

Recreation Advisory Board  
Tuesday, May 2, 2023  
Town Offices Wheelwright Room  
7:00 PM  
Draft Minutes

1. Call to Order

Members Present: Chair Stephanie Papakonstantis, Brinn Sullivan, Mike Wissler, Dan Provost, Bob Dudra, Jenn Harrington, Nick Nordin and Select Board Rep Molly Cowan. Greg Bisson, David Tovey, and Caroline Thuma of Parks and Rec were also present.

Members Absent: None

Ms. Papakonstantis called the meeting to order at 7 PM.

2. Public Comment

- a. There was no public comment at this time.

3. Recognitions

- a. Ms. Papakonstantis recognized Mr. Bisson for receiving the “Wink” Tapply award.

4. Minute Approval

- a. March 7, 2023

**MOTION:** Mr. Provost moved to accept the minutes of March 7, 2023 as submitted. Mr. Wissler seconded. Ms. Harrington abstained as she was not present at the March 7 meeting. The motion passed 7-0-1.

5. Pickleball/Tennis Update

Mr. Bisson said we launched pick-up pickleball with an overwhelming response. 189 people signed up, more than last year. We had to turn people away. The program will be on the lower courts on Monday, Wednesday, and Friday from 7 AM - 10 AM. Each person that registered got a season pass that has their name and a barcode to scan to collect data; the data we collect will help us with CIP requests. Tuesday and Thursday nights are adaptive, with Northeast Passage. They will have wheelchairs and assistance for the players. For tennis, Jay Childs [who was present] has proposed a tennis Rec program on Mondays, Wednesdays and Fridays. There's also a Thursday morning group.

Mr. Dudra asked how many people would play tennis. Mr. Childs said we've tried to limit it to four of the lower courts. Last week we had 23. Mr. Bisson said we could get more if we advertise.

Ms. Sullivan asked, with all the scheduled programming, when are the open hours? Mr. Bisson said weekends except for tournaments. The top three courts are reserved for tennis only. Ms. Sullivan asked why there aren't 8 pickleball courts on the

upper level. Mr. Bisson said the Select Board thought that changing the facility was not appropriate at this time. They wanted to collect data first, or add another facility in town.

Ms. Sullivan asked Mr. Bisson to think about other sites in the community.

Pickleball is going to decimate the tennis numbers. Mr. Bisson said any location is yet to be determined. We don't own a lot of town land. 10 Hampton Road could be developed for more parking. No one wants pickleball or dog parks in their backyard. Pickleball works at the Rec Park because the white noise of 101 drowns it out. Another property would need to have bathrooms that are cleaned.

Mr. Childs said he's never wanted pickleball to be in competition with tennis, but it's become that. There are 17.5 million recreational tennis players in the country and 5 million pickleball players, but it's growing. Tennis also grew during Covid. He would like to help find a place for pickleball, but there's no less need for the 8 tennis courts.

Mr. Bisson said in the last year Exeter has become the support system for other towns that don't have the recreation facilities to support the sports. Newfields Youth Association wanted to run a T-ball program, but they canceled it two weeks after we closed our registration. For future CIP suggestions, we should look at the Master Plan. We don't want to go residents-only, but residents will need to support facility upgrades.

Mr. Nordin asked if the purpose of the tennis program is to have more public accessibility and dedicated court time. Mr. Childs said he's just trying to put a foot in the door to have tennis people able to play at times that are popular. Mr. Bisson said we want to give tennis a good designated time and try to grow the sport. Mr. Childs said there's Great Bay Tennis Club and the Sports Barn. It seems like the Pickleball Association wants to do this type of tournament, but someone should open an indoor pickleball facility to meet that demand. Mr. Wissler said these are tennis courts, and it's important to carve out dedicated time that tennis courts are available. Mr. Dudra said we could have 60 people for the pickleball program, with 40 playing and 20 rotating in. Maybe we want to be open and flexible enough to add the nets to the upper courts.

Ms. Papakonstantis asked how we get everyone on the same page on how to have pickleball, tennis, and open time. Mr. Bisson said we want to get a tennis association together and schedule times. Ms. Harrington said we should call them "the courts," not "tennis courts," because "tennis courts" is not inclusive to the other sport.

Mr. Provost said we've had issues like this before where people feel out of the loop. Having an advocacy group that can get information out will be great for the tennis community.

Mr. Childs said the leadership of this [pickleball] organization has voiced it in a way that no one is playing tennis anymore. That doesn't help in not having a competitive environment between the two sports. Ms. Papakonstantis said there should be better communication with both sports. We can do that with signage down there and contacts with the community. Ms. Sullivan said the Facebook page could be used for that. Mr. Wissler said we should mark up the plan of the courts to say certain courts are always available for tennis at these hours. Mr. Bisson said we don't want to say no pickleballers can play. Ms. Papakonstantis said if there were live cameras, people could look to see if the courts were open. Ms. Sullivan said at the end of the season, we'll have more data.

Ms. Sullivan said in Portsmouth, there is free and open play with no supervision. We don't allow tournaments. It's tricky to try to manage this the way that Exeter is doing. Mr. Provost said 50% of the time should be unprogrammed. Mr. Bisson said programming could be only on the lower courts.

Mr. Nordin said the tennis program is being proposed to get a foot in the door for court time, as opposed to making as many programs available to the community as possible.

