not included in the current project. He thought that it would be useful to have some idea of what other Recreation funding needs might come up during the life of the bond as he would like the CPC to have enough funding available for those as well. Commissioner Banks stated that they would continue to develop broad estimates as part of their capital spending. She stated that as a Department, they worked to develop maintenance plans and schedules that would help to avoid the extent of these types of projects in the future. She added that they were also looking for other funding sources that they could access in the future and were working with the Planning Department to potentially use development mitigation payments for Braceland Park and to pull from other resources. Commissioner Banks noted that while there were some efficiencies in doing several projects at the same time, they also recognized the need to work hard to identify future funding sources.

Mr. Brody noted the City's CPA program's bonding history and how it had approached bonding for Webster Woods. He explained that the CPC's goal was to spend 20% of its annual funding on Open Space and that the Committee had ultimately decided that it was most comfortable with setting aside 10% of its annual funding for that payment. He thought that they would need to do similar planning for this site but that they needed to have a clearer sense of what was out there and what the City was comfortable with bonding and spending first.

Review of Pre-Proposal for Phase III of the Gath Memorial Pool Renovation Project

Consultant Tom Scarlata, Bargmann Hendrie + Archtype (BH+A), made the presentation on the current plans for the updated Gath Pool. He began by noting that the design of the pool had changed in July 2022 from one pool with a large spray deck to a two pool design which included a recreational pool and an eight lane lap pool. The splash pad area had been narrowed and one ramp and walkway area removed. The new design would now allow full access to all sides of both pools as well as a zero-entry area and a new ramp leading into the competition pool. The redesigned spray pad would still be two levels and the existing bathhouse would be retained but renovated to provide full accessibility, direct access through the building to the pool, and new gender neutral changing areas as well as a more generous area for checking in and registering. The project would add a new ramp to the front of the site as well as new steps and fencing. Mr. Scarlata pointed out the new hip roofed shade structures that would be installed around the decks and explained that they were looking at more permanent metal structures for the shades to save in both maintenance and durability. These could also be used for solar in the future if needed. On the lower level of the bathhouse, they were creating a new second means of access out of the filter room and redesigning the space to provide better solutions for maintenance and safety.

Mr. Scarlata explained that the competition pool would have eight lanes of equal size and depth. A ramp was part of the pool design and a lift would also be added along with two diving boards. Mr. Scarlata noted the multiple options for use here and how the pool had been designed for multiple users. The recreation pool would include a 0 entry area with a splash area as well as a walking area that could also be used for laps and a general play/exercise area. He explained how the two pools would have two separate filter systems and reviewed their features and benefits. The spray deck had a new linear design on two tiers with universal accessibility. The space was designed for toddler through pre-teen use and would have an impervious, slip-resistant but soft surface. This area was designed so that it could be used even when the pool was closed and their team was beginning to look at the specific water features to be installed. Four new shade structures would be installed on the east side of the pool with two more to be located on the north side and another adjacent to the bathhouse. Mr. Scarlata noted the new storage area that would be created adjacent to the bathhouse which would allow them to open up the deck space. He also pointed out how the space had been designed to allow for better viewing during swim events and showed further plans and overall views of the site.

A breakdown of the proposed \$7.2 million was reviewed and it was noted that it included \$967,000 in contingency funding due to the current environment. Commissioner Banks stated that she was excited to be bringing this project forward and to see it completed next year as a fully accessible facility with eight lap lanes significant improvements to the decks and shade areas. She stated that they were looking forward to having the new pool facility open for the following summer season.

Ms. Molinsky thought that it looked like a great design and asked if the two pools was the reason for the two filter systems. Mr. Scarlata answered yes and explained that the water needed to be turned over every four hours in the recreation pool versus every six hours in the lap pool. He also noted that the spray system would recirculate the water every 25 minutes. Mr. Scarlata added that the two pool design allowed for better access to the far side of the pools, more flexibility in uses, and full access to the lap pool. Commissioner Banks stated that the design provided full accessibility to both pools and had allowed them to pick up more deck space for seating and shade areas. Ms. Molinsky asked if the

budget shown was the full budget and if the amount requested from the CPA fund was just over \$5.8 million. The applicants answered yes.

Mr. Maloney noted that the Committee had received several letters with concerns about the depth of the pool and asked if the starting blocks could be located at the deep end. Commissioner Banks stated that that was an option and that the deep end of the pool would be 12 feet deep in all lanes. Mary Pohlman stated that the current pool went from 4.5' to 6' at its shallow end. She explained that 6' was recommended for diving but that 4' was the current requirement. The new lap pool was proposed to be designed with a consistent 4' shallow end and they were concerned with younger divers since their races start at the shallow end.

