

ARLINGTON PARK & RECREATION COMMISSION MEETING MINTUES

November 24th, 2020

Approved 5-0 on 12-23-2020

The Town of Arlington Park and Recreation Commission came to order for its online virtual meeting via Zoom on Tuesday November 24th, 2020 at 7:05pm.

Commission Members: Leslie Mayer, Jen Rothenberg, Shirley Canniff, Phil Lasker, Scott Walker, and associate members Sarah Carrier and Scott Lever were present. Recreation Director Joe Connelly and Program Supervisor Zachary Vaillette were also in attendance.

Anticipated Speakers: None

Members of the Public: Kate Riley, Dean Carman, Elaine Backman, Elisabeth Carr-Jones, Alan Jones, & Henry Brush.

Preliminary Matter: Leslie Mayer, Park & Recreation Commission Chair, took formal attendance via a roll call. Ms. Mayer read a statement pertaining to Governor Baker's Public Meeting Law change due to COVID-19 regarding virtual meetings. Meeting business ground rules and procedures were also covered by Ms. Mayer.

Open Forum – Public Comment

N/A

Field Report Recommendation and Block Scheduling Discussion

Mr. Connelly began preliminary discussions with Commission Members regarding the Town's field scheduling process moving forward. A field report was completed within the last several years. Mr. Connelly reviewed the information on this report for the first time and has not previously discussed the report/block scheduling with the Commission. Numerous individuals have reached out, including Commission Members, indicating that improvements could be made to the current field scheduling process. Mr. Connelly stated that there have been minor issues with the current process for over (20)+ years. These minor issues are things that every Town scheduling fields deals with. While the current process does work, Mr. Connelly stated this conversation would be the starting point for improvements moving forward. Items Mr. Connelly noted following his review of the conducted field study report are as follows:

- **Field Permitting Policy:** Policy currently in place works well, however there is room for improvement/updating. Mr. Connelly is recommending that a subcommittee is put together, made up of representatives from Town field user groups, to look review/edit this policy.
- **Field Fees/Residency:** Field fees are a part of the current system, but the Recreation has not followed through on the collection of user group fees in recent years. As for residency status, Mr. Connelly stated that most user groups are from Arlington or have participants that attend a school in Arlington.
- **Blanket Permitting:** Mr. Connelly advocated that blanketing field permitting still needs to be the process moving forward. When determining field schedules several months ahead of time, many user groups do not know their exact practice/game schedules. However, he does believe that user groups should have to submit final schedules as seasons begin. This will allow the department to identify open field times, which can be given to other user groups looking for space.
- **Spot Checks:** Mr. Connelly stated the department is not able to do spot checks with the current staff and amount of usage hours occurring in Town. It would be desired to have an individual on staff (ranger) to oversee spot checks, but there is no funding in the budget to support this.
- **Automated System:** Arlington Recreation's online system, MyRec, does have the capability to do all field scheduling online. The Department currently does receive some requests through this system and uses the calendar feature. Mr. Connelly prefers the hands on approach, with local user groups submitting hard copy field requests. This system allows him to get a better understanding of the schedule and use being requested. Currently, blank field schedules are entered into the system and can be seen by the public online, but specifics/league game schedules cannot. If receive final schedules are submitted by user groups moving forward, Recreation will be able to add this to website.
- **Priority System:** Currently in place with Town based organizations receiving first priority.
- **Public Works:** Mr. Connelly noted that the Department is only Recreation, not Parks & Recreation. Recreation oversees the scheduling, but the DPW is responsible for the upkeep. Mr. Connelly stated that Recreation and DPW have communicated very well for being (2) separate departments. He believes the DPW reference from the study

related to the field closure process. Closures are determined by the DPW. A weather related blanket closure could be announced at 1:00pm on a specific day. By 5:00pm however, the weather/fields could be fine but at this time, DPW staff has finished their day (fields typically stayed closed until the next day once closed). Mr. Connelly will discuss this and work with the DPW. If there are specific fields or areas can be played on, then they should be played on. Identifying fields that need to be closed (new turf or drainage issues) will be helpful for this process.

