

**Minutes of the Newburyport Parks Commission**  
**June 16, 2022**  
*Zoom Meeting*

Call to order: 6:00 p.m.  
A quorum was present

In attendance: Chair Ted Boretti, Paul Swindlehurst, Charles Griffin, Nicole Whelan

Also in attendance: Parks Manager Mike Hennessey, (no attendee list available)

**APPROVAL OF MEETING MINUTES**

**This item was tabled.**

**OLD BUSINESS**

*Campout—Cashman, August 5-6, 2022 (NYS & cub scouts)*

Dan Logan presented the application, filed jointly between NYS and the Cub Scouts. NYS is hosting a movie night, and the Cub Scouts would like to add a campout element in order to encourage children to try camping out. Commissioner Swindlehurst asked what time the group would exit the park on Aug 6. Answer: by 10 am. Commissioner Swindlehurst suggested the Cub Scouts coordinate the event with the Chair of Yankee Homecoming for the closing of the park to ensure no conflicts. Logan said he was already doing so. Chair Boretti asked about contingent approval from other departments. Parks Director Reid stated that no further department approvals were needed. **Motion by Commissioner Griffin to approve permit as presented, seconded by Commissioner Swindlehurst. So voted on a role call vote, 4 yes.**

**NEW BUSINESS**

*Pump Track at March's Hill (Dante Chabot)*

Chair Boretti stated that the Commission had received many emails regarding this agenda item and that this would be the first opportunity to hear public comment. He stated that he did not expect a final resolution tonight, but that this would be an opportunity to allow the public to be heard. He outlined the process for the discussion, beginning with background on the issues, followed by presentation by Dante Chabot, then public comment, and finally Commission deliberation. Chair Boretti provided background on the issue: Biking has occurred at March's Hill for many years, and a year ago, bikers were given approval with conditions by the Parks Commission to use the trails. Alterations may have been made to the trails without explicit approval by the Commission, and the Commission is now hearing increasing concern from residents. There was a meeting in the Mayor's office to discuss. Director Reid described the meeting with the Mayor, Councillors Donahue and Vogel, Parks Commission Chair Boretti, Special Projects Manager Turner, Chief of Staff Levine, Parks Manager Hennessey, and Parks Director Reid, who met to discuss the many communications received, and how the activity impacts the neighbors and the environment. The group recognizes the impact on the neighbors and is also thoughtful of children wanting to use the park for recreation. They discussed how to actively seek resolution, including working with the City Solicitor to ensure safety and liability. Parking would need to be approved by the City Council, and there would be no lighting or fencing. While the trails have been present for many years, they are aware of a new section of trails more recently. No trees were removed by the bikers, but some trees were removed by the Department, and understory has been reduced. The group discussed the Parks Department working with youth to re-introduce native plantings and target restoration zones and/or buffer plantings toward the neighbors. The group discussed the Department

