

## ARLINGTON PARK & RECREATION COMMISSION MEETING MINUTES

Approved 12/12/2023

*November 14, 2023*

The Town of Arlington Park and Recreation Commission came to order in the second floor meeting room at the Community Center on Tuesday, November 14, 2023, at 7:00pm.

**Commission Members:** Phil Lasker, Shirley Canniff, Leslie Mayer, Jen Rothenberg, Josh Fenollosa and Sarah Carrier. Recreation Director Joe Connelly and ConCom liaison Nathaniel Stevens were also present. Scott Walker was not in attendance.

**Anticipated Speakers:** David Morgan – Planning Department, Courtney Wilson – APD Animal Control Officer

**Preliminary Matter:** Jen Rothenberg, Park & Recreation Commission Vice-Chair, took formal attendance and welcomed anticipated speakers and members of the public to the Recreation Commission meeting.

### Discussion with Planning Department – David Morgan

- a. 2025 CPA Applications – Mr. Morgan presented preliminary CPA applications for two projects, the McClennen Detention Pond Survey and the Public Land Management Plan Addendum. Mr. Morgan is requesting letters of support.

McClennen Detention Pond Survey - \$40K request to hire vendor to review current conditions including sedimentation and storm water retention, draw up plans to return to “as built” state and create an alternatives analysis.

- Mr. Lasker - The estimate seemed high for a topographical survey. Mr. Morgan agreed but noted that the cost may be higher because parts of the survey may need to be conducted underwater.
- Mr. Stevens - Stressed the need for maintenance, with which the condition of the pond may not be in the state that it is now.
- Ms. Mayer- The detention pond was installed to stop flooding in the adjacent neighborhood. Mr. Connelly shared that flooding has increased over the past three years.

Public Land Management Plan Addendum - \$25K request to inventory public lands, identify additional needs (playgrounds, courts, irrigation), improve field/turf conditions create management/maintenance plans. The plan also will consider impacts of climate change, historical sensitivity, DPW involvement and the influence of public art.

- Mr. Morgan – The existing plans expires in 2026. The scope of the project is the same as the original plan which was funded by CPA for \$30K. The ask is smaller because the scope is smaller. Will be on leave through March but will ensure contracts are in place by December 31, 2023.
- Mr. Connelly – Glad to see playgrounds and courts represented in the plan. Recommended that aquatics be considered in phase 3 of the plan. Inquired if the lower ask of \$25K was appropriate.
- Mr. Lasker – Turf maintenance plans are typically from the turf vendor.
- Mr. Stevens – Recommended including the Water Bodies Working Group and including a PRC liaison to tie the work into the plan.
- Ms. Carrier – Include review and inspection of safety issues.
- Mr. Fenollosa – Requested clarification of DPW’s involvement. Mr. Morgan – DPW practices, maintenance contracts.
- Ms. Mayer – Stressed the need for a maintenance plan and budget to ensure that projects reach their maximum life expectancy. Also requested further discussion regarding the removal of the

fence between Summer Street Field and the bike path. Mr. Morgan – Will discuss with Transportation Department.

Mr. Lasker made a motion to support the CPA applications for the McClennen Detention Pond Survey and the Public Land Management Plan Addendum, seconded by Ms. Canniff and approved 4-0.

- b. 2025 Town Meeting Article Related to Property Ownership Clarifications – Mr. Morgan presented a list of locations listed as “general town properties” with recommendations to transfer ownership. Ownership transfer recommendations to Parks and Rec Commission include – Crosby, Florence Field, Paper Road parcel at the end of Magnolia Field. The Commission discussed the parcel layouts noting that an unidentified, separate parcel runs through Magnolia Field.
- Mr. Connelly – Discussion needed to determine ways to split parcels. Also noted that the Buzzell Field bench belongs to PRC.
  - Ms. Mayer – Stressed the need for cleaner and clearer margins.
  - Mr. Morgan – Regarding splitting parcels, will gather assessor’s data and have a discussion with the Town Manager and SelectBoard.

Mr. Morgan also identified several Open Space properties that are not zoned as open space. Examples include Mt. Pleasant Cemetery, zoned as industrial, Thorndike Field, zoned for 2-family housing, and MBTA properties which will be rezoned as “transit district”. The proposal to rezone open spaces concurrent with their current use will be presented at Town Meeting.

