

Newton Parks & Recreation Commission

Meeting Minutes

Zoom On-Line Meeting

7:00 p.m. – Monday, October 17, 2022

Attending: Chairman Magni, Vice-Chairman Byron Dunker, Commissioner Nicole Banks, Jack Neville, Beth Wilkinson, Midge Connolly, Ted Chapman, Gloria Gavris, John Rice, Mark Feldhusen, Randy Johnson, John Rice

Meeting began 7pm

1. **Meeting Minutes** – September 19, 2022, approved as amended

2. **McGrath Field Project**– Public Hearing

- Luis Perez Demorizi, Director of Open Space introduced, Mike Dodson from CDM Smith who is one of The City’s on-call consultant teams and Greg Mellett, Assistant Director of Parks & Open Space.
- Significant community by in has been received by The Department for this project.
- Funding has been secured from CPC followed by community meetings and updates and today we are questioning the Parks & Recreation Commission to vote on the vision which includes removal of 2 ball fields and incorporating a request and funding allocation from The Commission on Disabilities for a perimeter pathway along with a few site furnishings. The Department is also working through some details with the Conservation Commission as well as Marc Welch, Tree Warden, and others as we continue to move the project forward.
- As you know, McGrath is a beautiful field, great grass turf however it has quite a bit of conflict with spring sports with softball and lacrosse being the primary sports. The present softball fields have very little use, so this project is looking to increase permanent lacrosse and soccer field use here as the high school uses the park as part of their soccer program in the fall. Another goal is to minimize disturbance to the field and mature trees, remove the underutilized backstops and infields, expand irrigation, and as noted improve accessibility and install a perimeter path, properly locate the previously approved lacrosse practice wall, add shade trees, and provide additional seating along the pathway as well.
- Mike Dodson presented a slide of the existing conditions analysis and the conceptual plan pointing out that there are also tennis and pickleball courts and a dog park on the site. Mike also presented a Bird’s eye Drone Imagery slide which shows how well this site in integrated into the community the Park is. You can clearly see some wear spots, but the turf is in great shape. Mike also produced photographs of present conditions noting some invasive species such as Japanese Know Weed which is difficult to get rid of but that would be part of the construction of the fields.
- Mike also produced a photo of the brook, which is exposed in the section right behind the field so as part of the overall analysis, a full site analysis with topography, resource areas, noise, sun angle, etc. is done. A bit of noise from Washington Street and some of the fencing is in poor condition around the tennis courts on the north portion of the site which will be addressed. Goal is to maximize the multi-purpose use fields since the underutilized softball fields will be removed thus providing additional multi-sport activities.
- The Conceptual Site Plan points out the proposed lacrosse wall location which was previously approved in 2019. The wall is prefabricated and locally sourced so it should have less impact on the site itself as it would not need a lot of excavation. Along the pathway, some locations where benches could be installed are shown and irrigation will be expanded to the 2 areas where there were softball infield locations, and the irrigation system will be upgraded to 2022 standards which is more efficient and less costly over time.

- Commissioner Banks mentioned that the hearing was joined by City Councilors Wright, Malakie and Kelly as well as representatives from youth lacrosse were also present.
- Chairman Magni asked for comments from any of the Commission Members. Commissioner Dunker asked if there was a well and on site. Luis confirmed that there was a well on site up near the existing dog park area. Commissioner Feldhusen noted that the plans did not show a water bubbler on site. Luis responded that he would talk a look at that item and to incorporate some bike racks on the site as well. Mr. Feldhusen noted that there was a bubbler at Wellington that accommodated water bottles as well as does and humans and is used heavily and he suggests that we investigate that. He also noted that he was on site at McGrath and noted that a lot of the fences are in tough shape especially fences that are on the abutters edge and it is quite rocky and asked if there has been any discussion to fix up the fences along the back, many of which are in the woods. Luis responded that there were discussions with our maintenance division about some of the fences and they have concerns about replacing fences that are under the woods just because they tend to get damaged and pose a lot of maintenance issues. Luis responded that we could look at ways to improve these areas, but we must be mindful of the budget as well. Mr. Feldhusen was glad to hear that we are talking about the invasive species as there is a lot of invasives, and it would be great if we can deter if not eradicate as much as possible. Mr. Feldhusen also noted that we have an opportunity to introduce plant native plants to the area and would be happy to talk offline about this subject.
- John Rice had a question for Commissioner Banks on the process for this project. Tonight, the Parks & Recreation Commission would be voting on the conceptual design of McGrath and noted that once a site plan is approved because this area involves Cheesecake Brooke, the plan would need to go Infront of The Conservation Commission for their approval as well as a funding source request from CPC Committee for their approval and both City Council's Programs & Services Committee and Finance Committee. Mr. Rice's point out to the residents who may be watching this webinar that this evening's vote is only one step in the process for final approval both in funding and Conservation Commission approval. Commissioner Banks confirmed the process as outlined by Mr. Rice and noted that we are already working with Jennifer Steel on any overview and permitting would go through her office and the other Department that we would be working closely with is The Commission on Disabilities because we are adding accessible pathways and that we have a grant for this purpose. Any type of permitting necessary from Marc Welch, Tree Commissioner that is necessary and even though we are not removing any trees but with the invasives species if there were any trees involved that would get reviewed also. It is our intention to request funding from CPA Funds which would eventually make its way to the City Council for their approval and authorization for this project. This project is part of our larger scaled Athletic Improvement work that we have been putting together.
- Commissioner Chapman noted that there was mention of some drainage problems and the letter that was circulated there was a concern about flooding from Cheesecake Brook and is this issue identified in any of the conceptual site plans are and what if any thoughts on how to address these concerns? Luis responded that the site doesn't have drainage issues as it is in really good shape as it drains well, well irrigated and does not hold water. We have heard that toward the back does suffer from some occasional flooding and at this point we have not addressed that piece just because our focus is on the fields and grass and the pathways so any improvements to Cheesecake Brook we have not accounted for in this plan.
- Commissioner Johnson asked if the lacrosse practice wall angle as shown is the angle that the wall if going to be installed and are you throwing from the left side or the right side of the wall? Luis responded that yes, that is the angle so that it is perpendicular to the pathway so that if someone needed to use the wall, they can get to it that was in a wheelchair, so you would use both sides of the wall. Mr. Johnson's question is if there is going to be any netting put around the wall for an errant wall but that would not be feasible if it is on both sides. Luis responded that he recalls meeting minutes from the previous Commission approval a lot of this was discussed and possibly placing the wall closer to Washington Street and there was concern about

