

Newton Parks & Recreation Commission

Meeting Minutes

Zoom On-Line Meeting

7:00 p.m. – Monday, February 28, 2022

NOT APPROVED BY COMMISSION

Attending: Chairman Magni, Byron Dunker, Commissioner Banks, Randy Johnson, Beth Wilkinson, Gloria Gavis, Jack Neville, John Rice, Mark Feldhusen

Meeting began 7:02pm

1. Meeting Minutes – February 28, 2022

2. Nonantum Village Day- June 5, 2022 -Public Hearing

- Lois Margaret Dominique & Terry Sauro representing The Nonantum Neighborhood Association presented the proposal for the 10th Annual Village Day, in Colletti-Magni Park on June 5th, 2022. The plan is to have the same type of activities as in the past 9 years, except there will be no bounce house. Schedule:
 - 11:30am Awards & Scholarship announcements
 - 12:00pm -3:00pm Live band and dance recital on Watertown St.
- Chairman Magni stated abutters on Bridge Street submitted a letter regarding the noise during the event. Chairman Magni asked if the speakers can be placed away from the houses and closer to Watertown St. Ms. Domonique replied that is the location the speakers are usually set up.
- Neighbors Patrick and Kathleen Slattery of Bridge Street were in attendance and commented, the noise from the event is too loud, they must leave their house, this is not a place for a big event, it is a residential neighborhood. Chairman Magni commented he could hear the passion in the Slattery's statement. This has been a great event in the past and requested the event organizers find a middle ground. Ms. Dominique apologized and sympathized with the neighbors; the intention was not to upset the neighbors but for everyone to gather for a good time. The music can be turned down. Mr. Rice offered to assist in relocating the band further down the street.

Ms. Gavis made the motion to approve the proposal as submitted. Mr. Dunker seconded the motion. Motion passed 8-0.

3. Community Park Structure -Cabot – Mass Art Collaboration

- Paul Hajian/ Head of Graduate Program in Architecture at the Mass College of Art introduced a proposal for a Community Park Structure at Cabot Park. The Community Build Studio is a design/build project for a summer collaboration where master's level students participate and lead meetings with members of the community, interact with each of the city departments, and present the developed designs for the project. The first month, June, is an intense design process and then the construction part of the project commences—all to be completed by mid-August. Mr. Hajian has met with the Mayor and PRC Department and existing funding tied to Cabot Park is available. The location of the project is an under-utilized area behind the field house. If the Commission is ok with moving forward with this project, the group would return with a more detailed proposal.

- Chairman Magni asked if for some reason the project is not approved for Cabot Park, could the project be moved to a different location. Commissioner Banks replied yes.
- Ms. Gavis commented she loves the idea. The funding should include on-going maintenance and the option to have electricity.
- Ms. Wilkinson loves the partnership with the students but is concerned that open green space is being called under-utilized. Maybe the project could be moved to the edge of the park, so the open green space is not lost. Will this be an interactive process with the students? Mr. Hajian replied yes, the students will address concerns and evaluate multiple areas.
- Commissioner Banks stated PRC staff will be involved with the project.
- Mr. Neville asked about the location and dimensions of the project and stated Cabot Park field took a beating with the expansion of the school and does not want that to happen again.
- Mr. Johnson asked if the stage would have electricity is their concern with amplified sound, this park is very close to neighbors, and would there be a permit process to use the facility? Commissioner Banks commented the electricity could be locked and, in the beginning, it may be used for department programming and if we decide to open to private groups, it would be permitted.
- Mr. Rice commented he manages the band stand at the Hyde Community Center, and it is interesting to see families doing performances on the stage, it has tied the community together.
- Chairman Magni commented all park stakeholders will be involved. Mr. Hajian confirmed the students will organize engagement activities.

