

Recreation Advisory Board  
Tuesday, October 29, 2019  
Senior Citizen Center  
7:00 PM  
Final Minutes

1. Call to Order

Members Present: Courtney Marshall, Dan Provost, Mike Wissler, Stephanie Papakonstantis, Jen Harrington, Steve Geiger, and Brinn Sullivan; Julie Gilman and Molly Cowan of the Select Board; and Melissa Roy, David Tovey and Greg Bisson of Parks and Rec.

Members Absent: Val Castonguay

Ms. Papakonstantis called the meeting to order at 7 PM. She welcomed Mr. Geiger to his second meeting.

2. Public Comment

Amanda Kelly was present; she is an Exeter resident who spoke at the Rec Public Comment night about her daughter Margo, who has significant ADA needs, and the shortcomings of ADA. She is asking the town to do better than what is required. She said she wants to be part of the conversation, and she stayed for the duration of the meeting.

3. Minute Approval

a. September 27, 2019

**MOTION:** Mr. Wissler moved to approve the minutes of September 27 2019 as submitted. Mr. Provost seconded. Courtney Marshall was not present for this vote and the motion passed 6-0-0.

4. Festival Collaboration - AIM

Julie Gilman of the Select Board and the American Independence Museum Board of Directors was present to discuss a collaboration proposal.

Mr. Bisson said he and Ms. Roy met with AIM Directors Emma Bray and Victoria Su, who asked if the Rec Department would work with the Independence Festival and possibly supply intern help. At the museum, all of the employees are part time, and it's a challenge to manage the activities. The Independence Festival dates back 30 years, and was also celebrated in the 1940s/50s. Historically, it was a collaboration between multiple agencies, but now is solely in the Museum's hands. The Museum approached Parks and Rec about managing Swasey Parkway, booking the militia, and running the events. The militia are not volunteers, but are paid contractors. There's another piece of the festival involving vendors, which Mr. Bisson felt was not a good fit for Parks and Rec, and the museum is not expecting the department to take that.

Mr. Wissler said this is an awkward public/private deal. Ms. Gilman said while she supports the project, her concern is that if they invest in this and take on a huge part of the festival, what's the next group who's going to come and want their help. Mr. Bisson said he

would like to help, but it's in the prime busy season for Rec. They could potentially manage the militia but couldn't manage the 40-50 vendors on Water Street.

Ms. Sullivan said they should compare the event to the Rec Department's mission. Mr. Bisson said they are very different. Ms. Sullivan said this is a festival with families and children, but not a Rec event. Mr. Bisson said he doesn't want to commit and not give the full commitment. There's no financial benefit for the department. Mr. Provost said he's right to be hesitant taking on coordinating vendors, that's a big job.

Mr. Bisson said the 250th anniversaries of Independence-related events, such as the Boston Massacre and the start of the Revolution, are coming up, so the event is only going to get bigger.

Mr. Wissler asked who pays for trash pickup and Police security. Ms. Gilman said there's no security except where the Broadside is displayed; this is paid for by the museum. Trash pickup is done by Public Works, who are paid overtime. Mr. Wissler said maybe it's not in the department's purview to partner, but they could organize a volunteer effort to pick up trash. Ms. Gilman said they tried asking for volunteers from the departments one year, but got no response. Ms. Papakonstantis asked if they could partner with the group they do Powderkeg with. Ms. Gilman said that volunteering on the day is different from volunteering on the planning.

Mr. Provost asked whether Chamber is involved. Ms. Gilman said they started it, but they stopped organizing it at some point. Ms. Roy said that Chamber has been approached and is not interested in helping.

Ms. Roy said that she and Mr. Bisson go to the Festival's planning meetings, so they are involved, they just don't own a piece of it. Ms. Cowan asked if there was capacity in the department to do more. Ms. Gilman said that from the Museum Board's perspective, lifting even one piece would be helpful. Ms. Sullivan asked what level of ownership they would have over the Swasey events, and whether they could come up with their own ideas. Mr. Bisson said the Museum left it open for the department to develop it more.

Mr. Wissler said he doesn't think the festival is in their mission. Ms. Sullivan said activities on Swasey Parkway often fall under Parks and Rec. Mr. Wissler said that politics, antique vendors, and craft vendors are not in their mission. Ms. Cowan said if they're not coordinating the militia or the vendors, maybe they could do the food trucks. It may help to cultivate those relationships, since it goes with the Powderkeg Festival. Ms. Gilman said that the food trucks haven't been as much of a problem.