too much netting and errant balls entering the parking lot, so this location and orientation seemed to be ideal at that point.

- Commissioner Wilkinson asked that if the ConCom requests a mitigation planning along Cheesecake Brook, does the plan allow for that to happen? Luis responded that we are hoping because Cheesecake Brook while it is on park property it's jurisdiction because it is a river front area and then DPW essentially owns the brook we are hoping that if there are any repairs or improvements to the brook, that DPW would step in and assist in that endeavor.
- Mr. Feldhusen also asked for a clarification of the dimensions of the lacrosse practice wall. Luis responded that the Commission had voted in 2019 for a 40ft wall and these walls are typically 12ft high, but Mike Dodson did reach out to the prefab manufacturer, and they recommended that we could go with a 30ft, so we are able to look at 30ft instead of 40ft, which is also more cost effective.
- Chairman Magni reminded the attendees that there was a 3-minute time limit on comments and a reminder that the practice lacrosse wall has already been approved by the Commission in 2019 and with that he opened the floor for comments.
- Ron Oldham spoke about the unsightly condition of the storage container which is in very bad repair and attracts a lot of litter and that previously he had worked with then Commissioner DeRubeis on this item and the size of the practice wall, and the rules for the use of the lacrosse wall and wants to make sure the neighborhood is consulted. Commissioner Banks noted that the Department is happy to work with the neighbors and keep everyone updated and that the Department is in close communication with the Lacrosse group who has storage needs. Ron asked that all these points be taken into consideration as you talk about the conceptual plan.
- Roli Kumar-Choudhu one of the things that is hard for the abutters to understand as there is not a detailed drawing of where things are and what the dimensions of the fields are as noted that in previous drawings there were benches, bleachers and fencing issues as there was some mention of moving the fencing by the brook itself and it did not seem reasonable to add benches or bleachers. She inquired if the bleachers are not part of this plan or will the fence be moved at all. Chairman Magni reminded the group that tonight is for public comment and that Commissioner Banks will follow up with emails and our info is in the chat component of this program are on our website and do list of the park dimensions and that if you send us an email, we would be happy to get back to you with any detailed questions you may have.
- Barbara Lischinsky is a member of the Commission on Disabilities and on behalf of the Commission would like to see the pathway done and more benches added in hopes of making this and all parks throughout the city accessible especially for those who are differently abled to just walk around the pathway and enjoy the area.
- Mark Schreiber has seen a lot of changes in the area and had a question on fencing and if in fact there is not going to be any expansion of the fencing and taking of property that should be noted on the plans and if there are any issues that involve the Conservation Commission should be noted on the conceptual plan. He also noted that he felt that the lacrosse wall is too close to the pathway and asks that consideration be given in the planning of this wall location.
- Another resident notes that he lives near the lacrosse wall and that the abutters still view this as an open issue along with fencing, graffiti, noise, and trash issues.
- Sam Figler who is a member of the Lacrosse Board of Directors and a former Parks & Recreation Commissioner noted that on behalf of newton youth they are very excited that this project is finally coming to fruition as it will go a long way in helping alleviate the chronic shortage that we have of multi-purpose field space in the city.
- Sandra Lingley is also on the Commission on Disabilities and wanted to thank Barbara Lischinsky who brought the pathway forward for this Park in addition to working on accessible pathways in all parks and to Luis who has done a great job with this pathway.
- Councilor Malakie asked for a clarification of the notation that no trees would be taken down and Chairman Magni requested that Commissioner Banks speak to specific questions on this subject after the meeting with Councilor Malakie.

