

Newton Parks & Recreation Commission

Meeting Minutes

Zoom On-Line Meeting

7:00 p.m. – Monday, May 17, 2021



Attending: Chairman Magni, Vice-Chair Dunker, Commissioner Banks, Randy Johnson, Beth Wilkinson, Melissa Sommer, Ellen Gibson, Gloria Gavis, Jack Neville, Midge Connolly

Also Attending: Luis Perez Demorizi, Open Space Coordinator, Sheila Butts, Permit Manager, Carol Stapleton, Recreation Manager, Peter Mazzapica, Off-Leash Recreation Specialist

Meeting began 7:02pm

1. **Meeting Minutes -April-** Accepted 8-0
2. **Commissioner's Reports on Programs, Forestry and Maintenance**
 - Governor Baker has updated the Covid guidelines which are under review
 - Crystal Lake informational meeting last month was a productive meeting with great input from the public
 - Appeared before the City Council Committees for the Gath Pool Project and Dog related fees and fines all are moving forward. Dog license fee increase would support pet waste collection.
 - Budget will be presented to the City Council in June \$840K is being restored to the department budget.
 - Newton Serves was a success this year. There were 36 sites and over 400 volunteers. Thank-you Cultural Development Division, Grounds Maintenance, Newton Conservators and Newton Community Pride for making a great day.
 - July 4th Fireworks are cancelled. There will be other activities around the City. Mr. Johnson asked if the fireworks are cancelled will the pool be open. Commissioner Banks responded yes if there are no crowds from other activities and there is staffing.
3. **Hunnewell Off-Leash Area Expansion (Attachment A) – Public Hearing**
 - Mr. Demorizi reported many off-leash dogs are in the park that do not use the fenced off-leash area. The Off-Leash Working group (OLAWG) has met with neighbors and users of Hunnewell Park and the off-leash area. A plan was discussed and voted on to extend the off-leash area by installing a fence across the field to the woods line. There would be a pedestrian gate, transition gate and a vehicle gate for maintenance. The other half of the park, where the tot lot is located would be used for passive recreation.
 - Chairman Magni opened the meeting for comments/questions.
 - Councilor Leary commented this plan leaves no barrier between dogs and joggers and bikers. Matt M asked if the fence could be extended to main fence. Commissioner Banks reported the idea is being reviewed with maintenance and users to create a natural barrier. Dogs do run through this area – it is the only shaded area.
 - Andy Gluck asked the permit requirements in the new extended area. Commissioner Banks replied an off-leash medallion is required.
 - There were several requests not to remove the gate on Grassmere St.
 - Mike A. commented he was very impressed with the progress of the process. It will be good to have the park back to a mixed-use park. In favor of extending the fence line into the woods. Mr. Mazzapica has a difficult job as the Off-leash Recreation Specialist.
 - Matt M commented he is appreciative of this project. Should be use of incentives to draw dog owners to respect the rules.
 - Councilor Leary stated there has been tremendous thought and hard work from all on this project, it's not perfect and better enforcement would help. Chairman Magni stated enforcement has been an issue form the beginning.

- Commissioner Banks commented Mr. Mazzapica has been given access to the license/medallion database which has been helpful. Mr. Mazzapica commented 43 Brighton residents have purchased medallions this year.
- Margie P. commented she uses the park every day and is glad the issue is resolved this has been an uncomfortable neighborhood issue. The steps coming down from the gate are very steep- the gate slows users down and prevents people from falling down the steps.
- Mr. Gluck commented he was a user of the park and an abutter. He used to run and bike in the park. His concern is once the word gets out about the extended area it will be come overused. The area will need clear signage and occasional police presence.
- Chairman Magni opened comments from Commission members.
- Mr. Johnson asked if the gate can be left where it is. Commissioner Banks will review the plan and bring it back to OLAWG.
- Ms. Gavris recommends signage at all entrance locations.
- Mr. Dunker suggested redirecting parking from Grassmere St to New balance parking lot.
- Ms. Gibson commented it will be important to have data collection on usage.
- Ms. Wilkinson asked where is parking for off-leash area. Mr. Demorizi stated the New Balance parking area. Ms. Wilkinson commented it is concerning people must traverse the off-leash area to reach the other end of the park. Mr. Mazzapica stated those using the area are mostly dog owners with dogs.