- Ms. Mayer – Inquired about private parcels included in the plan and Article 97 protection guarantees. Mr. Morgan will contact the State for clarification.

#### **Off Leash Dog Program Discussion of Public Statement from the Park Commission**

Ms. Rothenberg stated that the Commission will conduct a formal discussion and will hold public input at the end.

The Commission discussed the statement, noting that there is no new information since 2010 that warrants change in policies. The Commission will continue their mission to identify locations for fenced-in dog areas.

- Mr. Connelly – The statement is regarding existing policies and does not specifically address MRP/woods. The conversation was to discuss existing bylaws. Provided a brief history – the first proposal for off-leash dogs did not pass and the second proposal barely passed. The topic was very contentious and required a lot of compromise as the community was split 50/50.
- Ms. Mayer – Changes to the bylaws would affect commitments to ConCom, the disabilities commission, DPW, Safe Routes to School, etc. Acknowledging that both sides are very passionate, the Commission built in the ability to build additional fenced-in dog areas. Off-leash hours and locations are not flexible. Ms. Mayer also noted that the Arlington program has been highlighted in the Boston Globe as being one of the most dog-friendly towns in the area.

Mr. Lasker motioned to approve the statement, seconded by Ms. Canniff and approved 4-0.

Ms. Rothenberg invited public comment

- Marie Bertier (Brantwood Road) – 30 year abutter to MRP and 15 year dog owner. The community is different than it was in 2010. This is a mental health issue, not just a dog issue. Mr. Connelly - off-leash dog hours are permitted in the front field between 6-9am. Leashed dogs are permitted in the woods. The statement does not take away any existing conditions.
- Jan O’Halloran (Renfrew Street) – Wished the Boston Globe article stressed the community effort to clean and respect MRP. Stated that the MRP dog walkers are a group that takes pride in their community and

work together to self-govern. She also noted that dogs are able to exercise differently in the woods versus on a field. Mr. Connelly – User groups for all the town parks are very involved and are great about working together and with PRC.

- Sue Doctrow (Westminster Avenue) – Was a member of the initial article writers. She noted that the PRC was very supportive but that the article did not specify locations of specific hours. The 2010 plan was designed to be flexible and open. Ms. Doctrow’s belief was that there would be an evolution from 2010 because flexibility was built into the plan. Ms. Mayer – The 2010 bylaw incorporated what was already existing. Mr. Connelly – There are just as many people against off-leash dogs as there are in favor. The emails and calls are equally for and against changes. The article does not allow flexibility with off-leash hours, allows flexibility only with PRC land but not land adjacent to schools or playgrounds.
- Liz Reisberg (Shawnee Road) – In 2010 she was against the by-law but now feels that it has made circumstances better. Impressed by the responsibility of dog owners over the years and feels that off-leash hours in the woods merits reconsideration. ACO Courtney Wilson – most recent complaint was from two elderly women who were knocked down by off-leash dogs running through MRP. She did go on to note that most of the dogs she encounters are well behaved but stressed that bites and injuries outweigh everything else.
- Adrian Gropper (Cleveland Street) – Inquired about a process to study/survey neighboring communities. Suggested gathering volunteers to assist and bring new proposal to TM. Mr. Connelly – Citizen Warrants required signatures of 10 registered voters. Ms. Mayer – Noted that the survey would need to note each city/town’s parameters as they can vary greatly. She noted that Lexington allows off-leash dogs on conservation land but not recreation land as an example.
- Kristi Rostcowski (Mt. Vernon Street) – Stressed the mental health benefits of walking and being outside with a dog. Also noting the benefits of having a dog as a family member. She enjoys watching dogs have fun off-leash in the parks but does not want the experience of a fenced in dog area. Inquired about training programs.
- Anita \_\_\_\_\_ (Cleveland Street) – Fresh Pond in Cambridge has off-leash dog hours all day long with no problems. The space is shared with elderly walkers, children, bicyclists and individuals in wheelchairs. Feels that dogs are too cramped in a fenced in area.
- Matiz Rostcowski (Mt Vernon Street) – Moved to Arlington in 2007 when off-leash dogs were not permitted. Requested more information on the outcomes from reviewing the policy. Mr. Connelly – There is no jurisdiction to extend hours past 9am. However, the Commission does have the power to eliminate hours. But he again stressed that the Commission statement is not taking any existing conditions away. The Commission’s focus at this time is creating fenced-in options.
- Ms. Canniff – Stressed that most of the attendees at this evening’s meeting were from MRP. She noted that on other parts of town people complain that off-leash dogs are a huge problem in playgrounds, on school grounds, public property etc. While she appreciates the sense of community MRP groups have developed around dog ownership, the Commission hears just as many complaints and opposing views from the rest of the town. Unlike MRP, other neighborhoods are requesting fenced-in dog areas. The Commission’s responsibility is to create and maintain balance for all citizens. It was again stressed that the statement does not take any existing conditions away.
- Mr. Lasker – Noted that there are many complaints of incidents at other parks as well. Ms. Canniff added that many of the incidents occur during “on-leash” times.
- Ms. Doctrow – Advised the Commission that someone was using her email fraudulently to send complaints about off-leash dogs at the Rez to Mr. Connelly.
- Sebastian Diaz (Valley Road) – Stated that it is human nature to report the negative more frequently than the positive. Does not believe that people are reporting good experiences to PRC. He also shared that he has been very aware of dog owner responsibility and experiences since his daughter was bit at age 6. Mr. Connelly again noted that the messages he receives are 50/50 negative and positive experiences.
- Sheri Stratton (Harlow Street) – Would like to see a pilot program allowing off-leash dogs in the woods because she estimates that 90% of the walkers she sees in the woods do have dogs. Ms. Mayer advised the group that one of the conditions to get the 2010 bylaw passed was to not allow off-leash dogs in the

