

# Newton Parks & Recreation Commission

## Meeting Minutes

7:00 p.m. – Monday, October 21, 2024

**Attending:** Arthur Magni, Chair, Byron Dunker, Vice-Chair, Commissioner Banks, Beth Wilkinson, Randy Johnson, Sheila Butts, Mary Fitzgerald, John Rice, Ted Chapman, Jack Neville, Caitlin Cusick

Meeting began: 6:30pm

### 1. Meeting Minutes – Sept 2024 – Approved 8-0

### 2. Walker Park -Public Hearing- Establishing an off-leash area

- Commissioner Banks commented the off-leash area has been a part of the Washington Street Pilot Project. There have been several public meetings, abutters of the area were notified to have the chance to bring any comments to the P & R Commission. Ahron Lerman, Assistant Director of Parks & Open Space presented a drawing of the proposed off-leash area (see attached)
  - Fenced area
  - Accessible
  - Two double gates
  - One large area
  - Existing trees will remain on site
  - No water facilities will be added
- Commissioner Banks is requesting input from the Commission regarding the project timeline, the off-leash area project could begin before the Washington Street Pilot Project, or the project could be tied in with the Washington Street Pilot Project timeline.
- Mr. Dunker commented his concern is people and dogs crossing Washington Street
- Mr. Lerman stated there will be marked parking and a shared use on the park side of the road, as well as a crosswalk for people crossing the road. Commissioner Banks commented Washington Street will be changed from 4 lanes to 2 lanes with other visuals, such as planters.
- Mr. Johnson asked what type of surfacing will be in the off-leash area. Mr. Lerman stated the grass will stay as the surfacing. Mr. Neville asked if the grass would hold up. Commissioner Banks stated that grass has held up in other off-leash parks and should hold up here.
- Councilor Albright shared her support for the project to move forward.
- Marylee Belleville requested the off-leash medallion holders be notified and have a chance to comment on the project.

*Mr. Dunker made the motion to accept the proposal for the Walker Park off-leash area. Mr. Johnson seconded the motion. Motion passed 8-0.*

### **3. Summer Aquatics Recap- Sean Nickerson, Aquatics Manager**

- Mr. Nickerson presented an overview of the summer swim season with the new facility and larger staff of 75.
- Benefits of new facility:
  - Increased hours of operation
  - Added additional swim lessons
  - Improved accessibility
  - Swim team practice and open swim occurring at the same time
  - Expanded Senior aerobics
  - Larger, comfortable pool deck
  - New water fountains and outdoor showers
  - Added picnic area
  - New staff room with AC for cool down during breaks
  - Enhanced front desk allows for improved customer service
  - Automated system balances the pool chemistry
  - Loading door in basement makes loading supplies a lot easier
- 2024 was a hot summer, the facility was very busy:
  - 1,104 memberships
  - 385 combined memberships
  - 13,828 membership scans
  - 11,140-day pass transactions
  - 171 families participated in swim lessons
  - 330 financial aid scholarships
- Commissioner Banks thanked Mr. Nickerson and his team for a great summer
- Mr. Neville asked if the day pass fees stay within the department, Commissioner Banks replied yes.
- Mr. Chapman asked if the fees covered the pool budget, Commissioner Banks replied the fees covered the staff expense and supplies.

### **4. Commissioner's Report**

- The Mayor's CIP presentation is scheduled at 7:45pm tonight
- Farmer Market season is ending
- Harvest Fair- very well attended, the event supports Arts & Culture programs.
- Paddy's Road Race had over 3K participants, this event supports the Athletes Unlimited Program and was a huge success
- Coming up: Halloween Window Painting

### **5. Committee Reports**

- Community Preservation Committee -B. Dunker
  - Council requested restrictions on money awarded to the Baptist Church in Newton Centre to protect the city's investment.
  - Newton Cinema received \$100K for planning and design
  - Jackson Homestead received \$1.6 Million to waterproof the basement
- Urban Tree Commission – B. Wilkinson
  - Fall planting has started. Along with the trees planted by the Tree conservancy, 500 trees will be planted.
- Farm Commission – B. Wilkinson

- CSA is closed for the season
- Commonwealth Golf Foundation – J. Neville
  - Good things have been happening:
    - Election of new officers
    - Golf Course Management RFP has been reviewed, updated and being prepared to go out to bid

#### **6. New Business**

- Mr. Chapman reported the Walker Center at Grove St and Hancock St is being developed into 11 housing units. There is green space included and this project. Mr. Chapman is concerned that housing is not an appropriate use of the space.
- Commissioner Banks commented the green space is not park land, Public Buildings and the Planning Department are working on this project. There is 10K square feet of green space that will go to the school when developed.

*Meeting Adjourned 7:48 pm*

*Respectfully Submitted,*

*Robin McLaughlin, Commission Secretary*

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