4. Murphy Field Lights- Public Hearing Continuation

- Doug Feldman & Rick Dinjian from NLL and Mike Berry, Musco Lighting
- NLL has 600 families involved in their program. Lights on Murphy field spring, summer, and fall. The lights would increase fall usage. Newton Little League is requesting approval on the project to begin fundraising.
 - The benefits to add lighting:
 - Increased hours of play
 - Upgrade to current lighting
 - Low level of light spillage
- Chairman Magni commented the Commission received communications regarding the proposal:
 1. There are other lit fields in the city, is lighting Murphy field necessary? Mr. Feldman commented Lyons Field is the lighted field used by NLL. Lyons field has flooding issues. The field is level with the Charles River. NLL has met with the city to discuss fixing the issue. The repair would be very costly. Mr. Dinjian commented there was a minor repair completed and last year was the first year NLL had a full season at Lyons field in the last five years.
 2. What are the parameters of how long the lights will be left on? Mr. Feldman commented NLL would work with the PRC Department. The latest game would begin at 7:30pm and would end at 9:00pm. Mr. Dunker commented the lights at Newton Highlands turn off at 9:30pm.
- Ms. Gavis stated she is inclined to support this project in relationship to the master plan.
- Mr. Perez Demorizi stated a survey has been sent to the community for input on the Albemarle Park Master Plan. The bid for the master plan would be put out in phase 1, and Murphy field lights would be included in phase 1.
- Commissioner Banks commented there should be preliminary designs for the master plan in about a month. The department has been working with the athletic groups, there is currently a field shortage for athletic use, the goal is to create multi-purpose fields which could eliminate baseball diamonds to create multi-purpose fields. If this proposal is approved the designer would be notified to incorporate this proposal into the master plan.

- Margaret Albright, resident has lived in the area for 30 years. There is currently a lot of different projects scheduled for Albemarle, traffic solutions, bike lanes, Gath Pool, master plan and more. Ms. Albright is requesting a pause on any new proposals for Albemarle including the Murphy Field lighting project and address the other issues.
- Robert Krauss, resident commented there is already a lot of lighting in this area at Fessenden and Albemarle. The soil needs to be tested, Benzine has been found on the property. Is Murphy Field only used by boys, girls should have equal access. Mr. Dunker commented girls' softball has a lit field.
- Mary Fitzgerald, abutter, this is not about the lights but what fits with the culture and what the community wants. There should be a holistic approach. NLL focuses on a small group of the community.
- Mark Weinberg, resident, lives a 3-minute walk from Albemarle and is on the field quite frequently and is excited to add lights to Murphy Field.
- Matthew Freeman, abutter, family uses the field. Albemarle is vibrant and active; he feels safe at Albemarle and is supportive of this proposal.
- Rob Moruzzi, NLL coach, supportive of this proposal.
- Chairman Magni closed public comments.
- Ms Gavris stated approval for this proposal, is to be approved with the master plan. The risk is on NLL in the case the master plan does not include this proposal.
- Chairman Magni received a statement from Commission member Midge Connolly and asked for the statement to be read:
 - "I ask that we continue to organize site visits and create and take other opportunities for the various community constituents and stakeholders including abutters to be invited and weigh in on the Albemarle Complex changes. I also ask that we slow down these conversations until we have a full comprehensive site plan so that we can have more informed discussions and ability to make educated decisions on the behalf of our community."
- Ms. Wilkinson commented she likes the preliminary approval. The bigger concern is in creating multipurpose fields, Ms Wilkinson prefers using existing athletic fields to create multipurpose fields and keep the open space.

Ms. Gavris made the motion for preliminary approval of lighting at Murphy Field subject to approval within the Albemarle Park Master Plan. Mr. Dunker seconded the motion. Motion passed 7-1.

5. Albemarle Bike Lane & Traffic Calming – Nicole Freedman, Director of Transportation Planning

- Ms. Freedman presented the proposal. There have been several meetings with departments and stakeholders. There are safety issues when buses are picking up and dropping off the kids, cars swerve around the buses. There is not enough parking, the plan will also assist in reducing speed at the different intersections and create a bike lane. Some of the ideas include:
 - Change the angle of parking, 60 degrees to a 45-degree angle.
 - Parking will be head out parking
 - 14 spaces will be lost, but Fessenden has offered an area which will add 16 spaces
 - Add removable rubber speed bumps
 - Tighten up intersections to slow traffic
 - Add a bike cross and a pedestrian island in the middle of the intersection
 - This is not a long-term plan; this addresses the immediate safety concerns.
- Ms. Gavris asked if head out parking has been used anywhere else. Ms. Freedman replied yes, on Homer St. and many loved it, there will be a need for some educating the public. Ms. Gavris asked why the lane was put next to Cheesecake Brook and why not use jersey barriers, Ms.