woods. Concerns that have been raised include dogs being out of the line of site or voice control, dog waste not being removed and dog waste runoff affecting Hills Pond.

- Ms. Reisberg noted that no one condones off-leash dogs hurting people but stressed the importance of walking the entire park loop to improve mental health. She stated that the ACO's ticketing was too stressful for dog walkers. Ms. Rothenberg reiterated that Ms. Reisberg stated that MRP dog walkers are allowing their dogs off-leash in the woods during on-leash hours. The Commission is committed to balance and has to consider the mental health of those who are afraid of dogs as well.
- Ms. Canniff – Admires MRP as a hidden gem but it is now being identified as a dog park. She again stressed that there are just as many people complaining to the Commission that they can't use MRP anymore for other recreational activities, including bringing their children to the park, because of the off-leash dogs. MRP is for everyone to use which is why ACO Wilson is there to maintain safety and compliance with the bylaws.
- Ruth Esposito (Pleasant Street) – Asked about other wooded areas in town. Ms. Mayer – Most wooded areas are under the jurisdiction of ConCom, not PRC.

Ms. Rothenberg advised attendees to send any additional comments to Mr. Connelly via email.

Mr. Connelly will post the position statement on the town website after minutes are approved.

Mr. Fenollosa suggested the possibility of Mt. Gilboa as an off-leash dog site. Mr. Stevens stated that off-leash dogs are never permitted on ConCom property.

#### **Comments and Items for Future Meetings –**

- Permitting of alcohol for events on property under Park Commission jurisdiction.
- Park Permitting for Arlington Private Preschools – Roger Pierce School 11/28
- Public Arts Mural Conversation – Cecily Miller 11/28

#### **Correspondence Received**

Emails were received from the following members of the public:

- B. Gravely – Hills Hill
- J. Weinberg – Off-leash Menotomy review
- M. Bernstein – Off-leash Menotomy review

#### **Approval of Minutes**

The minutes for 10/24/2023 were tabled. A quorum was not present.

#### **New Business**

- Hills Hill Public Meeting – tomorrow evening 6pm. Meeting is to discuss existing conditions and will be conducted via ZOOM as consultant is located in Arizona.
- Turf Meeting – 12/5
- Parallel/Menotomy – 12/6

#### **Public Comment –**

N/A

Mr. Lasker motioned to adjourn at 9:25pm, seconded by Ms. Canniff and approved 4-0.

The Arlington Park & Recreation Commission Meeting Minutes were respectfully submitted by Deanna Stacchi.