

Newton Parks & Recreation Commission

Meeting Minutes

Room 211 - City Hall

7:00 p.m. – Monday, September 16, 2019



Attending: Chairman Magni, Vice-Chairman Tucker, Commissioner DeRubeis, Patty Kerwin Derrick, Byron Dunker, Al Cecchinelli, Andy Stern, Melissa Sommer, Jack Neville, Sam Figler, Michael Clarke

1. NEWCAL Building List –Informational

Josh Morse, Public Buildings Commissioner

Jayne Colino, Director Senior Services

- All presentation documents are located:
<http://www.newtonma.gov/gov/parks/commission/agendas/default.asp>
- Commissioner DeRubeis reviewed the site selection process. The group began with 145 sites, reduced to 24 sites to a shortlist of 6 sites. Of the six sites, Albemarle would require no taking of greenspace.
- The pool uses a lot of water. The pool is 60 years old and is currently losing 18 thousand gallons per day. This proposal has the potential to include a new pool that would be utilized 12 months out of the year, currently it is used 4 months out of the year. In the winter the department moves the swim programs to the NNHS pool where there is limited available time.
- Director Colino reviewed the overall process and vision statement of the NEWCAL Working Group and Advisory Building Committee.
- Commissioner Morse discussed the details of the process. And explained a recent parking analysis had been done for 687 Watertown St. Commissioner Morse is working on creating additional parking at the Ed Center for the F.A. Day staff and will also work with Fessenden and the Chinese School who uses F.A. Day School for parking on Sundays.
- The attendees requested Director Morse skip the presentation. Most were aware of the process and support a new senior center but would like to comment on the location. Chairman Magni explained comments would be taken from the public, with a three-minute time limit. The comments were to be directed to the Commission.
- Commissioner Morse stated the purpose of the meeting tonight was to request permission to proceed with a feasibility study for the Albemarle location.
- Members from the Council of Aging were present and support the feasibility study.
- Abutters and users of Albemarle Playground shared the following concerns:
 - They are worried about kids on Albemarle Rd. There is usually parking on both sides of the road and on the lawn.
 - The brook overflows onto the road in the winter and the slope becomes iced.
 - Commissioner Morse stated a study of the storm water run-off is being done.
 - The north side of the pike is the heaviest populated with the worst traffic and feels the city dumps on West Newton
 - NewCAL is dividing the community, the seniors want a dedicated senior center and basketball courts and tennis courts are being taken away. Will seniors have priority for the gym? Where will the children go that usually play on the basketball and tennis courts. Commissioner Morse stated the gym can be divided, one side for the kids one side for the seniors. Commissioner DeRubeis stated during the feasibility study, the basketball and tennis court usage will be evaluated and if the courts need to be repurposed to another part of the area that would be done.
 - Can the building be a dedicated senior center only to reduce the footprint of the building? Commissioner Morse stated the pool is a community asset and reducing the footprint may remove the pool.

- The Needham Senior Center is used as a comparison, but Needham is in the center of town where there is other activity, at Albemarle there is no public transportation or activities/businesses.
- A resident asked where the money came from for the study. Commissioner Morse stated \$150K was approved by the Council.
- Will the pool be indoor or outdoor? Commissioner DeRubeis answered it will be both. The resident stated the city must keep an outdoor pool.
- Resident asked about underground parking, because it is crazy to think there is more parking at Albemarle.
- Resident who live adjacent to Albemarle agrees with a new Senior Center and Pool, but feels the wool is being pulled over his eyes, where will the tennis courts and basketball courts be located. Commissioner Morse commented during the feasibility study the use of the courts will be monitored.
- A resident asked what is feasible about dropping a three-story building on the field and jamming traffic into an area not meant for that much traffic. Commissioner Morse stated the area will be tested for the ebb & flow of all movement at different times and address the issues.
- It feels like the north side has all the new development dumped in their already congested neighborhoods.
- Resident asked if they want public consensus why the closed meetings.
- Commissioner Morse stated “working groups” are not subject to the Open Meeting Law. Resident asked why are they here, at the P & R Commission meeting, and what are the costs for the new building, pool and operation? Chairman Magni stated tonight’s meeting is an informational meeting. Commissioner Morse answered the building cost for a fully fitted building is 16.65 million, the pool cost is 9.2 million, operating costs are unknown.
- Resident asked the square footage of the gym. Commissioner Morse replied - 10k-14k square feet including the walking track above.
- Resident stated the extra parking at the Ed Center will not work and feels the working group is not considering what they are telling them. And will the Albemarle Community be part of the feasibility study. Commissioner Morse replied, yes notifications will be sent to the community via, letters, flyers, and emails. Right now, they do not have all the answers, the feasibility study will determine the issues to be addressed.
- Resident asked if the feasibility study is for the Albemarle location only or are other locations being considered. Commissioner Morse stated the feasibility study is for Albemarle only, each property deed is different and requires analysis of project specifics.
- Resident stated every option should be exhausted, taking a park is a no-no and the P & R Commission should take their responsibility seriously.
- Resident Alan Noguee is a member of the Friends of Cold Spring Park and has collected 6,700 signatures to protect greenspace. How does the Commission meet the burden of proof, from their own manual, for this project? The petitioners will bring litigation if you do not follow your own manual.
- Resident stated the P & R Commission are stewards of green space. Once green space is gone it is not coming back.
- Resident asked if the community does not rally around NEWCAL does that mean there will be no pool? Commissioner Morse stated the pool falls very low on the C.I.P list because it is not funded.
- A resident asked about the Crescent Street property. Commissioner Morse commented the property is an odd shape.
- Elizabeth Dugan, member of the Council on Aging Council supports continuing with the process.
- Resident stated early in the process there was to be no deforestation, but you want to take parks, put those deforestation locations back on the table. Commissioner Morse stated there were two locations, Nahanton Park and Webster Woods.

