

Newton Parks & Recreation Commission

Meeting Minutes

War Memorial - City Hall

7:00 p.m. – Monday, January 28, 2019



Robert J. DeRubeis
Commissioner

Meeting began at 7:01 p.m.

Attending: Chairman Magni, Vice-Chairman Tucker, Commissioner DeRubeis, Peter Johnson, Andy Stern, Byron Dunker, Sam Figler, Jack Neville

1. Meeting Minutes – December 17, 2018 – Approved 7-0
2. NSHS- Athletic Field Lights – Public Hearing
 - Joel Stembridge, NSHS Principal, Patricia Rivero Gonzalez, NSHS Athletic Director and Doug McCarthy, Newton South High School Soccer coach presented the proposal to install lights on the Stadium Athletic Field.
 - The technology of the lights has changed drastically over the last 10 years. The lights illuminate the field only. There is no glare or spillage to the area surrounding the field or abutters.
 - Currently, temporary lights are used, the lights are run by a diesel generator that is noisy and smells of diesel fuel.
 - Having the lights will help in bringing the community together. Parents who work full time jobs will be able to attend events. The possibility of the High School day starting later, will push athletic practice later, which will put the athletes at a disadvantage due to less practice time.
 - The lights will also provide safety for students using the unlit field. And the use of lights will free up field space for other activities.
 - Guidelines for light use will be created that are responsible and respectful.
 - Chairman Magni opened the meeting up to public comment:
 - Ben Powdermaker, NSHS Senior and Lacrosse Captain, commented after attending evening games at Albemarle Field under the lights, his dream was to play a game under the lights. Mr. Powdermaker is in support of the proposal the lights will increase school spirit and build community.
 - Councilor John Rice is the Chairman of the Program and Services sub-committee on the City Council and he continually hears there is not enough field space in the city. Under the light games are great for building Newton community.
 - Steven McChesney, NSHS Coach, The NSHS Principal, Athletic Director and students work hard to give back to the community. Growing up in Oregon and visiting other communities around the

country most have games under the lights and these night light games were about community.

- Bella Ertel, NSHS Senior, Lacrosse and Soccer, Under the light's games will lift school spirit and allow for fundraisers which will impact the community.
- Isaac John Enelamah, NSHS Junior, supports the proposal. Had the opportunity to play a game under the lights in front of friends and family and it was an amazing experience and lifted school spirit. "Help Light The Way"
- Nikta Mozhgani, NSHS Track Team, the lights would increase safety for runners on track, currently the coach will use his car headlights to light up one corner of the track, but the rest of the track remains dark. On hot days the team could run at night when it is cooler, and the lights would help build community.
- David McCallum, Lacrosse, the lights would have a tremendous impact, additional clinics could be held, students are talking about connecting one on one.
- Justin Traxler, Newton Girls Soccer (NGS) President, has great pride in the City, there are over 1200 members in NGS. There are tremendous benefits of athletics. In support of the lights.
- Maxwell Plottel, Soccer player, all other teams have lights and he will never forget the roar of the crowd playing under the lights where his parents were able to see the team play. With the lights the games are more accessible to all.
- Raymond Atkins, Littlefield Rd, there are parking, trash and noise issues with this proposal. Must do what is best for the entire community. There is the issue of governance, what is the response from the Mayor? Why can't Newton Highlands be used as an alternative, the new renovations include lights.
- Ray Washington & Oliver Newman, beyond the school and the athletes, it's about the fans. The lighted games will increase school spirit and community. The environment and energy of games under the lights is electric.
- Reza Khorshidi, Girls Soccer, resident of Brandies Rd, Sound from speakers can be heard form blocks away which agitates mentally disabled brother. The proposal will also bring additional traffic and noise disturbance to the neighborhood.
- Susan Allen, abutter, in favor of sports, several years ago the fields were restored, and lights were rejected, again in 2013 a proposal by the booster club for lights was denied. Issues are more noise, music and parking. Utilize Newton Highlands Field. Letter left on table for Commission members, from Steve Farrell who could not attend meeting.
- Erland Lochen, abutter who lives closest to field, expects activity 9am-5pm, but lights will extend the activity until 10 at night. Newton Highlands is an alternate location.

