

**Newton Parks & Recreation Commission**  
**Meeting Minutes-Hybrid Meeting**  
**7:00 p.m. – Monday, September 18, 2023**

**Attending:** Arthur Magni, Chair, Byron Dunker, Vice-Chair, Commissioner Banks, Beth Wilkinson, John Rice, Gloria Gavris, Randy Johnson, Midge Connolly, Ted Chapman, Mark Feldhusen, Dr. Michael Richardson

Meeting began: 7:00pm

**1. Meeting Minutes – June 26, 2023**

- Approved 8-0

**2. Commissioner's Report**

- Commissioner Banks introduced Sheila Butts, applicant for the Ward 8 opening. Sheila's application is being voted on by the Council during tonight's Council meeting.
- NSHS- Both turf field renovations are complete, and the track has been resurfaced. There will be a grand reopening ceremony scheduled soon, an invitation will be sent to the Commission members.
- NNHS lighting project is in process, there have been some delays. PRC is working with the school's schedule now that the kids are back in class.
- Friday, Sept 22 the Gath Pool Groundbreaking ceremony is scheduled at 6pm on the south side of the pool. Ms. Gavris asked if the contractor will work through the winter. Commissioner Banks replied, the contractor will work through the winter, weather permitting.
- The State has earmarked \$100K for the restoration of the Farlow Pond basin. Currently there are leaks that need to be sealed.
- The Friends of Spears Park are requesting \$150K from CPC to complete the community garden project. Mr. Dunker commented the Community Garden Project is the type of projects the CPC is looking to support. The Friends Group requested to name the garden. Commissioner Banks told the group the Commission has a moratorium in place on naming parks.
- The department is scheduling public meetings for input on the Burr, McGrath, and Albemarle field project. Ms. Gavris asked if this project would come before the Commission. Commissioner Banks commented these meeting would be separate from the Commission meeting, and she does not anticipate any changes to the projects that would require them to be brought back to the Commission. Commissioner Banks will provide updates to the Commission. Mr. Chapman commented it is important to schedule the public meetings, the parents in the Burr School community do have some questions and concerns.
- Programs/Camps and Aquatics had a good season. Staffing levels were better this year, we still need higher level seasoned staff. Mr. Feldhusen asked what the pay rate for staff is. Commissioner Banks stated the minimum wage has increased each year over the last five years and PRC has worked with HR to create rates above minimum wage to compete with private organizations. The rate for experienced staff has also increased as the minimum wage grows closer to the higher salary positions.
- Events:
  - Paddy's Road Race- October 15
  - Harvest Fair – October 14 & 15
  - Halloween Window Decorating registration is open.

**3. Committee Reports**

- **Community Preservation Committee -B. Dunker**
  - PRC returned to CPC to request 1.5 million for Gath Pool. There was one bidder with a price of 1.2 million over budget. CPC granted 1.2 million. CPC prefers other sources contribute to the project to retain their 80% contribution. Commissioner Banks commented the \$1.2 million will keep the project moving forward and the City will request the remaining \$300K from the City Council.
  - The 2nd Church and Baptist Church are requesting money for renovations under historic preservation. Mr. Dunker reported the Baptist Church reported 35 attendees at Sunday Mass. Mr. Feldhusen asked what happens if the church closes. Mr. Dunker replied there is a provision the city will hold the building. Mr. Rice commented this was the situation at the Brigham House. Ms. Butts commented most of the recreation buildings would be considered historic, such as the Newton Centre Hut.
  - Warren House is requesting a \$1 million dollars from CPC for new windows.
  - Ms. Gavris asked why a P & R Commission member is on the CPC. Mr. Dunker responded there has always been a Commission representative on the CPC.
  - Commissioner Banks commented the CPC has been very supportive of PRC projects.
- **Urban Tree Commission – B. Wilkinson**
  - The Public Hearing for the proposed ordinance was held on August 16. The Discussion will be continued this Wednesday September 20.
- **Farm Commission – B. Wilkinson**
  - The Director Sue Bettino is stepping down. The position title has been changed to The Citizen Director of Administration and Programs. Ms. Bettino will assist during the transition.
  - Chairman Magni asked if any information was discovered about the theft last month. Ms. Wilkinson replied no there is no information on the theft, but cameras have been installed.
- **Off-Leash Area Working Group (OLAWG) – Commissioner**
  - The next meeting is scheduled in October.
  - Continued interest in having an off-leash area in Walker Park. The Planning Dept is also working on a street and sidewalk improvement plan for Washington Street.
  - Met with neighbors interested in creating off-leash recreation in Edmands Park. Ms. Butts asked what area the group is proposing. The group is sending a survey to the neighbors. Then a proposal will be submitted to the OLAWG for review before it is presented to the Commission. Ms. Butts commented there are many historic items in Edmands Park, such as fireplaces from the depression.
- **Arts & Culture – G. Gavris**
  - The Outdoor Special Event Application process is working well. Mr. Rice agreed, the Hyde Community Center had 75 events this summer, there was great communication with the PRC Staff, the staff is very helpful.
  - Cultural Development completed the third year of Summer Concerts in Newton Centre Playground, and it went well. Around 200-300 people attend each concert.
  - Public Art Projects are done for this season including The Pianos in the Park, Butterflies, and the students' SHINE project.
  - Scheduled events:

- ✓ Indigenous Peoples Day – October 9
- ✓ Harvest Fair – October 14 & 15
- ✓ Halloween in Coletti Magni Park – October 28

#### 4. New Business

- Ms. Wilkinson asked how the public contacts Commission Members. Commissioner Banks requested all request go through Ms. McLaughlin the Commission Secretary. They may call the PRC Office 617-796-1500 or email [parks@newtonma.gov](mailto:parks@newtonma.gov).
- Ms. Wilkinson reported the pollinator garden tour this weekend was a great success. We are getting requests for additional gardens, but it is difficult to find volunteers. Ms. Wilkinson is pushing for funding for the PRC Dept for staff to assist in maintaining the pollinator gardens.
- Chairman Magni reported he was contacted by a resident who has an expressed concerns with the Adopt-A-Space Program (AASP) and wanted to appear before the Commission to revise the program. Chairman Magni explained that the Commission does not revise programs. This would be an internal matter with the department. Other commissioners commented that they have been contacted separately as well. Commissioner Banks said that efforts continue to welcome this resident into the AASP.
- Mr. Rice asked how many Adopt-a Space areas are currently active. Commissioner Banks commented Luis Perez Demorizi, Director of Parks & Open Space manages the program. The Adopt A Space Program is very important; PRC works with the community and the adopted spaces evolve in many ways and may be long term or for one season. A community member completes the application and signs up as a volunteer. The department works with the applicant to review the plan, location and species being planted.

*Meeting Adjourned 8:00 pm,  
Respectfully Submitted,  
Robin McLaughlin, Commission Secretary*