

RECREATION COMMISSION

Meeting Minutes

January 19, 2021

7:00pm

Zoom Meeting

Present: Chris Hardy, Commissioner; Hema Santhanakrishnan, Commissioner; Steve Trimble, Commissioner; David Martin, Board of Selectman Liaison; Melissa Rier, Recreation Director. Also Present: Bill Alesbury and Alissa Nicol, Community Preservation Committee (“CPC”). Jennifer Brooke (Lemon Brooke Landscaping) and Paul Swydan, Friends of Gardner Playground. Nancy Corcoran, resident.
Absent: Joe Will, Commissioner.

Opening: Chair Steve Trimble opened the meeting at 7:02pm.

I. Regular Business

1. Review of Meeting Minutes from December 15, 2020: Steve moved, and Hema seconded, to accept the December 15, 2020 Meeting Minutes. Roll call: Hardy, yes; Santhanakrishnan, yes; Trimble, yes. The motion was approved, 3-0.
2. Citizen Concerns: Nothing to report. There was no public comment.
3. Preparation for CPC Presentations:
 - a. Gardner Field and Playground: Started at 7:22pm. Paul Swydan, of Friends of Gardner, talked about budgeting requirements for the Gardner project. One of the key differences from the Jones project is the lack of designated parking spaces for Gardner. The first phase is estimated at \$413,000, including playground renovation, upgraded parking and the sidewalk. Paul said it will help if CPC agrees to provide \$350,000 for this project. The Friends have already raised \$36,000 with additional businesses willing to contribute. (These possible donors have not yet been approached due to economic impact of the pandemic; fund-raising will be easier as things improve later this year). Both a functioning playground and a parking area are needed; there is no benefit to spending for one without the other. Alissa Nicol, of CPC, asked for details on the total budget for this project, \$704,000. Paul mentioned that the second phase will include landscaping costs, fence wall construction, benches with lighting and a 10% contingency fee. Jennifer Brooke, of Lemon Brooke Landscaping, explained why the costs are so steep. The major expense, nearly \$175,000, will be allocated to the rubberized surface. This could be reduced by using wood chips instead of rubber; however, rubber is preferable because it is accessible (including strollers) and requires less maintenance than wood chips. There is an option to apply rubber surfacing only on the high-traffic areas, but wood chips and rubber should not mix. There is some flexibility with the wall fence construction priced at approximately \$100,000. The lighting could also be removed if the overall \$704,000 budget is unattainable.

Alissa asked how many parking spaces are assigned to Gardner. Melissa replied that the number can be reduced. Paul said there are 14 parking spaces (with two HC). Bill Alesbury, of CPC, asked why there is so much difference between Gardner and Jones. Discussion followed that Gardner is in the Historic District and therefore must maintain a certain level of quality. Jennifer said that the estimate provided is rough and that she has been in talks with O'Brien & Sons to pinpoint the actual cost. Bill stressed that Recreation should standardize construction of both playgrounds and do both in the best possible way.

Steve asked if another CPA request will be coming later. Paul confirmed that there will be at least one, maybe two. There has been discussion of additional features not included in the \$704,000 budget. Paul is hopeful they'll be able to hold fundraiser gatherings in future when normal life returns.

Alissa questioned the need for a parking lot, since existing street parking is not always 100% occupied. People have been able to use the park without these proposed parking spaces. Gardner is in the Historic Village and is a neighborhood park used primarily by local walkers. There are many other parks nearby, unlike Jones with visitors from many parts of Town and the neighboring communities.

Steve also said that groups dedicated to specific projects need to be careful with their budgets as the Recreation Department currently is requesting more than a million dollars in CPA funding. He wishes more people would attend CPC meetings as this forum is open to all. He also recommended that the Gardner team reconsider such a huge ask compared with Jones.

David Martin checked whether the plan is complete and if any consideration has been given to the issue of drainage. Jennifer replied that planning is still in the schematic phase and that this will be done once the project is underway. Wetlands at the back of the playground will be considered in a future phase when lighting and benches are added.

Paul asked why the 10% contingency amount was rejected. Bill responded that CPC expects an accurate project estimate without a buffer. Bill also expressed concern that the drainage issue has not yet been addressed. Bill was unsure if the project is needed in this timeframe. Paul responded that the budget shortage will be the case for all years and that any delay would be unfair to donors who have already contributed.

Nancy Corcoran talked of the need to upgrade Jones as traffic is higher there than at Gardner. She is hopeful that Gardner can be approved if the proposal comes in different phases. Ended at 8:02pm.

- b. Jones Surfacing: Started at 7:08pm. Bill attended to ask questions in advance of Tuesday's CPC presentation. He inquired about the difference in budget needs between 2019 and the current Jones report. He also asked about Phase I completion and whether Phase 2 has commenced. Lastly, he asked for clarification of the difference between the report created for

Jones and that for Gardner which was more comprehensive and detailed. Melissa responded that rubber surfacing needs changed after discussions with the citizens group; she then confirmed that the project is still in Phase 1 but close to completion and that some work in Phase 2 has already started. The Jones report was mostly her work, versus Gardner which was outsourced to an external landscape company. Ended at 7:20pm.

c. Elm Street Reconstruction: Started at 8:03pm.

The construction company building the twin schools requires parking at Elm Street for over 60 vehicles. Since there is no available space, and building over conservation land (with wetlands) is prohibited, Recreation has offered the tennis courts for this use. The construction company is talking with the Town in exchange to renovate the tennis courts and build a new pickleball court after completion of the school. This could help to offset the \$240,000 CPA request. Steve responded, citing that CPC was asking to retain some contingent funds in case the construction crew does not build to our specifications. He also mentioned that the public should be informed that the tennis courts will not be available this summer, and that this should not be a repetition of what happened to the basketball courts. Melissa responded that the basketball courts were taken over without anyone's knowledge, and that the temporary closure with subsequent renovation will be communicated via email, Facebook and other social media. Ended at 8:11pm.

d. Sports Pavilion: Started at 8:12pm. Melissa reported that the project is almost complete. The North building is ready to open including space to be used this summer by NARA staff. The South Building needs interior finishing but will ultimately house NARA Summer Camp and provide on-site offices for Recreation staff. Ended at 8:17pm.

4. Reports:

- a. Fields and Facilities: Nothing to report. There was no public comment.
- b. Rail Trails: Nothing to report. There was no public comment
- c. Events: All events were cancelled due to the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020. Recreation has a full schedule of events for 2021 and will decide if they're able to run depending on COVID-19 guidelines. There was no public comment.
 - i. Community Preservation Committee: (See I.3. above.)

II. New/Special Business: COVID-19 updates. (See I.4. c. above.)

III. Consent Items:

None. There was no public comment.

Adjournment: At 8:46pm Chris moved, and Hema seconded, to adjourn. Roll Call: Hardy, yes; Santhanakrishnan, yes; Trimble, yes. The motion was approved, 3-0.