- Don Fishman, 68 Littlefield Rd, this neighborhood is overburdened with a high school and two middle schools. Lights are not the issue it is the roar of the crowd that is the issue. Neighborhood was not contacted about proposal
- Heidi Cambino commented abutters have said “they did not sign up for these changes”, but when you move to a location, things will change, they do not stay the same.
- Chris Upchuck, Newton Girls Soccer, this is about the city not just a neighborhood and it is a safety issue due to darkness.
- Beth O’Neil, gymnastics, lacrosse, traveling to another location will be stressful, students are already dismissed early and would need to find a ride to an off-site location. Travelling would also reduce the time for homework, and other necessary activities.
- Mrs. Marvel, values educating body and mind, there must be balance. Maybe if the students do not get what they want, they do not win. Maybe they will have curiosity to learn.
- Josh, Winston Rd, has young children that go to bed early, light pollution is real, just look at the tennis court lighting. Temporary lighting is also improving this could remain the option. This could affect property values. Who will have control or access to the lights and how they are used? This does not just affect the direct abutters but a large radius of the neighborhood.
- Public comment portion of meeting ended.
- Mr. Stern asked about the restrictions. Principal Stembridge commented they would work with he neighbors. There are no weekday games past 8:00pm. The number of weekend games is up for discussion. Parking is only an issue on back to school night.
- Mr. Neville asked if the P & R Department would have input on hours. Commissioner DeRubeis replied yes, and the school would have precedent on field.
- Ms. Rivero Gonzalez stated football games are done by 9:00-9:15pm. A new sound system is being installed which should improve the noise issue. Trash is checked by the school which includes the surrounding neighborhood.
- Mr. Atkins asked to have his questions answered:
 - Is Newton Highlands an option? Commissioner DeRubeis is working with youth groups, there is not enough field space. Both high schools do use other fields, Weeks, Cold Spring Park and Upper Falls. Schools take precedent. More time at the High School opens alternative field space for other groups. The Highlands has been out of use for two years for construction and to allow the grass to take root. The field will be fully operational this spring.
 - Governance? Commissioner DeRubeis stated there was a verbal agreement from former Mayor Cohen, “no lights as long as I am Mayor”.

Mr. Tucker made the motion to approve the proposal, subject to the school and P & R Department working out agreeable guidelines. Mr. Dunker seconded the motion. Motion passed 7-0.

3. Auburndale Cove Solar Panel Project – Public Hearing

- At the December 2018 Commission meeting, Bill Ferguson presented a proposal for a project at Auburndale Cove to install parking canopies with solar panels on the roof. At the present rates, this would create a \$313,347.00 in savings, over 20 years.
- Jonathan Yeo, Chief Operating Officer reviewed the information previously presented and commented there have been changes since the last presentation. The plan is to minimize the number of trees removed.
- The Climate Action Plan deals with the crisis of climate change and the need for renewable power.
- In addition, electric vehicle charging stations will be added. The height of the parking canopies will be 9.5' to 14' high.
- Mr. Figler asked what percentage the cove represents. Mr. Yeo replied 7-10%. If the panel is removed on the side to save the trees the percentage would be around 4%.
- Mr. Tucker stated the difference with this location is the canopies are in the middle of a neighborhood where others are not. Mr. Yeo commented Brown Middle School, Memorial Spaulding Elementary School and NNHS are in neighborhoods. People get used to the canopies.
- Mr. Tucker asked what incentives are given to residents. Mr. Yeo stated the state gives incentives.
- Mr. Stern asked if there are any foreseeable technological changes. Mr. Yeo stated we are there now with the technological changes with partners Macquarie & Hesp Solar. Over 20 years of the contract there will be minimal changes.
- Mr. Neville asked if there were public hearings for the school properties. Mr. Yeo replied yes with the School Committee and it will go before the Council for approval.
- Mr. Stern asked if the big, red oak is protected would the project move forward. Mr. Yeo replied yes.
- Ann Berwick stated she called the Commission members as the Co-Director of Sustainability but is speaking to them as a grandmother now. She would like to explain to her grandson that people needed to decide tonight to approve this proposal due to the climate change issue.
- Mr. Figler commented it is not whether climate change and solar energy is good or bad, it's about if this is the right place or the right time for this proposal.
- Councilor Gentile, 99 Aspen Ave is asking the Commission to deny this proposal. Responding to Jack Neville question regarding the school properties, councilor Gentile state the abutters of Brown Middle School opposed the solar proposal. Some of the solar projects are complete but

is this site appropriate for parking canopies? Councilor Gentile stated he grew up at the Cove and the site has gone unchanged, it is the perfect blend of active and passive recreation. The parking lot is an extension of the open space. There are big projects all around the city, we need to preserve open space. Do not allow people to tell you Newton has not done anything for climate change, we are in phase III of sustainability projects, the street lights have been changed twice and the schools are more efficient. There are no objections to solar panels on roofs.

