

Virtual Meeting – 6:35pm

April 5, 2021

Commissioners: Bobby Beagan, Mara Huston, Ben Carmel, Dick Williamson

Dennis Mannone, Dir. Park and Recreation/Pool

Guests: Howard Feng (Fin Com), Jen Roberts (BOS), Kay Bell (Disability Commission), Laurie Eliason, Darcy Conant Bell, Sloane Wendel (LSRHS Sailing), Mark Papas, (Vendor), Craig Blake, Dianne Williamson, Kathy Harris, Bettina Westerberg, Kevin Westerberg, Anne Hincks, Susanna Finn, Bob Clark, John Hincks (Planning Board),

**Public Comment:** Kay Bell, Commission on Disability, offered support to the Commission on any questions regarding the recent Town ADA report. She stated the Town has 3-5 years to address the issues in the report. Mara stated the issues in the Fairbank building will be taken care of with the new community center building.

**Chair Report:** Mara reported the Town is in the process of hiring an architect for the new Community Center, hopefully to be hired by May. In addition, the Town will start a land survey including testing soil and additional land work on the building site.

**Director Update:** Dennis reported fields opened today for use. The Field Enterprise Fund is down \$64,000 and still have to pay ½ of the Parks and Grounds salaries and spring expenses. He is concerned the Field Enterprise Fund may run a deficit again. Mara asked how much money is left from the funds transferred to the Field Enterprise Fund from the General Fund at the last Town meeting. Dennis stated about \$24,000. Spring permit revenue is coming in. Recreation Revolving funds look better due to camp registration. Camp is sold out with 60 registrations, which is what the building can handle with the CDC guidelines for inside spacing. Counselors are being hired for the summer program. Revolving funds will be used to cover summer camp expenses salaries. A few spring programs and April vacation programs are being offered. Atkinson pool is busy with swim team season two. Belmont and Lexington boys and girls swim teams are using the pool, dive will rentals, lap rentals and other swim team rentals. Currently \$150,000 in the positive with three months remaining in the fiscal year. This is due to significant reduction in the part-time staff and hours and expenses and new swim team rentals.

**Tennis/Pickleball Discussion:** Mara stated four pickleball courts are located at Featherland and two at Feeley. Four tennis courts at Featherland and six at Feeley. Featherland also has basketball on two of the tennis courts. Two issues for discussion tonight: strategy for sharing the courts and sound issues. Mara shared her screen showing signs Craig Blake found at other tennis/pickleball courts in other towns (Westford and Concord). Signs showed designated times for tennis or pickleball and instructions for how the courts are to be used. Mara welcomed comments on sharing the courts from residents attending the meeting. Bettina Westerberg, abutter to Feeley courts, stated neighbors were not made aware that pickleball courts would be added to the tennis courts. Her concern was a different sport was being played on the tennis courts, and that pickleball was a louder sport. She did not think it belonged on the tennis courts and it brought too many people on the courts.

Kathy Harris, Reed Street, has played pickleball and tennis in other Towns and suggested the Park and Recreation Departments in other Towns be contacted to see how they handle sharing the courts. Craig Blake, 300 Old Lancaster Road, stated he understands the issues. The game is played with a plastic ball and hard paddle so there will be noise when playing. It is a very popular sport right now, and if it were around when the tennis courts were constructed, there would be pickleball courts there. He does not see a lot of tennis players when they are playing pickleball. Susanna Finn, 58 Hudson Road, plays tennis at Featherland. She was unaware that pickleball was played at Featherland or Feeley. She is concerned about setting limited hours for each sport especially since she has not seen a lot of conflict between users. She would be in favor of a first come first serve rules, with time limits if people are waiting. She would like to see the actual usage at the courts before deciding on any type of court restrictions. John Hincks, Planning Board, is involved with the Town's Master Plan. He thought it was great that the residents want to use the existing courts for this new sport, which gives the tennis courts new life and added use.