providing closer oversight in maintaining the trails in the future. The Director will meet with the consultant who built trails in Stratham, NH to ensure a baseline of safety of the trails. Signage will be installed to encourage courteous behavior, no new builds, no placing of dangerous materials across jumps. The group discussed a commitment to transparency and open communication with the aim to come to consensus. Chair Boretti reiterated that Commission is reading all communications and is taking this seriously. He then introduced Dante Chabot, who presented a project for a pump track. Jamie Chabot introduced Dante, who has been biking at March's Hill since he was 8, and feels this is a tremendous asset for the community. Dante presented his project, which is part of the 'I am We' project for school, a community focused project with the aim to make a difference in the City. He stated that he has been using the area more since the pandemic began. His plans for improvements include encouraging bikers to become stewards for the park, remove trash and debris, clear overgrowth, and give the park a better use. He described the project as low cost, encouraging kids of all skill levels to exercise in a fun atmosphere and keep kids outside. The Water Department has approved this project on their property and he wants to fundraise to move forward. He described 'code of conduct signage': courteous to neighbors, helmets required, dawn to dusk, don't ride when wet, no changes without permission, no littering, no amplified sound, no alcohol use, etc. Chair Boretti thanked Dante for his presentation and opened for public comment, with a reminder for a 2 minute limit per person. Seth Peterson, 15 Union St. been riding there for 2 years, great community, come together, has experienced increasing problems with residents, including a woman who attacks them with vulgar language. Others walk by and offer support. Split feedback, wants to find consensus, wants to know what the neighbors want from them as they don't ride a night. Merrick Barlow, 366 High St. stated one of the benefits of biking at March's Hill is being able to make friends, he goes to private school, and with Covid, its been hard to make friends, this has been a great outlet. Better than playing video games. Shay Trail, 14 Rawson Ave one of the only girls who bikes at March's Hill, this is an opportunity for girls to be more involved in mountain biking, encourage a community-based opportunity. Tom Murray, 2 Toppans his son loves biking at March's Hill, discovered years ago, it's a gem in Newburyport, opportunity for kids to be outside and close to everything. Applaud Commission for allowing this to happen, its unique for many towns, Newburyport is showing a strong effort on finding unique opportunities for kids. Allow kids to connect with nature on their own level—these kids will be the future for preservation of the environment. Paula Katkin, 5 Coffins Ct impressive presentation, understand the initiative and value of letting kids be outdoors, concern is not with kids, but with current trails and proposed pump track, Parks Department gave 2/3 of a City park to a special interest group without any input from residents, made woodlands unusable for anyone else. Tyse Tague, 18 Collins St has been biking at March's Hill for 4-5 years, met all his friends there, progressed as a rider, building a pump track would allow more kids to get involved in biking as well. Karen Clagget, 3 Coffins Court lived here for 45 years, uses rail trail a lot, has never complained about the park until now. Wanted a meeting with neighbors a year ago, feels that proximity of neighbors to this park, they should have been involved in the beginning. Needs adult supervision. Brian McCarthy, 11 Coffins Court, concerned about the safety of the jumps and future alterations, wants to continue open dialogue, asked if a site assessment been done for other locations for pump track. Rachel Mullen, 8 Coffins has a feasibility study been done for pump track here vs other locations across town, have police, fire and public safety been engaged, there is no turnaround at Coffins Court and so the access to this location would be difficult. Parks Department did not create a baseline when this was created to understand the limits of the trails. Garrig Wittner, 2 East Boylston has been riding for many years, work as a team to create awesome bike trails, great way to be outdoors with friends with different skill levels, they pick up trash and its nicer now, would be happy to volunteer his time to make this work. Mike Page, 189 Merrimac St need to have an honest discussion, he complained 2.5 years ago when kids were cutting down trees. Doesn't want all of March's Hill to be turned into a pump track. Minutes from last May say no more digging or expanding trails, which is happening, signs are not helping. They are not in compliance. Cara Vecchio, 56 Spofford St has 17 year old twins who are involved in parks, son is biker, she is a psychologist, and discussed mental health of kids during Covid, detrimental to mental well-being, this has offered a chance to be part of community, outside, exercise, with friends, mental and physical benefits, feels strongly that we support Newburyport youth. Stephen Mullen, 8 Coffins Court, kids are being industrious and social, but that does not demand that it needs to be at this one location, they were at Crow lane, Atkinson Common, wants to see feasibility study of other locations in the city where this can happen. Jasmine MacDonald, Columbus St this is 'don't want this in my backyard' and in a city this small, there are lots of recreational areas, but not a lot of opportunities for kids who age out of swing sets, we should be excited and supportive of this. Don't get too much government involved, no fence. Matt Tague, 18 Collins Ct in support of bikers, wants to see signage to respect neighbors and environment. All of March's Hill will not become bike trails, its 9 acres big, and this is a small portion of that. Renee Pellitier, 11 Coffins Court puts too much pressure on kids when the Parks Department should have had open dialogue with residents much earlier. Kids are stripping bark off trees. Caleb Barlow, 366 High St parent of one of the kids that uses park, this is amazing, maker space, welcome