Ms. Weber thought that the design process seemed to have gone smoothly and asked if the Parks and Recreation Commission felt that they were finished with the design. Mr. Demorizi answered that they had taken a lot of input on the design and were still finalizing it but felt that the design was pretty advanced. He stated that a lot of thought had gone into the plans and a lot of changes made over time. He also noted that the plans had been reviewed by the Parks and Recreation Committee and the Commission on Disabilities. Commissioner Banks agreed with Mr. Demorizi on the level of care and review that had gone into the designs.

Mr. Scarlata noted that future races could be started in the deep end and noted that the City also wanted to use the lap pool for recreation use, the standard for which was 4' shallow end depth. He stated that Massachusetts's current regulations did not have depth requirements for starting blocks and noted the requirements in other locations. He explained that they had tried to design the best competition course that they could while also providing an adaptive design. Commissioner Banks added that they had reviewed the proposed design and uses alongside other pools in the area and could not find any other pools with 6' shallow ends. She stated that this needed to be a pool which worked for the whole community, which is why they had designed it with a 4' shallow end. Mr. Demorizi also pointed out that the ADA compliant ramp leading into the lap pool ended in the 4' end and could need to be completely redesigned if the shallow end was 6' deep. The current ramp and pool design had achieved a careful balance and they could not maintain accessibility and equal depth lanes with a 6' shallow end. Ms. Molinsky asked about the dimensions of the Newton North High School Pool. Commissioner Banks stated that Parks and Recreation did not oversee that pool but that the current Gath Pool had a 4' shallow end.

Ms. Datta stated that it was great to see the design update and asked to hear more about any sustainable elements of the design in the full proposal. Ms. Weber asked if the original proposal had requested \$5 million. Mr. Demorizi answered yes and noted that the current plans were coming in at slightly more than they had originally thought. Ms. Molinsky stated that it would be helpful to include information on the longer term picture of potential future funding requests in addition to providing the information on sustainability and any other potential funding sources for the next discussion. Mr. Demorizi asked for more information on the CPC's sustainability guidance and Ms. Molinsky referred him to the Proposal Guidelines on the City Website. Commissioner Banks noted that one of the urgent problems with the current pool was its water loss issues and asked if that could be considered as a sustainable component of the project. Ms. Molinsky answered yes, as could their work on solar readiness and reusing of fill from other Newton sites. Ms. Lunin moved to invite the applicants to

submit a full proposal for the construction funding of the Gath Pool project. Mr. Maloney seconded the motion which passed by unanimous vote.

Status Report and Review of CPA Program Information Session

Ms. Kritzer reported on the work to proposed date for the information session and the potential agenda. She agreed to recirculate the list of organizations to be contacts to members for review. Members also discussed creating a handout for the meeting.

Review of Existing and Potential Future Projects

Members had a brief review of current and potential future projects at this time. Ms. Kritzer reported that she had contacted the New Art Center about the status of their project as requested. The New Art Center was in the process of negotiating the purchase of the property with the owners but had not reached an agreed price yet and discussions were still ongoing.

Review of Current Finances

Members reviewed the most recent Finances At A Glance update at this time.

Ms. Molinsky noted that bonding had been discussed as a potential option for the Recreation projects and asked what resources would be needed for the Committee to make that decision. Members discussed the extent of the Recreation projects and what other projects could be coming in in the next few years. Mr. Dunker noted that there were five fields that needed to be redone (Braceland and Oak Hill/Brown being the two that were not included in the current application) and that the rest of the City's fields would probably only need maintenance. Mr. Brody thought that the issue was the interest rate that the City could get for the bonds. He thought it would be helpful to find out if the City could anticipate what effective interest rate might be available for a bond issued in the next year. With that information, he thought the Committee could have a good understanding of what it would mean to bond the Gath Pool project for a set number of years. He thought the interest rate and length of time that the Committee and City were comfortable with were the most useful elements to consider. Ms. Molinsky wondered if it made sense to consider a mix of bonding and outright funding for the project and asked staff to check with the applicant on that question. Members agreed to hold an extra meeting on Tuesday March 7 to discuss the CPA bonding process and what it might look like to approve bonding for one or more of the upcoming recreation projects. Ms. Kritzer agreed to reach out to Mr. Demorizi prior to this meeting for more information on the recommended length of the bond and whether there was an ideal amount to bond.

Approval of January 10 Minutes

Members had reviewed the draft minutes prior to the meeting and Mr. Maloney had sent back revisions. Ms. Weber moved to approve the January 10 meeting minutes as revised. Mr. Maloney seconded the motion. The motion passed with 5-0-2 with Ms. Lunin and Mr. Dunker abstaining from the vote as they had not been present for the meeting.

Mr. Maloney moved to adjourn. Ms. Datta seconded the motion which passed by unanimous voice vote. The meeting was adjourned at 8:51 P.M.