Bob Clark, 32 Old Framingham Road, was one of the first individuals involved bringing pickleball into Sudbury. He stated when kids are playing basketball at Featherland, they are also loud and could be blending into the noise from pickleball. He thinks it is great people are playing together and would hate to see that stop. He stated the Feeley courts are not in great shape so more people are playing at Featherland. Mara clarified that Feeley courts were built as tennis courts and two pickleball courts were added at a later date. Featherland Courts when replaced several years ago were designed as multipurpose courts with basketball, tennis and pickleball to get the best use of the courts. Anne Hincks, just started to play pickleball, and said they are a very welcoming group. They do play at specific times, so she felt there was plenty of time to use the courts at other times. Jim Cavanaugh, is an occasional pickleball player. He sees many kids using the basketball courts and would like people to keep that in mind when discussing the use of the courts. Kevin Westerberg, 239 Raymond Road, stated the tennis courts at Feeley get a lot more use that people think. He also thought other flat surfaces in Town could be used for pickleball. He also thought if the popularity of the sport is growing, why not find better areas to put the courts in that don't disturb neighborhoods.

Commission discussed need to set up a policy for sharing the courts, is this something the Commission wants to do now. Ben asked Mara how much of an issue is this?

Diane Williamson, 52 Country Village Lane, has been playing for a number of years. Contention for the courts seems to occur more on the weekends. During the week a few times there may be conflict and they seemed to be able to work it out with the tennis players. Sunday morning seems to be a busy time with more conflicts. Basketball is also played on Sunday and sometimes tennis. Mara pointed out that there are a few different groups of pickleball players.

Mara asked the Commissioners if they wanted to do something similar to what Westford and Natick did regarding sharing the courts and signage or wait and see how the spring and summer goes and gather more data and check back in the fall. Bobby stated he would not be ready to

make any decisions at this time. He felt the need to get more data and work with the Dennis, the Director of Parks and Recreation. He also mentioned the larger group activity of pickleball is starting to sound like a potential user group. He felt it would be good to talk with other communities and see how they are handling the existing resources and the issues. Dick stated he felt the groups that know each other can work together to co-exist on the courts. Park and Recreation could lay down rules, but he isn't sure that is necessary at this time. Ben stated the need is for a short, mid-term and long-term plan. He would like to monitor usage so the Commission has a better understanding of the current use and then reevaluate as more information is developed. As for as mid-term, long term, possibly look to get funding to create a specific area to play pickleball in the future. Dick commented on the skating area in the Featherland parking lot and suggested that may be a good area to put a pickleball court. Mara added that area is also used as a parking lot, when not a skating area in the winter.

Bettina Westerberg expressed concern that after her comments the Commission was going to vote on how to share tennis courts with pickleball. Mara stated no vote is on the agenda and the Commission is listening to all comments and working toward a solution that will work for all parties. Craig Blake informed the Commission that the current sign at the Featherland courts states tennis only and should be corrected and that Featherland tennis courts have more pickleball players due to the cracks on the Feeley courts. Dennis stated the signs were made in the past to keep skateboarders off the courts. Commission decided to gather more information on usage before making any decision.

Commission discussed sound issues at the courts due to pickleball. Mara stated there is no money to do anything about the sound at Feeley. She stated funds are still available in the CPC article for the renovation of the Featherland tennis courts. Pads to absorb the sound are available, but expensive. Bobby will do more research on them to see what is available. Discussed moving the pickleball courts to another court at Feeley to see if that helps with the sound. Bobby suggested putting pickleball courts on the Sewataro tennis courts. Mara stated ADA issues at Sewataro, but it might be a good idea for the future.

