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Minutes of the Newburyport Parks Commission

September 29, 2022

Senior Community Center First Floor Room A and/or Patio

Call to order: 6:00 p.m.

A quorum was present

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

Also in attendance: Parks Manager Mike Hennessey, Manager of Special Projects Kim Turner, Sandra Thaxter, Ben Iacono, Bob Watts, Carol Robertson, Paula Estey

MEETING MINUTES APPROVAL

June 16

Motion by Commissioner Griffin to approve the minutes of the June 16 Parks Commission meeting, seconded by Commissioner Ellsworth. So voted on a unanimous voice vote.

August 25

Motion by Commissioner Griffin to approve the minutes of the August 25 Parks Commission meeting, seconded by Commissioner Ellsworth. So voted on a unanimous voice vote.

OLD BUSINESS

Approval of garden plaque (Laudato Si committee)

Carol Robertson presented the project. The Support-A-Spot garden, which supports bees, birds and butterflies has already been approved by the Commission. She is asking to install an engraved stone with the words “We are not disconnected from the rest of creatures, but joined in splendid universal communion” by Pope Francis in lieu of the standard plaque. Parks Manager Hennessey asked if the stone would be in the lawn area or tucked into the garden. Answer: tucked into the garden. **Motion by Commissioner Swindlehurst to accept the stone as proposed in lieu of the plaque, seconded by Commissioner Griffin. So voted on a unanimous voice vote.**

NEW BUSINESS

Request to place temporary mural banners along the Clipper City Rail Trail near the Wastewater Treatment Facility and Joppa Park—Small Solutions Big Ideas (Sandra Thaxter)

Sandra Thaxter presented the request to install temporary banners along the Clipper City Rail Trail near the Wastewater treatment facility. She is part of a non-profit working with youth to advocate for

environmental protection and climate awareness. She worked with youth in Newburyport and Kenya, as well as Afghan refugees in Newburyport, with grant money from the MA Cultural Council in order to connect youth, art and climate. The art was scanned and a mural was created that reflects wildlife on our waterfront. They are now looking for a place to display the art and would like to propose the area in front of the fence near the wastewater treatment facility. The three banners would not be attached to the fence, but rather mounted to a plywood backing and staked into the ground at roughly 18" above the lawn. Commissioner Swindlehurst asked if the intention was for the banners to be temporary. Answer: yes, 2-3 months, this is meant to be a pilot that could be reassessed after a year and potentially obtain more grant funding. Commissioner Swindlehurst stated his concern about safety and would like them located with Parks Manager Hennessey, and would like them removed in late fall. Chair Boretti asked whether this should be part of a larger policy question about how to select art. Commissioner Swindlehurst stated that the Commission has more flexibility to accept this application now, before a final public art policy is adopted. Commissioner Griffin stated that he would approve this as a short-term project, and that future installations would be vetted through the public art policy. Parks Manager Hennessey asked what the expectation would be if the banners fell over. Answer: the applicant would maintain them. Parks Manager Hennessey stated that he had a concern regarding mowing if these were not placed on the fence. **Motion by Commissioner Swindlehurst to approve the proposal to install 3 temporary banners from now until December 1 at a location at or near the Wastewater Treatment Facility subject to Parks Manager Hennessey's approval on location and method of install, and if those cannot be agreed upon, the project would come back to the Commission for review, seconded by Commissioner Griffin. So voted on a unanimous voice vote.**

Installation of trash can at Bartlet Mall & general update on Bartlet Mall project— (Chuck Griffin & Kim Turner)

Commissioner Griffin explained that the trash cans at Bartlet Mall were moved around a year ago and only one was left near the playground end of the Mall. He is requesting one trash can near the bike racks to the right of the courthouse. This location will allow for DPS to easily enter into the courthouse parking area and service the trash can. An image of the trash can, which matches others in the City, was presented and the price was given at \$750. Commissioner Griffin also announced the successful, unanimous vote by the City Council on Tuesday night to approve the \$2.5M bond order from the CPA to clean up Frog Pond. Some of the details are still up in the air but the project is moving forward. **Motion to approve the purchase and installation of one trash can as described by Commissioner Swindlehurst, seconded by Commissioner Griffin. So voted on a unanimous voice vote.**

March's Hill – postponed until October

Chair Boretti stated the Commission was waiting for the report by PowderHorn to be completed, and so no new information was available. Once the report is available, discussions could resume around March's Hill biking. The report will assess the conditions of the existing trails and provide recommendations to the Commission about how to improve conditions with regards to safety, environmental concerns, maintenance and communication. Once the initial report is presented, the company may be hired, if appropriate and desired, to engage in further design studies. This contract does not include a discussion of a pump track, only the existing trail system. Commissioner Swindlehurst asked how much this report cost. KT: \$1600. Commissioner Whelan asked what the status was on the recent signs that were installed and vandalized. MH: they have been reinstalled with concrete footings. **No action was taken.**

Cashman park signage—(Mike Hennessey)

Parks Manager Hennessey stated that the softball leagues at Cashman Park often overflow the trash barrels, and that Recycling and Energy Manager Ettenborough removed them once emptying them became a challenge. Parks Manager Hennessey communicated to the leagues to carry in and carry out any trash. The league president asked that a sign be posted to remind players to do so. Parks Manager Hennessey is requesting two 10"x14" signs to be installed in front of the bullpens. A graphic was provided to the Commissioners. Chair Boretti asked what the material would be for the signs. MH: aluminum. **Motion by Commissioner Ellsworth to install two signs at Cashman Park as described, seconded by Commissioner Griffin. So voted on a unanimous voice vote.**