Ms. Gibson made the motion to accept the proposal to install a fence as proposed north to south. Keep the existing gate at Grassmere St entrance. Improve signage, stabilize the entrance from New Balance and remove backstop and benches. Ms. Wilkinson seconded the motion. Motion passed 8-0.

4. St. Mary of Carmen Festival- Informational

- Chuck Proia, Festival Chairman presented a proposal for the 86th annual festival. The dates of the festival are July 14-July 18. Over the past couple of months Mr. Proia has been meeting regularly with the Executive Office and P, R & C Department. Plans were changing weekly. Now with the new guidelines the festival will be the same as it was in 2019.
- Mr. Dunker asked if the festival will be the same as is has been for the last 10 years. Mr. Proia responded yes. Mr. Dunker commented there is current work being done to improve fields, is there a contingency plan for damage to the field at Pellegrini Playground. Mr. Proia replied any damage has been miniscule and repaired by event organizers.
- Ms. Connolly commented outdoor numbers are increasing. Mr. Proia commented yes on May 29th everything is open. Ms. Connolly is excited for the festival.
- Ms. Gavris stated this festival is a fabulous, iconic Newton event.

Ms. Gavris made the motion to move the proposal to a public hearing. Ms. Connolly seconded the motion. Motion passed 8-0.

5. Field Fees- rental fees only

- Commissioner Banks presented the following fee increase to field rental fees. The fees have not been increased in over 20 years. The fees were voted on and approved by the Athletic Field Committee. If approved the fees will be in affect for the summer permit season.
 - Grass: Tier 3: \$30/hr., Tier 4: \$40/hr., Tier 5: \$50/hr.
 - Turf: Tier 3: \$100/hr., Tier 4, 5: \$150/hr.
- Sheila Butts, Permit Manager commented this is a 50% increase to fees. Ms. Butts has been in contact with he groups and has notified them of the possible increase. Most groups understand because our rates have not been increased in over 20 years and are low compared to other communities.

- Ms. Gavris asked are these new fees at the same level as surrounding communities. Ms. Butts replied yes.
- Ms. Wilkinson asked if this is a per group or per person fee. Ms. Butts replied this is a per group fee.
- Mr. Johnson asked the quality of the fields. Commissioner banks replied it depends on the field. The turf fields are in pretty good shape. Grass fields need improvement, increased fees will help.
- Mr. Dunker commented if you are worried about less use if the fees are raised, if fields are used less but the same amount of money is raised the fields will be improved.

Motion was made to accept the rental fee increase for tiers 3,4, & 5 as proposed. Motion was seconded. Motion passed 8-0.

6. Committee Reports

- Athletic Fields Committee
 - No report
- Community Preservation Committee -*B. Dunker*
 - Levingston Cove Project has been approved
- Urban Tree Commission – *B. Wilkinson*
 - No report
- Farm Commission – *B. Wilkinson*
 - May 6, they present the pre-proposal to CPC
- Commonwealth Golf Course – *J. Neville*
 - New roof on clubhouse
 - Had a meeting on maintenance building
 - Annual income was \$322K
- Commission Manual Update – *M. Feldhusen*
 - Chairman Magni provided the update for Mr. Feldhusen
 - Revisions to the manual are going well, thanks to several people with expertise and experience
 - We've updated the list of CPA-funded projects, thanks to Luis Perez-Demorizi and Carol Schein.
 - We now have an updated Organizational Chart
 - We've updated/simplified the Commemoration Policy to reflect current opportunities for citizens to name a bench or a tree - thanks to Luis and Marc Welch.
 - In the same way that the Commission interacts with Forestry and speaks to the Urban Tree Commission, we want to add Culture and the Cultural Council Board. So, I will be reaching out to Paula and Gloria to discuss the details on incorporating these entities into the manual.
 - We are researching ways to share ongoing manual edits with the commission - including the ability to compare current and proposed language.
- Off-Leash Area Working Group (OLAWG) – *Commissioner*
 - No report
- Arts & Culture – *G. Gavris*
 - Installing public art in Newtonville and the Highlands, more to come
 - It is Newton Community Prides annual appeal

7. New Business

- No New Business

Meeting Adjourned at 9:14pm
 Respectfully submitted by
 Robin McLaughlin
 Commission Secretary

Attachment A



HUNNEWELL OFF LEASH AREA EXPANSION LAYOUT