- Field Upkeep: The Town is constantly working on improving field conditions. They are currently under contract with Prescription Turf Services. Mr. Connelly believes field conditions in Town have improved greatly over the last decade. He also noted that it is not realistic to compare one Town's worst field vs another Town's best field. Individual field conditions vary for a variety of reasons, and field conditions in Town need to be looked at from an overall perspective (*Comparing best fields in Arlington to best fields in another community*).
- Practice vs game fields: Mr. Connelly loves the idea of having separate practice only/game only fields, but this is not feasible. Arlington has many different field users and there are simply not enough fields in Town to do this as it would have a major impact on the allotted time for each group.
- Variety of other Questions: Mr. Connelly stated Recreation's goal is to permit all spaces as much as possible year round.
- Fee Analysis: Fees can be structured in a variety of different ways including pay by use, pay by hour, and pay by player. Mr. Connelly is open to suggestions but the fee per player structure is simple. Simple is better. Mr. Connelly gave more detail on the current structure. The fee per player per user group is currently \$10.00. Of that \$10.00, Recreation receives only \$1.25 for each player. The remainder of the fee is split with the DPW and goes to Porta Potty Rental Fees placed at field.

Ms. Mayer asked if there were comments from Commissioners or any members of the public who were present. No comments at this time. Mr. Connelly stated that this review/update process with the subcommittee will be a good deal of work. Mr. Connelly will reach out to field user groups to make sure everyone is represented on the subcommittee. Ms. Canniff & Ms. Rothenberg will represent the Commission on this. Mr. Connelly anticipates the subcommittee starting the process after the holiday season.

Capital Projects Update

Robbins Farm Slide

Mr. Connelly spoke on the Commission's previous discussion regarding how to move forward with the Robbins Farm Slide. The Commission went through a number of options last week with Playground Safety Instructor, Jody Reale. Suggestions for the removed slide area included PLACING artificial turf, plant beds, etc.

Mr. Lasker suggested to Mr. Connelly placing boulders with tall grass in the area to eliminate individuals on bikes from going down the slope. Larger rocks near the Reservoir Beach parking lot could possibly be used or granite slabs already owned by the Town. Ms. Reale suggested this suggestion would be easier to install and would still prevent individuals from using the slope. Mr. Connelly stated the quote received for this suggestion was around the same estimate as turf placement. Mr. Lasker stated he was surprised at the estimate for his suggestion. Mr. Lasker then suggested the possibility of a landscape contractor or even DPW overseeing this work, with Ms. Reale and her team still overseeing the physical slide removal. Mr. Lasker believes exploring other avenues could lower the cost if this is the plan they move forward with. Mr. Connelly agrees that the secondary work could be done at a lower cost if the work is done by the Town or another contractor. Mr. Connelly did express that he wants Ms. Reale to oversee the removal. It is an important process and in order to be done correctly without damaging the slide, it needs to be done by a professional.

Ms. Mayer suggested the possibility of something that cost less, like a DIY or gardeners in Town donating plants to be used in this area. Mr. Lasker agrees, stating that ornamental grasses need to be used. Ms. Rothenberg stated she is glad that this suggestion was discussed with Jody. Ms. Rothenberg still has concerns regarding with the amount of space that needs to be filled once slide is removed. She does not think the placement of granite slabs/grass will be 100% effective, believing users will still run up/down the hill. Ms. Rothenberg wants a safe option and suggested that the Commission holding off on this to look into alternative options. Ms. Mayer stated that funding for a new slide at Robbins Farm would be available at earliest in July if approved. Ms. Rothenberg thinks that if they can hold off and can get through the winter, they may only need to keep users off the slide for a few months if a piece breaks in the spring. Mr. Connelly stated that funding may be available in

July but with the required process, work would be starting in September at the earliest. Ms. Mayer stated it is a focused project and while there will be public input, not a lot would be needed. Ms. Rothenberg brought up the previous decision of rethinking the space in terms of playground and slide placement. This should be discussed before any slide projects move forward as there could be better placement locations. Mr. Connelly stated Stantec is aware of this feedback and the firm suggested the possibility of placing a two-tier double slide. Mr. Connelly looks forward to seeing the final feasibility study from Stantec and the suggestions that are made. This report will be completed in early December and shared with the Commission. The Commission will revisit the discussion regarding the plan for the Robbins Farm Slide at this time.

Reservoir Beach: Phase 1& 2

Mr. Connelly reported that the mechanical work completed in the pump house in Phase 1 has been tested and is working properly. Training for Department staff on the new system will occur in the spring, as the system will be winterized in the coming week. As for Phase 2 of the project, Mr. Connelly stated that there is not much to report at this time. The building portion of the project for the concession/pump house building roofs has gone out to bid. Phase 2 not much to report. Building portion for the roof of pump and bath house has gone out to bid. Bid submittals are due in early December. Mr. Connelly reported that the Conservation Commissions in Arlington & Lexington have not yet determined meeting dates. The goal is to have the remainder of the work go out for bid in early 2021, after these meetings occur.