CPC application consideration—(Kim Turner)

Special Projects Manager Turner stated that this year's CPC application deadline was moved from early February to December 16, in order to allow all approval milestones to be reached before the construction season commences. Based on previous requests by the Commission, she suggested that a list of potential candidates for CPC consideration be reviewed early, to reach consensus and planning for applications with ample time before the deadline. She provided the Commission with a comprehensive list of parks projects from the recently completed Facilities Master Plan. Commissioner Swindlehurst stated he is glad the Commission is starting early on deliberations and asked that the administration provide a prioritized list to the Commission, so the Commission could have more direction in their deliberations. He proposed this prioritized list be provided to the Commission a week prior to the October meeting so that deliberations could occur, and possible decisions made in October, with a carryover of discussions in November only if absolutely necessary. Chair Boretti agreed and asked the Commission to be prepared to vote on potential applications in October. Commissioner Swindlehurst described a matrix of decision inputs that might include safety, historic preservation, and populations served. He suggested that prime candidates might meet one or more criteria of resolving a safety concerns, preserving an historic asset and/or serving an underserved population. He also suggested the Commission and Administration consider projects that may be fully funded by CPA funds and/or those that may have a more likely potential to receive gap funding from identified sources should CPA funds be made available. A short list of potential candidates should intersect several of these criteria. Commissioner Griffin suggested another criteria might be projects where CPA funding would give the City 'more bang for their buck'. Commissioner Whelan added that she would consider projects that might benefit a larger population of the City as potentially being more attractive. **No action was taken.**

Strategic Visioning session introduction & brief discussion around Parks Reorganization plan—(Kim Turner)

Chair Boretti stated that he wanted to discuss the Parks Reorganization Plan as a group. He stated that he wants to begin with what he sees as a shared premise that the Parks Department was not operating as strongly as it could because of inefficiencies and sees this reorganization as seeking to solve those inefficiencies. He asked each Commissioner to answer two questions: 1. What is the greatest strength of the reorganization plan and 2. What would be a change you would make. Chair Boretti answered these questions for himself stating that he believed the strength was moving maintenance to DPS in order to eliminate redundancies, reduce costs and improve administration efficiencies to allow Mike and his staff a clearer focus, as long as they remain a Division within DPS. He went on to describe that he sees the greatest weakness as being 34 tasks redistributed into 9 positions under 4 departments and asked if these would all be coordinated. He is concerned that communication would be a struggle. Commissioner Ellsworth stated that he agreed with the Chair with regard to the strengths of the plan. He felt the weaknesses included that the plan felt rushed, did not consider input from the Parks Commission, and he did not feel there was a plan. He is concerned that he does not know who the

Admins at DPS are, and that they do not have the appropriate knowledge or background about parks, and continuity would be lost. He also stated that he did not understand how fundraising would be managed moving forward. He is concerned that interaction with the public would be compromised now that there is no hierarchy of oversight. He also stated that he felt this pause in the plan is providing the opportunity to 'make it better now'. Commissioner Whelan stated that she felt the operational efficiencies made sense to her and that the Commission already has a strong connection with Parks Manager Hennessey and she feels this will only make that connection stronger. She also stated that she has faith in the Commission to remain the thoughtful protectors of parks. Commissioner Griffin stated that he sees two advantages to the plan, 1. By moving parks into DPS, there may be an opportunity to receive more financial support and 2. This move will allow the parks to capture more professional staff that already exist within DPS with an opportunity for more and better operational efficiencies. He sees the weakness in the plan as the personalities are not the same and there may not be as much sensitivity toward parks. He also stated that he felt Special Projects Manager Turner, based on her experience with the Commission, is in a position to move this forward with success, but worries about what might happen when she is gone. Commissioner Swindlehurst stated that he doesn't feel this reorganization plan is a plan. A plan is an initiative that brings us into the future with thoughtful evaluation, deadlines and goals. What was presented by the administration was an assessment where responsibilities were reassigned. He stated his desire to create a strategic plan that looks 20 years into the future, defines the role of the Commission, what principal responsibilities should be, and what efficiencies can be captured. He stated that his fear is that this time will be used to answer further questions and not make any real change to the plan, but wants to take a fresh start and look at where parks can be in 15-20 years. Special Projects Manager Turner stated that she would like to work with the Commission over the coming weeks or months to execute a strategic visioning plan with the Commission, and to identify where the Commission wants the parks to go over the next 10 years. She outlined an exercise that begins with a new mission statement, then defines prioritized objectives, details projects that can be embarked upon to achieve the identified goals and objectives, and measures success with key indicators. She asked that the Commissioners begin by thinking about why they each decided to join the Commission, and to come to the next meeting with a response to that question, which will help kickoff a discussion around a new, high-level mission of the Commission. Turner stated that she would be involved to provide a framework for this work, ask clarifying questions to move the discussion, and put together the final document which synthesizes everything discussed. She also stated that others can be brought into the conversation as goals are identified, to broaden discussions where appropriate. Commissioner Swindlehurst presented a sample strategic plan from another community as being an example of the type of work that could be done, and the product that could be created. Chair Boretti asked if the Commissioners would commit to scheduling some special meetings in the coming weeks, so this work can happen outside of other agenda items that may distract from the focused discussion. Answer: yes. **No action was taken.**

Motion to adjourn by Commissioner Griffin, seconded by Commissioner Ellsworth. So voted on a unanimous voice vote.

Adjourned 7:32 p.m.