Ms. Sullivan said we have a link to USTA on the website. We could direct players to other towns.

Mr. Bisson asked if the Board would be in favor of buying a set of semi-permanent pickleball nets. They could still be moved out of the way. Ms. Sullivan said you have to be responsive to what 190 people want. Ms. Thuma said 45 people are on the waiting list.

**MOTION:** Mr. Wissler moved in favor of buying another set of portable pickleball nets, meaning two nets. Mr. Dudra seconded. Ms. Sullivan said she would like to empower the Rec Department to buy what they think is necessary. Mr. Bisson said we wouldn't need more than two. The motion passed 7-0.

Mr. Wissler said this is a public Rec Park. If people show up with tennis racquets, there's a reasonable expectation that people should be able to play tennis.

#### 6. Introduction: Caroline Thuma Recreation Coordinator

Ms. Papakonstantis welcomed Caroline Thuma, the new Recreation Coordinator, and Ms. Thuma introduced herself.

#### 7. Recaps

##### a. Easter Egg Hunt

Mr. Bisson said we had to move the Egg Hunt to the Rec Park because of work being done on Swasey Parkway. It was a success because there was more parking. The new bunny costume was a big hit.

##### b. Spring Sports Registration

Mr. Bisson said spring sports are very full. For T-Ball, we love working with EJBSL, they got the fields at Gilman ready. One team name is the "Trash Pandas." The soccer numbers are good. The 7" of rain recently was not so good, and we may have to push back the first week at Brickyard.

##### c. Camp/Pool Hiring Payscale

Mr. Tovey said we're good on staff. We could take one or two more but he's not concerned. Ms. Thuma said the camp staff is good. We may do a job fair next year. Mr. Bisson said went to the Select Board for an increase in the pay scale. Ms. Sullivan said regarding the pool, the only other private workplace is Water Country and the training is not transferable. Your training has value. Mr. Bisson said it's rare to have someone last with us for more than 6-8 years.

##### d. 10 Hampton Road Renovation Update

Mr. Bisson said renovations have gone well. We're starting to do the final painting. We're trying to schedule Bell & Flynn to pave the gravel portion of the parking lot by the ADA ramp. There are a few more items and modifications for Dept of Labor standards.

e. Community Center Investment Program Grant

Mr. Bisson said we're using the \$25,800 we already spent as a grant match. With a \$155,000 total match, we applied for \$996,000 to renovate the whole place. We need to meet an energy policy; CDFA did an audit and will have recommendations. We should know in 1-2 weeks if we get the grant. If we get it, we will have it in June. We have the RFP ready to go out so we can get some bids back before then. Even though it's partially federal, Davis-Bacon does not apply.

8. Discussion Items

a. Age-Friendly Community Network

Mr. Tovey said the AARP Age-Friendly Community Network's purpose is to show that the town's elected officials are dedicated to creating an age-friendly community. They provide resources and training, and give us a livability score. Ms. Sullivan said you can weave this through all of your programming elements of age-friendliness. Everything is seen through that lens. It opens you up to grants from AARP and other resources. Exeter already does this well, but it gives a name to it. If the Board supports, there would be a letter of intent from the Select Board, a plan of action, and a steering committee. Ms. Sullivan said Portsmouth doesn't have a steering committee.

**MOTION:** Mr. Wissler moved that the Rec Board recommend to the Select Board that we apply to become an AARP age-friendly community. Ms. Sullivan seconded. The motion passed 7-0.

b. Field Rental Usage/Rates Update

Mr. Bisson said we're inundated with field rental requests. We're going to survey other towns to see how much they charge. We haven't had a rate increase in 20 years. We just renovated the infields, which cost \$16,000. Ms. Papakonstantis said Brentwood charges \$75 per practice, and we're well under that. Mr. Provost said that's for private groups. Ms. Harrington asked what the process is for renting space. Mr. Bisson said the application hasn't been redone in 20 years. There's a town property policy that preferences town groups, then the SAU, then other organizations. For other organizations it's first come first serve. We want more transparency.

c. CIP Suggestions

- i. Mr. Bisson said we can table this for next time. He's looking for recommendations. There are big items coming up, and we need to look at the Master Plan. For 2024, we're looking at Parks Improvement and Planet Playground. Ms. Sullivan asked about the skate park. Mr. Bisson said a group came in but never came back. That would be a fundraising effort or a grant.

9. Old Business

- a. Ms. Sullivan asked for an update on the bike/walk master plan. Mr. Bisson said Dave [Sharples] got approval for the traffic study, and he's waiting to incorporate everything. The Kingston Road sidewalks should be done this year. Ms. Sullivan said she hopes the survey reveals the need for a sidewalk from the middle school to the Rec Park. Mr. Bisson said we're hoping to work out being on a bus route. Ms. Papakonstantis suggested having a Master Plan discussion at the next meeting.

10. New Business

- a. Mr. Wissler suggested putting in a batting cage. This would be automatic and for-profit. We may be able to find some investors to cover the cost. Mr. Bisson said that could be a good revenue source. We could ask Primex if that's allowed.

11. Adjournment

**MOTION:** Mr. Wissler moved to adjourn, Ms. Sullivan seconded. The motion passed 7-0 and the meeting adjourned at 8:34 PM.

Respectfully Submitted,  
Joanna Bartell  
Recording Secretary