

Newton Parks & Recreation Commission

Meeting Minutes

7:00 p.m. – Monday, June 17, 2024

Attending: Arthur Magni, Chair, Byron Dunker, Vice-Chair, Commissioner Banks, Beth Wilkinson, Randy Johnson, Sheila Butts, Jack Neville, Mark Feldhusen, Gloria Gavis, Midge Connolly, Ted Chapman

Meeting began: 7:00pm

1. Meeting Minutes – May 2024

- Approved 8-0

2. Friends of Wellington Park- Play Structure Sign

- Commissioner Banks reported the Friends of Wellington Park fundraised for the new play structure at Wellington Park. The group has submitted a proposal for a sign to be posted near the Wellington Play Structure, which would include the names of the individuals, groups and companies who donated toward the play structure project. The proposal is with the PRC department for design review and Law department. Posting a company's name on the sign would be considered advertising which is not allowed on park land. The proposal would come before the Commission with a Public Hearing.
- Mr. Dunker stated the little leagues have signs on the ballfield fences, the signs must be a specific size and are removed after the season ends. Commissioner Banks commented the Wellington Sign would be permanent.
- Mr. Dunker commented there is a permanent sign in Waban Common. Ms. Wilkinson commented there is a permanent sign at Heartbreak Hill Park at Waban Hill Reservoir. Mr. Feldhusen commented there is a permanent sign on the Farlow Pond bridge.
- Mr. Chapman stated the only plaques he sees are on the memorial benches and is concerned about the use of permanent sign in parks and playgrounds creating sign clutter.
- Ms. Gavis is also concerned about sign clutter, longevity of the signs, materials used and wording but if the city wants to promote private/public relationships to off-set the city costs, the city must assume the donors want acknowledgement.
- Ms. Connolly commented Newton celebrates diversity. One person/group may donate a small amount for a project and recognizing only the groups/organizations that donate large sums of money does not seem like the right thing to do. Ms. Connolly is also concerned about the cluttering of the park with signs.
- Ms. Wilkinson commented she was on the PTO Council and there was discussion about monetizing the pieces of property and about equity and it was decided that that should not be done. Is there going to be a sign next to that piece of playground equipment saying donated it. So, I think maybe because if this was sold to the donors, as you're going to have your name listed. Maybe we say, okay, that gets grandfathered in with very strict regulations and then we
- Commissioner Banks commented there are many "Friends" groups that donate time, service, labor to projects, it is not always just money donated.
- Ms. Butts stated she read Ms. Dorfman's letter and suggested maybe the donors be listed on a have a policy going forward. website with a general statement. Ms. Butts is also concerned about sign clutter.
- Mr. Magni commented two major projects violated the rules of the Olmstead act, allowing private donations to receive special attention; Millenium Park at City Hall and Newton Centre Playground. The Mayor at the time appealed directly to the P & R Commission that it was a nice way to support the family. A Commission member resigned at that meeting.
- Mr. Dunker stated if large donations is the only way to get a project done, the ends may justify the means. Mr. Johnson is in favor of sponsorship.

- Ms. Butts asked if there is a city rule regarding sponsorship. Commissioner Banks it is about what the City Council will allow.
- Ms. Connolly stated over time residents may have different thoughts on sponsors posted in parks.
- Mr. Feldhusen suggested a standard sign for all parks with names, rules & regulations. Commissioner Banks is interested in more consistency, like what the Conservation division has done.
- Commissioner Banks started she did not mean for this one sign be caught up in this discussion, but the request has triggered the discussion on a policy for signs. The PRC staff has had to remove all types of signs/postings from city property because it is not allowed.
- Mr. Dunker stated it is the same issue with naming places after individuals. Mr. Magni started the P & R Commission and City Council have a moratorium on naming of places.
- Ms. Butts will reach out to other communities' policies regarding signs and sponsorship.
- Ms. Wilkinson suggested no signs and PRC staff post the information on social media.
- Ms. Gavris stated it is not the staff's responsibility it is the responsibility of the Friends group. Until the city makes an ordinance it is fair game.
- Mr. Feldhusen asked if the signs can be dealt with on a case-by-case basis. And asked if PRC is expecting a cascade of sign requests. Commissioner Banks replied yes, fundraising is a big component for playground projects.
- Ted Kuklinski, Friend of Wellington Park for over 25 years, stated Wellington Park is a special case, the group was upfront there might be a modest sign. If this sign is rejected it would be a disappointment in the community.
- Ms. Dorfman commented the sign was never mentioned in the literature or presentation provided to the neighbors.
- Mr. Feldhusen asked what the process will be to have this sign approved. Commissioner Banks will check with the City Law Department and have staff review proposed sign.

Commissioner's Report

- Commissioner Banks acknowledged Mary Fitzgerald, applicant for a position on the P & R Commission. After tonight's meeting there will be three openings:
 - Ward 1- Mr. Richardson resigned due to work conflicts
 - Ward 3- Tonight is Ms. Connolly's last meeting
 - Ward 7- Tonight is Ms. Gavris' last meeting
- Commissioner Banks thanked all for their service and wished them all the best of luck on their new adventures.
- Projects:
 - Auburndale Fountain – complete
 - Gath Pool opens June 24
 - Farlow Pond- in progress. New coating of paint and seal on the concrete
 - Cronin's Cove staircase in process
 - NN turf field staging has begun
 - Marty Sender Path is coming along, plantings and boardwalk renovation
 - Williams School – swing set installation
 - Burr Elementary School – stockpiling soil at Burr Elementary from the pool project for the two new multi-purpose field project.
 - Mr. Feldhusen asked if the fields will be irrigated, Commissioner Banks confirmed the fields will be irrigated.
 - Ms. Butts asked if the soil has been tested. Commissioner Banks stated there will be no digging, soil will be added to build up the field.
 - Spears Community Gardens- CPC approved funding
 - Albemarle field project begins in the fall