Freedman replied to get out of the way of the chaos on the other side of the road and there is no space for jersey barriers.

- Ms. Wilkinson commented this is an impressive plan and asked who owns the property near Fessenden, Ms. Freedman replied both the City and Fessenden.
- Mr. Dunker commented it may be difficult educating all users of the park, a lot of users come from outside of Newton.

6. Gath Pool Design Review

- Luis Perez Demorizi, Director of Parks & Open Space, presented the Gath Pool Presentation.
- Commissioner Banks commented the big design element is either one or two pools. The connected pool creates a more accessible pool. If there is no connector it allows for improved traffic flow on the deck, which is key to swim team events. A bridge over the connector could be investigated to allow for convenient traffic flow.
- Mr. Perez Demorizi stated there have been several meetings with focus groups. Features discussed were pool orientation, additional seating, and the spray deck.
- Chairman Magni asked about a year-round pool. Commissioner Banks commented PRC is applying for CPA funds from the CPC for this project. CPA funds may only be used for outdoor facilities. Included in the design is the structural support for a bubble to be installed in the future.
- Mr. Dunker asked if the bath house would have to be configured differently for a year-round facility. Commissioner Banks replied that future work would be required to make the bath house a year-round facility. Tom Scarlata, Project Designer, also added that the pool deck footprint will remain a rectangle to accommodate a bubble in the future.
- Mr. Dunker asked if the field house will be eliminated. Mr. Perez Demorizi responded the field house is not part of the pool project but will be reviewed as part of the fields/ park master plan.
- Mr. Johnson commented the challenge is the public wants a year-round option, there are other funds and loans available to offset costs. Commissioner Banks stated that other options are being explored within the city at different locations for expanded indoor swim opportunity. An ongoing operating budget would be around one million dollars per year, it is challenging but we are keeping the options open. Mr. Johnson stated pool demand is high and revenue could be generated.
- Mr. Feldhusen stated there are traffic issues now if a year-round pool is open it would create additional traffic. Albemarle may not be the best location for a year-round pool.
- Mr. Perez Demorizi commented if a year-round pool was the choice, we may get this swim season in but may not get next season, and the pool could be off-line for several years building a facility.

7. Commissioner's Report

- Commissioner Banks commented we have been busy with all the projects that have been discussed.
- It is the beginning of summer camp/program season.

8. Committee Reports

- Community Preservation Committee
 - Farm is requesting funding for repairs
- Urban Tree Commission
 - City street plan is ongoing
 - Public Tree ordinance change going before the City Council
- Farm Commission
 - Continued installation of the solar panels

- Working on the business plan
- Re-appointment- Chairman Magni commented Ms. Wilkinson is due for re-appointment to the Farm Commission. Ms. Wilkinson accepted the re-appointment. All in attendance agreed Ms. Wilkinson would continue to be the Commission representative for the Farm Commission
- Commonwealth Golf Course
 - Management contract awarded to Sterling Golf Management
- Commission Manual Update
 - Final draft is ready. The draft will be sent to members for review before the March meeting.
- Off-Leash Area Working Group (OLAWG)
 - Held the first meeting this year and created a meeting schedule
 - Focusing on assessment of the current off-leash areas
 - Receiving positive feedback on the Hunnewell project completed last fall
- Arts & Culture
 - No report

9. New Business

- Commissioner Banks introduced Ted Chapman. Mr. Chapman is observing the meeting tonight, he is interested in applying to be a Commission member.

Meeting Adjourned at 10:05 pm
Respectfully submitted by
Robin McLaughlin
Commission Secretary