environment for kids of all ages and skill levels, learning critical skills, including how to engage with inappropriate adult behavior. Have an opportunity to show kids how to behave, how to work together to find consensus. Elaine Fearnley, 31 Purchase St thank the kids for initiative. Son is a biker, now 27 years old, was digging trails many years ago, understands that it has escalated, but it's a great opportunity for kids, March's Hill is not a pristine park, long been a dumping area, with lots of invasive species. Disagrees with environmental impact. Director Reid read a letter into the record by Paul Recinos opposed to pump track as proposed, wants current trails to be restored, wants a feasibility study on alternate locations, wants to be sure its ADA accessible. Matt Trail, 14 Rawson Ave, in support of the bike trails at this park, not many spaces for unorganized play in Newburyport. Elizabeth Leukens, 3 Fruit St not just for fun, can engage kids as volunteers, work together, place to coexist. Sounds like a 'not in my backyard' issue. Councillor Donahue, 18 Cherry St thanked all kids and residents for comments. Paying close attention to this issue. Wants to find a way to work together to find common ground. A site selection study can be expensive, would turn this into a larger project than it needs to be. Biking at March's Hill occurred organically, it wasn't that the Department was being lax, this has occurred organically, it has been there historically. We can work together to address concerns, but March's Hill is the appropriate site for this. Commissioner Boretti has lived in Newburyport for 8 years, and has witnessed the biking there the entire time, also at Atkinson and Woodland Park, tells him there is a need for this activity, whether we like it or not, kids will find ways to bike there, enforcement will be tricky—will not be able to station police officer there all the time, banning biking is not a reasonable solution. Commissioner Whelan impressed with kids proactivity, leadership and problem solving, is it possible to have a space for kids to ride and also make it less impactful on residents, how do we make this happen, does not feel she has 100% of the information right now, if a pump track was built, would that alleviate some of the concerns about safety and environment?, if a pump track were built somewhere else, how would that impact what is happening at March's Hill, supports kids riding at March's Hill. Commissioner Griffin understands there have been bike trails here for 25 years, and the new trails were done with City approval, damage to trees is minor, supports continued biking at March's Hill. Commissioner Griffin thanked the kids for coming forward with presentation in a positive way, impressive, his background as an executive for YMCA when BMX biking popular in the 80's, has visited March's Hill 4 times in 6 weeks, has seen kids riding, spent time at Stratham Hill Bike Track, which is amazing, asked lots of questions about how it became what it is, currently raising \$30K to put in version 2.0, it's a super story and an amazing facility, his concerns are that the level of professional management is lacking here, we could have done a better job at planning the area better, ultimate responsibility should not be on the kids, more active management of March's Hill is needed, there are dangerous jumps, need safety rules, need signage, trails are larger than what was approved 1 year ago, did not see a lot of damage to existing trees, not convinced that the pump track location here makes sense, concerns about what the abutters face, need for professional design and management, anticipation of maintenance. Chair Boretti feels he cannot make decision on pump track until the larger trail system is dealt with. What is there now is larger than what the Commission approved. This is a grassroots, organic project that was driven by the kids, which is wonderful, but now it needs more program management and problem solving. Various groups of kids using the site, how to manage information being passed on to new groups and generations, how to manage it? Director Reid stated that the Parks Department did not give permission, does not have that authority, only the Commission can grant permission. Permission was given in May 2021. Is not convinced that the trail is larger now. Can map the trails via GPS and assess the changes. Chair Boretti suggests tabling the issue of the pump track while the Commission addresses concerns that have been brought up tonight (safety, language, etc.). Commissioner Swindlehurst understands that the land proposed for pump track is partially on Parks and partly on Water Department land, and Water Department approved. Reid- Water Commission did have a public meeting about this, not sure if abutters were noticed. Commissioner Griffin said he does not want to prevent kids from riding the trails while this is being considered, very concerned about barbed wire and trash being dumped on the trails, what are the rights of the neighbors to have a say in what happens in the park? Commissioner Swindlehurst asked that Department take a more active role in managing trails. Wants to see a GPS map of the trail system to understand what is there, and what has been expanded. Figure out how/where to create a pump track. Councillor Donahue stated she is happy to sponsor resident-only parking on Coffins Court to help alleviate that concern. Residents should reach out to her, she can speak with Clerk, can take up to 6 weeks in Council. Chair Boretti will keep item on agenda as old business until it is resolved. **Motion by Commissioner Swindlehurst to table the proposal of the pump track at March's Hill to a later date, seconded by Commissioner Griffin. So voted on a roll call vote, 4 yes.**

*Pickleball signup at Perkin's Park (Sophia Kirkpatrick)*

This item has been withdrawn.