- Kathleen Hecht commented that the brook is a fragile body, and it changes by climate every year and that there will be no regrading necessary and that no trees removed is commendable. She is hoping that more than 6 trees near Washington Street will be planted to provide shade.
- Larry Casillo who is the President of Newton Youth Lacrosse commented that this project would be so helpful and that they League will look at placement of the wall and work with the Commission on location and thanked the Department and Commission for all the work on this project.
- Luis is taking over the meeting for Commissioner Banks who has left to attend the Mayor Fullers announcements in the Chambers.
- Chairman Magni has closed the public comment portion of the meeting and Mr. Dunker asked for clarification on the vote on this plan as presented which does not show a storage container on site. Luis confirmed that that is correct. Midge Connolly spoke about the need for storage on the site and not having anyplace to put equipment is problematic. Mr. Dunker noted that there are other types of containers like Reeds Ferry Sheds which is movable and may not require Commission approval. Luis confirmed that any storage units on site would be placed closer to Washington Street.
- Chairman Magni called for a vote on this project.

A motion was offered to accept the conceptual plan as shown for McGrath Park by Mr. Dunker and seconded by Mr. Feldhusen. The vote was unanimous.

3. Commissioner's Report

- Update on Newton South Brandies Road lights are complete and working on tree buffer plantings which have been reviewed with the abutters.
- The Newton North lighting project is a little behind and work and bid will be posted soon and is anticipated to commence in the spring.
- Artificial turf replacement at both high schools and community meetings on both projects and working with Conservation Commission as there is one wetlands area near Newton South Stadium field.
- Our Tennis Program did have some challenges with the contractor, and we are looking to bid that out very soon for next year.
- Our tennis and basketball courts projects we did some patch work at Stearns and resurfaced Lower Falls court and patched and resurfaced the basketball court at Franklin School. We also have several courts we have lined up for work in the spring when the weather is better.
- At Newton Centre Playground we are moving forward with the resurfacing project for the play areas with an approximate 5-week closure period and signs will be posted on site.
- Gath Pool has received City Council support and there are substantial permitting requirements that we are continuing to move forward and targeting a fall of 2023 construction
- Crystal Lake Project, we held our first community meeting with good input for the park project and for left beach improvements and are working on digesting all input and getting ready to listen to the community once again.
- Levingston Cove, we have selected the Construction Company for the work and the contract is being worked on now.
- Highlights of community events: a very successful Indigenous People's day at Albemarle, Wellington Park had a very successful neighborhood event, a tennis doubles tournament organized by FONT who will be giving the City a donation towards the court work that will be done this year was held at North and South courts and a game table donation in honor of former Alderman Polly Bryson in Auburndale, and this past weekend we had the 21st Paddy's Road Race which after this years event, the O'Hara family has raised 1 million dollars to the Newton Athletes Unlimited program and the very popular Harvest Fair event in Newton Centre organized

by our Cultural Affairs division which is followed by the Halloween Window Painting event taking place on Oct.31st.

4. Committee Reports

- **Community Preservation Committee** – Mr. Dunker reported that the past meeting was just to review the progress of all the projects that they have funded and that they will probably be seeing Parks, Recreation and Culture in November or December with many funding requests.
- **Urban Tree Commission** – Beth Wilkinson had a special session last months and there was a vote as there are 2 proposals out for changes to the tree preservation ordinance. One has been put forth by Urban Forestry Director Marc Welch and one has been put forth by Councilors Malakie, and Norton and the vote she reported on last month was the moratorium. Then, in the special meeting there was a vote to actually support one of the two plans and the vote was 5 to 1 to support the plan put forth by the councilors as opposed to by Marc Welch and like the last vote, Beth was the one who voted against the proposal and that the moratorium will be discussed at the next City Council meeting later tonight and programs and services will again continue with their discussion of the tree preservation ordinance on Wednesday.
- **Farm Commission** – Ms. Wilkinson noted that there would be a meeting in a week. They had a great season.
- **Off Leash Area Working Group** – Carol Stapleton reported that the Department is working with the Planning and Economic Development Departments on a proposal to create a dog park on Washington Streets Walker Park. They are hoping to begin community meetings on the Washington Street Project in early December.

5. New Business

- No new business

Meeting Adjourned at 08:20pm
Respectfully submitted by
Carol Stapleton