- Chairman Magni opened the meeting up to public comment:
 - Steve Karp, 78 West Pine St., not anti-solar but asks that the city be thoughtful and place the solar panels where it is appropriate.
 - Leah Schwartz, 78 West Pine St., concerned the area is 100% residential with no guarantee it will look like the rendition in the proposal. The parking lot is an extension of the park and will be tarnished by these structures. Ms. Schwartz is not anti-solar but is this the right decision currently? The old red oak tree cannot be replaced. Ezra Hausman, abutter and uses the park every day. Global warming is a crisis of epic proportion and wants clean energy with minimal impact, we need to produce energy and in support of this proposal.
 - Dan Ruben, user of the park and supports the proposal. If nothing changes by 2050, we are doomed. Loves trees but climate change is harmful to trees.
 - Peter Barra, 60 Endicott St, in favor of proposal, in five years the canopies will be part of normal life. Climate change is bad for the trees.
 - Karen Bray has lived in city for 30 years and is in favor of the proposal. Ms. Bray is an artist and loves beautiful things, parking lots are not beautiful. The canopies also provide shade and protection. Ms. Bray is proud the city is taking such bold steps.
 - Dara Brodsky, West Pine Street, supports clean energy, opposes proposal, this area is different from other sites. This is a nature area with no schools, private of municipal buildings and would block the view of the wide-open space. The benefits are minimal, ~300K over 20 years. Pursue other options such as private buildings, the park should be the last resort.
 - Brooke Lipsitt, founding member of Green Decade, we are in crisis and need to take every step to mitigate climate change. Understand the concern about the visual of the canopies, solar panels on roofs used to be a concern and now they are a selling point. This is not about the dollar savings it is about saving the world we live in and urges support for this proposal.
 - Sophia Lazarides, 79 West Pine St., agrees with Councilor Gentile. There are fruit trees on her property that cast a shadow on the parking lot. There is new technology coming out, you can go to the

website of Macquarie & Hesp Solar and watch the video of the new technology.

- Carey Alperstein, Climate change is scary, and the country needs to make changes, it is like a puzzle, need to understand the larger content to do the right thing.
- Jonathan Kantar uses the park and is in favor of the proposal to help with the climate change issue.
- Carolyn Kraft, 295 Dudley Rd, Loves all the parks. They are the gems of the city. Supports solar energy and has a geo thermal system at her house. Having solar car ports next to the neighbors says the city does not care about the neighbors or their quality of life. Went on line and looked at a bird's eye view of the city and did not see many Newton houses with solar panels on the roof.
- Julia Malakie, planting trees enhances the atmosphere. Watertown recently passed an ordinance that all business' must be 50% solar energy. Skeptical if Macquarie & Hesp Solar having good knowledge about tree coverage.
- Carol Sommers supports Phase III, but not the carports. The city will keep taking space. Newton has other choices to fix the puzzle.
- Mr. Johnson commented he is favor of renewable energy but going to the Cove is a shame to impose an eye sore on the abutters there must be other options.
- Mr. Stern proposes reducing parking lot and returning to open space that will reduce carbon footprint and advocates for the park. Wants to tell his grandchildren he kept park from being destroyed by well-intentioned projects.
- Mr. Tucker commented it is the Commission's obligation to preserve open space an serve all people who use the park.
- Mr. Neville agonized over this proposal, a permanent structure is not good, our responsibility is to protect the park.

Mr. Figler made the motion to reject the proposal. Mr. Tucker seconded the motion. Motion passed 7-0

4. Commissioner's Reports on Programs, Forestry and Maintenance

- Allison Crosbie, Open Space Coordinator has resigned her position. Carol Schein is back in a part-time roll as Open Space Coordinator.
- Camp Fair was successful again this year, registration opens on Wednesday.
- Opening Ice Skating at the Cove if safe skating criteria are met.
- Off-Leash Dog Park Design Proposal for Norumbega Park is going to be re-bid due to the large discrepancy between bid prices.
- Jason Roberts the Off-Leash Recreation Specialist is no longer with he city. Met with Ralph Torres, recently retired Animal Control Officer, he is interested in the position as Off-Leash Recreation Specialist, there are details to work out.

- Preliminary budget meetings have begun.
5. Committee Reports - *Postponed to February 25, 2019 meeting*
- Community Preservation Committee
 - Farm Commission – *Appoint a representative*
 - Commonwealth Golf Course
 - Off-Leash Area Working Group (OLAWG)
 - Crystal Lake Working Group (CLWG)
 - Athletic Fields Committee
 - NewCAL
 - Policy & Procedure Review
 - Field Naming
6. New Business
- Commission Elections- *Postponed to February 25, 2019 meeting*

Meeting Adjourned at 10:20 p.m.

Respectfully Submitted,
Robin McLaughlin
Parks & Recreation Commission Secretary