Capital Requests FY22

CPA Requests for FY 22 are due by December. Mr. Connelly will be putting final submissions together for the previously discussed Robbins Farm Slide, Hurd Field, & Spy Pond Playground projects. CPA Public Meetings will occur in late January.

Task Group Updates

Regarding to the Mountain Biking Task Force, Mr. Lasker stated the group completed their last site visit at Turkey Hill. The Task Group will be compiling their feedback and be developing a pros/cons list for each site in the near future.

Recreation and Rink Updates

Mr. Connelly gave the Commission an update on the Department's Travel Basketball Program. The High School MIAA season is moving forward for basketball. In the event that High School Basketball is cancelled, Arlington will also cancel their program. The program will have (15) teams this winter, with (1) practice a week per team. Mr. Connelly reported that parents have been sending very positive feedback about the season moving forward at this time. A detailed COVID Policy has been developed for Travel Basketball. The families of all players are required to sign a COVID Waiver & Acknowledgement Form prior to the season. Within this, the "one strike" rule is outlined. By signing the form, families are agreeing/acknowledging that if an individual/team is not following any of the outlined requirements (mask, required health screenings, etc.), Arlington Recreation will remove them from the program immediately. A prorated credit would be issued if this is to occur. This puts the responsibility of following the rules on each and every player, as it crucial to have the safest season possible.

Mr. Connelly provided an overview of the ammonia leak that occurred at the Ed Burns Arena on Friday, November 20th. At 6:10pm, rink staff member Dimitri Kraev noticed the ammonia alarm going off. He immediately identified Program Supervisor, Zach Vaillette, who was present. The two staff members evacuated the youth hockey team who was using the ice and cleared the building in approximately 2 minutes. At this time, Arlington Fire Department was called, in addition to Mr. Connelly, Rink Supervisor JJ O'Sullivan, and Preferred Mechanics. Shortly after arrival, AFD declared the events to be a Level 2 HAZMAT situation. Mr. Connelly explained that it was determined that there was a small leak in one of the hoses. The system has (2) compressors. On the main compressor, there is a drain hose where oil and ammonia mix. Due to this small leak, oil leaked to the floor and ammonia gas was released. HAZMAT crews spent approximately (2) hours to get ready. The HAZMAT team entered the building, was able to turn the system off, and cleared the spill. Preferred Mechanics were able to partially enter with HAZMAT. Once the turned off, the HAZMAT team required the building to air out for approximately (45) minutes. By 11:30pm, HAZMAT and AFD has left. At this time, Department staff & staff from Preferred Mechanics were allowed to enter the building to complete work. Staff remainder on site for several hours and the system was repaired. Mr. Connelly noted that the ice in the arena was not lost even though the system was temporarily turned off. Mr. Connelly is now going through the regulatory protocols with DEP and is required to file a report on this incident. Mr. Connelly stated that an audible ammonia alarm is needed.

Mr. Connelly also reported that MIAA hockey will be moving forward this winter. Arlington High School of the Middlesex League will begin December 14th. Arlington Catholic will begin practicing on December 7th. Mr. Connelly informed the Commission that the Department is losing on average \$3,500.00 of revenue a week due to the mandated curfew. The State's required (2) week shut down resulted in a loss \$26,000. He is currently working on end of year forecast.

Approval of Minutes –October 20, 2020

The approval of the October 20th, 2020 Park and Recreation Commission Meeting Minutes was discussed. It was determined that no edits were needed. The motion to approve the October 20th Commission Meeting Minutes was made by Ms. Canniff. This motion was seconded by Mr. Lasker. The Commission voted and approved the October 20th Meeting Minutes with a roll call of 5-0, at 8:10pm.

Comments and Items for Future Meetings:

- The next Park & Recreation Commission meeting will take place Thursday, December 8th at 7:00pm via Zoom.
- Ms. Rothenberg requested information on the current status of the Recreation & Rink FY Budgets.
- Ms. Canniff asked about the previously discussed issues of unleashed dogs in Town Parks. Mr. Connelly will be following up with Animal Control Officer, Diane Welch.
- Mr. Lever discussed the Envision Arlington Town Survey, stating that some questions/data were recreation related. Requested Mr. Connelly to add recreation related questions, as well. Mentioned the focus of the relationship between Recreation and School Department post COVID.

Other

Mr. Walker motioned to adjourn the meeting. This motion was seconded by Ms. Rothenberg. Motion to adjourn the meeting was approved by Commissioners, 5-0, at 8:20pm.

The Arlington Park & Recreation Commission Meeting Minutes were respectfully submitted by Program Supervisor, Zachary Vaillette.