*ACES tree education*

Chair Boretti stated that he has been working with ACES and High School students to work on signage and identify species at Atkinson Common for this program. He introduced 3 students to present the project. Audrey Langley described the project, which is to copy what ACES has done in West Newbury, set up signs to explain the trees in the area, and encourage people to connect with the environment. The design would have common name at the top in larger font, the scientific name underneath in smaller font, followed by the body of text that has interesting facts about the trees. A QR code would be included that would bring allow one to access more information. An image would be located in the upper right corner and the overall color palette would be neutral. The website would be thorough ACES, and allow for donations for the cause. Claudia Cummings explained the goal of the project to educate people about trees, with interesting facts about the trees and a map of all the trees in the park. Lyza Marino explained that Atkinson Common has diverse trees that the public should be aware of. Commissioner Swindlehurst asked the size of the sign and where it would be affixed. Answer: 5"x7" sign attached to a pole in the ground near the tree. Commissioner Swindlehurst asked how this would be paid for. Answer: by ACES, including for replacements. Commissioner Griffin suggested the pole be fairly low to the ground and tilted upward so as not to be intrusive. Chair Boretti suggested the signs match those of the artwork posts along the CCRT. Councillor Wallace stated her support for the project. Asked about the schedule. Answer: hope by the end of July. Commissioner Swindlehurst stated that there doesn't seem to be a graphic standard for signs in the parks, would this follow an existing graphic standard or start a new standard? Answer: Director Reid impressed with graphic work the kids have done so far, doesn't need to match other graphic standards since it's a standalone project. Parks Manager Hennessey asked that he be included in placement and construction of the signs, since he'll need to work around the signs during maintenance. Hennessey also expressed a need to revisit signage that is installed in parks that falls into disrepair or is vandalized, and needs clarification as to how long should be maintained once a project is abandoned. Commissioner Griffin mentioned that a group of people in the City is reviewing a public art policy which is similar to this, and could be handled within that document. **Motion by Commissioner Griffin to approve the project to install signs at Atkinson Common, working with Parks Manager Hennessey on placement and construction, seconded by Commissioner Swindlehurst. So voted on a roll call vote, 4 yes.**

*Adopt-a-Trail, 'share the trail' signs, and First Night (Rick Taintor)*

**Motion by Commissioner Griffin to table, seconded by Commissioner Swindlehurst. So voted on a roll call vote, 4 yes.**

*Flag application, Yankee Homecoming Flag at Bartlet Mall, July 30-Aug 7<sup>th</sup> 2022 (Jason LaCroix)*

Director Reid presented a proposal by Yankee Homecoming to fly the Yankee Homecoming flag at Bartlet Mall from July 30-Aug 7, as has been done for many years. **Motion by Commissioner Swindlehurst to approve the flying of the Yankee Homecoming Flag at the Bartlet Mall from July 20-August 7, seconded by Commissioner Griffin. So voted on a roll call vote, 4 yes.**

*Jim McCarthy tree donations*

Jim McCarthy presented his proposal to plant 100 trees in the City. He has worked with the Tree Commission, the Schools and the Parks Commission in the past and aims to plant 5-6 trees per year. He prefers to donate large, deciduous trees. He planted 5 at Atwood Park last year and would like the Commission to identify 5-6 locations per year to propose to him for his donations. He would like to continue the allee at the Bartlet Mall this year. He asks that signs are never put on his trees, as he does not like signs cluttering the City. Commissioner Griffin thanked Jim McCarthy on his efforts and asked that the tree species be run by Special Projects Manager Kim Turner if they are different from what was listed on the plan. Jim answered that he would be happy to work with Kim to select the best trees. Commissioner Swindlehurst thanked Jim McCarthy for his efforts throughout the City on planting and maintaining trees. **Motion by Commissioner Griffin to accept the donation of trees for Bartlet Mall with approval by Kim Turner, seconded by Commissioner Swindlehurst. So voted on a roll call vote, 4 yes.**

*Rose bush next to Cohodas bench at Cashman Park*

**Motion by Commissioner Swindlehurst to table, seconded by Commissioner Griffin. So voted on a voice vote, 4 yes.**

*Approve Betsy Ross flag at Bartlet Mall, July 4 weekend (Rich Banks)*

Rich Banks presented his proposal to fly a 12'x18' Betsy Ross flag at Bartlet Mall on July 4 weekend. Rich has been managing flags in the City for over 30 years, by loan, which means they are protected by law. **Motion by Commissioner Griffin to approve the flying of Betsy Ross flag over July 4<sup>th</sup> weekend at the Bartlet Mall, seconded by Commissioner Swindlehurst. So voted on a roll call vote, 4 yes.**

**Motion to adjourn by Commissioner Swindlehurst, seconded by Commissioner Griffin. So voted on a roll call vote, 4 yes.**

*Adjourned 8:40 p.m.*