- Chairman Magni closed the public comments and opened the proposal up for Commission discussion.
- Mr. Stern requested the group take a consensus on moving forward and noted that approximately 40% of the proposed building would be for non-parks and recreation uses and asked the question if the Commission should approve any project that isn't totally for Parks & Recreation purposes.
- Mr. Clarke suggested a discussion first and then make a recommendation.
- Mr. Clarke made the following comments:
 1. Asked Mr. Morse if he has looked at the Open Space plan and recommended, he review the plan and possibly use CPC money to purchase privately owned property.
 2. How will the costs be covered, CIP? CPA? Will the 16.5 Million be bonded from operating funds? Mr. Stern commented this project does not meet CPA criteria.
- Mr. Morse agreed a friendly eminent domain needs to be evaluated.
- Mr. Neville commented the Commission came to a consensus regarding the Cabot park project and the park was destroyed. Mr. Stern replied we must learn from our mistakes. Mr. Stern suggested to make a motion to give direction to permit further consideration or prohibit development.
- Commissioner DeRubeis referred to Mr. Nogee's statement of legal action. The Commission has not followed the process and allowed comments at an informational meeting, not all parties were invited to comment, this could also bring legal action.
- Mr. Figler suggested the Commission offer guidance that we are not inclined to repurpose green space for this proposal, and we expect to see more than one option.
- Mr. Cecchinelli commented Lincoln Eliot School is not an option because it is school committee property. Aquinas is a good spot for NewCAL. Albemarle is not centrally located. Mr. Morse stated Lincoln Eliot School is a swing school.
- Mr. Clarke commented park land is not free and school land should be considered.
- Mr. Cecchinelli stated he does not want to lead the group on, not much would get him to vote to put this on park land.
- Commissioner Morse commented this proposal requires no loss of open space and includes replacement of pool, basketball courts and tennis courts, tonight we are only asking permission to further study the location.
- Mr. Stern suggested a straw vote, which is non-binding:

As presently proposed on an informational basis, the Commission is strongly disinclined that any park land be used for NEWCAL and suggests the feasibility study look at non parkland possibilities. Straw vote failed 5-3 (Figler and Neville not voting)

2. Rogers St. Conservation Restriction – Andrew Lee, Law Dept

- 20 Rogers Street is a small parcel of land bordering Crystal Lake and the Crystal Lake Bathhouse. The parcel was acquired by the City of Newton by eminent domain in 2007, with supplemental compensation awarded through a 2010 court decision, for a total of \$2,786,000 in Community Preservation Act Funds.
- The Conservation Restriction to be granted to the Newton Conservators by the City provides an envelope of land for trails, access roads and fencing on 20 Rogers Street, but prohibits construction of a building on the CPA-funded parcel.
- The Conservation Restriction has been approved by the Executive Office of Energy and Environmental Affairs and the Newton Conservators. After the CR has been approved by the Parks and Recreation Commission and signed by the Commissioner of Parks and Recreation, it will be presented to the Newton Conservators and the City Council for approval, respectively.

Mr. Figler made the motion to approve the Conservation Restriction as presented. Mr. Cecchinelli seconded the motion. Motion passed 8-0.

3. Hunnewell Playground Fence Proposal – Informational

- Commissioner DeRubeis explained there has been a flagrant disregard to the rules by professional dog walking companies and others. There has been discussion at the OLAWG meeting to extend the fence.
- MaryLee Belleville, OLAWG member stated her concern is that off-leash fees are to be used for the fence for the park users who do not pay the fees.
- Mr. Clarke asked if Parks & Recreation can issue warnings. Commissioner DeRubeis commented this is a Police enforcement issue.
- Commissioner DeRubeis stated there will be further discussion during the OLAWG meetings and will keep the Commission updated.

4. Meeting Minutes – Approved 8-0

5. Commissioner’s Reports on Programs, Forestry and Maintenance

- Sean Nickerson, Aquatics Director has done a great job at Gath Pool. The one issue is the salaries are subsidized by the summer camps. Mr. Stern asked what will happen if there is a year-round pool. The Commissioner replied it will have to be staffed with full-time lifeguards. Mr. Clarke asked if fees can be raised.
- Ms. Kerwin-Derrick asked the status of the NSHS lights project. Commissioner DeRubeis replied the project is in the early stages, the group continues to meet with neighbors.
- Commissioner DeRubeis updated the Commission on the illegal tree plantings around the City. The department is going to be cleaning up some of these sites.

6. Committee Reports – No Reports -hold for October 21st meeting

- Community Preservation Committee
- Farm Commission
- Commonwealth Golf Course
- Off-Leash Area Working Group (OLAWG)
- Crystal Lake Working Group (CLWG)
- Athletic Fields Committee
- NewCAL
- Policy & Procedure Review
 - Field Naming

7. New Business

- *No new business*

Meeting Adjourned at 10:30 p.m.

Respectfully Submitted,

Robin McLaughlin

Parks & Recreation Commission Secretary