Ms. Harrington asked if they could change the event to fit more into the Rec mission. Ms. Roy said it's a period festival, and doesn't really fit. Ms. Gilman said that the Museum has kids' games in the spring, but they don't do them at the festival. That could go out on Swasey Parkway. Ms. Papakonstantis suggested they add other events to get kids involved, such as writing with feathers.

Ms. Roy said it's a tough time of year, the second week of July, when they are already at full capacity. Mr. Bisson said they have time to discuss it at the next meeting. Mr. Wissler said it's not within their mission or purview. He would like to help but doesn't see the Rec Department as a good fit. Ms. Sullivan agreed that it doesn't feel like the Rec. Ms. Gilman asked why beer and chili was a fit. Mr. Wissler responded that the Powderkeg Festival makes money. Ms. Gilman said Rec is child-oriented, and beer and chili not kid-friendly. Ms. Sullivan said that just because children or seniors attend, that doesn't make it a Rec event.

Ms. Marshall arrived at this time.

Ms. Harrington asked if the Museum could do a more formal presentation to the Board, and address any potential for shared revenue. Mr. Bisson said it's a very small amount. Ms. Gilman said they can't charge for the most expensive part, which happens on the Parkway. Mr. Bisson asked if they'd tried a suggested donation, and Ms. Gilman said yes, but they hadn't had a lot of results. Mr. Bisson said that if they could generate revenue, that would be a different discussion. They can't be the type of department that works with every event. Ms. Sullivan said they could develop a set of criteria for partnership going forward.

#### 5. Recreation Park Discussion

Ms. Papakonstantis said there has been progress on the Rec project, and they're looking for proactive steps they can take to present the project to the town. Mr. Bisson said they've finalized a building schematic. In August the designers asked the department to give them likes, wants, and needs. The department gave the designers a list, and they came up with a 37,000 square foot building which was way above budget, which is not going to happen. This is about the 20th revision. The walking track would have been awesome elevated, but that would have added \$2 million to the building, so they made everything one level. The square footage surrounding the gym is now the same square footage as the existing Senior Center and Rec Center. They're not necessarily looking for more space, they're looking for better design and ADA compliance, as well as the ability for rooms to serve multiple functions. The new design is 26,195 square feet. The walking track is important for year-round health and wellness for the senior population. They condensed it as much as they could, except they could take one more lane off. Mr. Bisson said there would be bathroom access from outside, adult changing tables in all facilities, and shower stall. They're keeping in mind everyone in community. Ms. Roy said it looks like a lot of storage, but they need to put chairs and tables away to make the spaces multipurpose.

Mr. Bisson said they have a meeting with Meals on Wheels on Monday to find out if that group plans to come with them to the new facility. Ms. Sullivan asked if the building will have the potential to be a shelter. Mr. Bisson said the town could relocate the whole Town Offices to their new facility in an emergency.

Ms. Sullivan asked if this was concrete block construction. Ms. Papakonstantis said it's a prefab gym with a stick build on the outside. It's more expensive to add solar panels, but it's designed to add them on later. They are looking at a lot of sustainable components, such as LED lighting and composting toilets. Mr. Bisson said he talked with Unutil, and as soon as there's a more finished plan that company can start discussing potential rebates and reimbursements.

Mr. Wissler said he had been tasked to look at a gym with an elevated track and some spaces for toilets and locker rooms, which he estimated at \$1-1.5 million. Mr. Bisson replied that Tighe and Bond say \$6 million. Mr. Wissler said it would be around 7,000 feet, and he's guessing \$275/sq ft. Ms. Papakonstantis said the second floor they were counting as the full square footage, not just the track. That alone would be \$2 million; Tighe and Bond insisted on that number. Mr. Wissler said they must be getting that somewhere. Gym surfaces are expensive. Ms. Sullivan asked if they could get a different estimate. Ms. Papakonstantis said they're stuck with Tighe and Bond. Mr. Bisson said that they had hired a separate company as a cost estimator, and are waiting for their report.

Ms. Harrington said they've reduced the plan a lot; in five years, are they going to regret losing things? Ms. Roy said they'll be fine in five years, but she doesn't know about 15 years. It would be great to have more space, but it won't get passed.

Mr. Bisson said the scope of the project has changed since their \$7.1 million dollar petition article two years ago, when they only got 42% of the vote. The project didn't include seniors, so they didn't get the senior vote. Back then, it was only a concept; now they know the topography challenges and can lay it out.