**Field User Fee Recap:** At the last meeting the Commission voted to increase the field permit. Mara stated the Field Enterprise fund is not in great shape, due to the pandemic and the fact it has to cover expenses associated with the fields and half the salaries of the Parks and Grounds staff. Mara stated the discussion moving forward is questioning if the Field Enterprise Fund is the right model for capturing revenue and expenses for field use and should the field permit policy be revisited. Should adult groups be charged the same as youth town teams. Should the fee for the field use be hourly or by season. Bobby agreed and stated this was a conversation in the past about different categories and user types and appropriate fees. He said in the past the Commission has made some adjustments because certain groups were impacted by large increases. He would like to have additional discussions to determine the best way to charge for field use. Mara stated the field permit policy might be simpler if the permit was based on an hourly fee. Mara stated the systems in place right now are manual and time consuming. If the Commission moves towards requesting CPC funds in the fall to hire a Recreation Consultant

could review our current systems and give guidance. A review of the field permit policy could be included. Dennis said he appreciated the support and agreed it is a difficult task to permit the fields and there are many ways to look at it. He agreed the field permit policy needs to be reviewed and revised. He said it will be good to get a full year in, not during the pandemic, to monitor the use of the fields. He didn't think the hourly rate would work for youth groups like Sudbury Soccer and others, for the amount of time they request the fields.

Mark Pappas, Sudbury Flag Football, said he has been running a program in Town for over 10 years. He is hopeful that the Commission will be able to come up with something that is fair for everyone.

**LS Field Fees** – Mara put this topic on the agenda, but then realized there is no issue with the field fees at this time so no discussion.

Mara noted that Ben Carmel had to leave the meeting, remaining Commissioners are Dick, Bobby and Mara.

**Snack Shack Discussion** – Discussion centered on where snack shacks are located, who runs them and expenses associated with their operation and who should cover the costs. Snack shacks are located at Haskell, Featherland and Feeley field. There are two snack shacks at both Featherland and Feeley, but it is not clear if both are operational at this time. Snack shacks are open from April thru October/November. No snack shacks were open last summer. In the past they have been staffed and run by volunteers from youth teams using the fields or in the case of Haskell the LSRHS sailing team. All are operated to raise funds for their specific organizations. Dennis reported expenses associated with running snack shacks include, water fees, electricity, trash clean up, facility cleaning. Expense are currently paid out of the Field Enterprise Fund, but this is something that needs to be reviewed to determine who should be paying for expenses associated with operating snack shacks. Mara asked Dennis to continue to research expenses, so they can be discussed at a future meeting. Mara informed that representatives from the LSRHS sailing team joined the meeting to ask about updates to the Haskell snack shack in response to requirements from the Board of Health. Darcy Conant Bell, 5 Woodbury Rd, stated the Board of Health is requiring all snack shacks to have a sink, and asked if the Town will be installing a sink at the Haskell Snack shack and other snack shacks. Mara stated costs for changes to the snack shack would probably come out of the Field Enterprise Fund, which is not in good shape at this time. Dennis said he spoke with Parks and Grounds staff and it would be difficult and expensive to add a sink to the existing snack shack at Haskell. Dennis encouraged the LSRHS sailing team volunteers to reach out to the Board of Health to find out what is required for the fall in order to run the snack shack. Sloane Wendel, stated the sailing team volunteers are not planning on running the snack shack this spring/summer, but will contact the Board of Health to check on the requirements and stated they want to keep the snack shack open for the community and because it is a good fund raiser for their team.

**May meeting with Aquatics Users** – Mara stated the aquatic users will be invited to the May meeting so the Commission can hear from them about their experience using the pool. Mara will send an email to Dennis to be forwarded to the swim teams and users of the pool.

**Vote-Review and Approve Meeting Minutes:** Motion to approve the minutes from February 1. Bobby – yes, Mara – yes, Dick yes. Motion received a second.

Future Commission meetings are planned for Monday April 5, Monday May 3, and June 7<sup>th</sup>. After June 7, any summer meetings will be planned.

Mara congratulated Bobby Beagan on his reelection to the Park and Recreation Commission and Laura Eliason to her election to the Commission.

Mara made a motion to adjourn, which received a second. Bobby – yes, Dick – yes, Mara – yes.

Adjourned 8:32pm.