- Mr. Dunker asked if the Albemarle project and Burr project will be done at the same time. Commissioner Banks replied, the Burr project will be done over the summer.
 - Walker Park Off-Leash Proposal
 - There has been community input on the proposal it could be approved by the City Council this fall. Mr. Johnson asked if there will be a parking lot for the Off-leash area. Commissioner Banks replied there will be on street parking with two new crosswalks.
 - Farmer Market
 - Programs:
 - Crystal Lake is open today. A new water circulation system has been installed.
 - Camps begin and align with the school calendar. The department is onboarding over 300 seasonal staff
 - Farmer Market begins tomorrow
 - Tuesday- Cold Spring Park- 1:30-6pm
 - Saturday-NNHS- 9:30am-12pm
 - Commissioner Banks thanked Nancy Scammon for her work for the Farmer Markets.
 - July 4th fireworks
 - Ms. Butts asked if the fireworks would move after the turf field is installed. Commissioner Banks replied, the fireworks will be staying at Albemarle.
 - Sumer concert series at Newton Centre July 14- August 18
 - Staffing:
 - Lu Cao. Assistant Director Cultural Affairs has moved on, the position is being posted
 - Assistant Director of Special Needs is posted
 - Forestry – new administrative position is posted

3. Off-leash areas discussion

- Mr. Magni commented this is a discussion on the administration of the off-leash areas. Does the Commission want the group report directly to the Commission or keep the current set-up where Commissioner Banks reports to the Commission.
- Ms. Connolly asked what would be most beneficial to the PRC Department.
- Commissioner Banks reported the current group has been very helpful and very dedicated. There are meetings quarterly. PRC staff also attends the meetings. It works well having the group to discuss ideas and Commissioner Banks reporting to the Commission. Larger proposals/changes to the parks would be presented to the Commission.
- There are a lot of operational things done in the department that requires fees, such as camps, fields and programs. In Commissioner Banks time a fields sub-committee was set up and the sub-committee set the fees and the fees were presented to the Commission.
- Commissioner Banks will provide updates during the *Commissioner's Reports* agenda item
- Mr. Feldhusen commented according to the ordinance section Animals & Fowl, the designation of sites for off-leash area site selection criteria. Commissioner of Parks, Recreation and Culture together with the Director of Planning and Development establish site selection criteria for the identification of appropriate sites for consideration as dogs off leash areas on public land owned by the city and shall identify and list potential sites for consideration.
- Commissioner Banks stated the Law Department has looked at the ordinance, but the responsibility of the P & R Commission is the use of park land and any permanent changes to the park land. The Commissioner feels it is appropriate to present any changes to the P & R Commission.

- Ms. Butts asked if any of Edmands park is not Parks land. Edmands Park is parks land. Mr. Johnson asked for an update on the off-leash proposal at Edmands, many of his neighbors are contacting him for information. Commissioner Banks stated there is now a counter proposal to the off-leash proposal at Edmands Park. The off-leash proposal is for the trails to be used off-leash which Newton does not have this option yet. The proposal will be presented to the Commission.
- Mr. Magni opened the discussion to public comments
 - Maryan Amaral, Newton Corner
 - Appreciated the off-leash parks
 - The fenced in areas need an area for small dogs
 - Concerns:
 - The oversight of the off-leash program
 - Fees and how the money is used
 - Hunnewell the fence around the off leash had an opening where dogs can escape, Ms. Amaral asked New Balance to address the issue and they have repaired the opening
 - What the advisory group is doing to include the public
- Mr. Magni asked the difference between a sub-committee of the Commission and an advisory group. Commissioner Banks explained a sub-committee of the Commission would require members of the Commission be part of the sub-committee and the committee would be subject to follow the Open Meeting Laws. The advisory group would remain as it is now, the advisory group does not require a commission member participate or be subject to Open Meeting Laws, the advisory group would report to the PRC Commissioner, the PRC Commissioner would report to the P & R Commission.
- Mr. Dunker commented the filed fee advisory group advised the department and the Commissioner brought the recommendations to the Commission.
- Mr. Feldhusen asked what is most helpful. Commissioner Banks commented nothing is broken the way the group is running now. The working group has done a great job when developing the current area now established.
- Ms. Wilkinson asked if there is a working group for camp fees. Mr. Dunker stated it is not the P & R Commissions responsibility to micromanage the departments operations.
- All Commission members in attendance agreed to keep the management of the off-leash areas as it is currently, with the advisory group reporting to the Commissioner who will report directly to the P & R Commission.

4. Committee Reports

- Community Preservation Committee -*B. Dunker*
 - \$650K given to Davis School – Family Access through historical preservation
 - The Baptist Church in Newton Centre is returning to the CPC and requesting \$1.6 million through historic preservation.
- Urban Tree Commission – *B. Wilkinson*
 - Next meeting is scheduled June 21
- Farm Commission – *B. Wilkinson*
 - Next meeting is August 1
 - Farm Share program is underway
- Arts & Culture – *G. Gavris*
 - Murals have been installed throughout the city
 - Newton Pride is putting together a photo album. You will see QR codes around the city, You can scan the code and upload your pictures

5. New Business

*Open Meeting Adjourned 08:47 pm
Respectfully Submitted,
Robin McLaughlin, Commission Secretary*