Ms. Harrington asked if they have a cost, and know what phase each item goes into. Mr. Bisson said they'll have a cost soon. The rough estimate is \$11 million for the whole project. Phase 1 is the building, sitework, reconfiguring the parking lot, and Planet Playground. Ms. Sullivan asked if they should put the entire thing on the ballot, or have it approved in phases. Mr. Bisson said that the town portion of the tax rate is dropping. He discussed the ballpark numbers with Mr. Dean. \$11 million with a 20 year bond would be 40 cents per thousand on the tax rate, but they'd be paying almost \$3.5 million dollars of interest. With a 10 year bond, there would be a 65 cent impact per thousand, but they'd save \$1.5 million in interest. They could also do it like the Water/Sewer plan and have another group do an all-day value engineering session to find new things to eliminate. Ms. Roy asked for opinions about phasing. Ms. Sullivan said they should do it all at once, since no one wants to come back. Someone else in town will want to do a project.

Mr. Bisson said they've already applied for Alteration of Terrain (AOT) permit from DES, since the cost of applying is going up 250% on November 1st. The permit is good for 10 years, with an extension application required after the first 5 years. They have \$27,000 left in the account to do value engineering.

Mr. Wissler said the kitchen is ill-defined; is it a cooking kitchen or just a warming kitchen? Mr. Bisson said they may have to get a kitchen designer. Ms. Roy said they don't need a commercial kitchen. Mr. Wissler said they're either cooking food there or only warming, those are totally different systems, and could be a \$250,000 difference in cost. He also felt the kitchen shouldn't pass into the gym. Mr. Bisson said it's a pass-through for serving.

Ms. Papakonstantis said four groups they missed the mark on last time were seniors, dog people, sustainability supporters, and library supporters. If they move Planet Playground, they could turn the space into a separate and fenced-off dog park. They could look at ways to pull in the sustainability group, such as reusing structures from the playground. The department supported the library project last year, and now they're looking for the library's support.

Ms. Harrington left at this time.

Ms. Cowan said the way that people get things passed is to lodge a campaign in support: they raise money and visibility with mailers, door knockers, signs, and digital ads. Advocacy means direct voter contact, going and knocking on doors. They need to identify who their voters are and talk to them. Without visibility, voters will look at the ballot and reject \$11 million.

Mr. Bisson said the new 501C3, the Friends of Exeter Parks and Recreation, can help. Ms. Cowan clarified that the Friends can only do education, otherwise contributions to them are not tax deductible. The Board can do advocacy. They can also apply for grants once they've passed something.

Mr. Wissler said they should be reminding people that they'd be replacing the Rec Building and the Senior Center. In the plans, they should emphasize the senior space and the potential for Meals on Wheels to use the space.

Ms. Papkonstantis said Mr. Bisson asked them to bring the names of 10 people who will advocate. Mr. Bisson said they're talking about sponsorships. He has a list of corporations in the area, and they're looking for any personal connections at those businesses.

Ms. Kelly suggested that they could use other Rec programs or events such as 5Ks to promote the project.

Ms. Cowan left at this time.

Mr. Bisson said they will not need more staff, programming-wise. They generate enough with the Revolving Fund to hire part-time instructors. They do need a custodian. Currently, they only get 45 minutes of custodian time at the Rec Building. The DPW did put in for a nighttime janitor twice a week, which would be better.

#### 6. New Business

Ms. Roy said the Senior Survey had gotten 167 responses online and 40 on paper. They extended the deadline, as they wanted to hit 300 responses. Of 167 online responses, 120 said that a fully accessible intergenerational community center was either very or extremely important. 50% of responses were from residents in single-family homes, not centers. In the Transportation results, almost nobody was using transportation. A lot didn't know about these programs, so they may have education to do. She questioned whether those programs are working for the senior population.

#### 7. Old Business

- a. Mr. Bisson said that 40 PEA staff members did a property cleanup at the Rec Building last month. The front of the building is now visible. They cleaned up stuff that was stored in the back. They painted a meeting room. The department is looking for a new facility but is maintaining and improving what they have.
- b. Mr. Bisson said that the Powderkeg Festival sold \$20,000 more in tickets this year. He doesn't have the final number, but he's estimating \$28,000 in pocket, so it was a big success. He's having a disagreement with Chamber; they would like to see more people in there, but Parks and Rec would not, and Public Safety would not. Ms. Roy said they should keep it a fun, safe festival, not add more revenue. Mr. Wissler suggested charging more.
- c. Mr. Bisson said last year the Halloween parade was rained out, so this was the first year parade on Saturday morning. Downtown merchants were overwhelmed by the turnout for trick-or-treating, there were hundreds of kids.

#### 8. Adjournment

**MOTION:** Mr. Provost moved to adjourn. Mr. Wissler seconded. All were in favor and the meeting was adjourned at 8:57 PM.

Respectfully Submitted,  
Joanna Bartell

Recording Secretary