

City Council Committee Reports for 2023

Date: February 21, 2023 *Recorder:* McCauley

Community Service Committee

Councillors Attending		Others Attending	Address
James McCauley	<i>m</i>		
Jennie Donahue	<i>m</i>		
Connie Preston	<i>m</i>		
Byron J. Lane			
Ed Cameron			
Heather L. Shand	<i>x</i>		
Afroz Khan			
Bruce L. Vogel			
Christine E. Wallace	<i>x</i>		
Sharif I. Zeid			
Mark Wright			

AGENDA ITEMS

ACTION TAKEN

<i>Approval of Previous Minutes</i>	<i>3-0</i>
<i>Discussion with Health Director</i>	<i>No Action</i>
<i>ORDR 417 1-30-23 Parks Reorg Plan COTW</i>	<i>Approve 2-1</i>
<i>COMM460 1-30-23 Letters in Support of Parks Plan</i>	<i>R&F 3-0</i>
<i>ORDR419 1-30-23 Resolution of Pete Pollard</i>	<i>Approve 3-0</i>

Recording

You can copy the recording information below and share with others

https://us02web.zoom.us/rec/share/6UTWA941xK-iNWjl85WkrGJ4ozU4bmJO_8KDup9t3QSehTp3n9egyUphvEWph9-1.cJhjDqkc82veyeTm

Agenda Items

Present were: Cnclr Preston, Cnclr McCauley. Cnclr Donahue was remote.

Approval of Minutes from Previous Meetings: Minutes from 2/7 approved 3-0

Order 419 Resolution o Pete Pollard

Sponsored by Cnlrs Preston and Lane, is a resolution honoring the life of Pete Pollard.

Cnclr Preston spoke of here developing friendship with Pete first in downtown, and then as he aged at the Brigham Manor facility. A long time resident and fixture in the downtown. Upon his death, a proposal to post a plaque outside of Richdale's, commemorating Pete's impact on the community.

Public Comment: Don Little, 6 Cottage St, relative of Pete's. Thought the effort would be a fitting tribute to such a kind-hearted soul. Supported the resolution.

Committee: Vote to Approve 3-0

COMM 460 Letters in Support of Parks Reorg

This communication was a bundle of letters supporting the Parks Program. Letters from the Port Parks Alliance, DPS, Parks Commission, NYS, Plan Office, and the Parks Manager.

Committee: Receive and File Vote 3-0.

Additional Written comments attached.

ORDR 417 Parks Reorg Plan (COTW)

A continuation of the discussion from previous meeting 2/13 and Public Meeting on 2/15.

A quick review of the Administration's Parks Re-Org plan to set the discussion within the committee.

There seem to be 2 sides to this debate: One is that only via a new parks director can the right level of priority and visibility be achieved, the other side is that by integrating parks dept into the existing operations of the city can the dept be effective.

A question to the administration: How do we plan to measure the progress and effectiveness of the program.. Chief of Staff Levine commented on the existing metrics of the Work Order system, the online reservation system MyRec, the new framework of the Parks Commission's Vision of Short-Med-Long goals, the separation of the Volunteer/advocacy/fundraising into a 3rd party entity. While all these are new, the basis is there for timely ongoing measurements especially looping in more community feedback as the process continues.

Committee: Vote 2-1 to approve. (1 vote to continue to hold until a permanent DPS director).

Discussion with Health Director

Health Dir, Laura Vlasuk, was present to give the committee and overview of the going's on within the Health Dept. Items she highlighted: Hiring a New Office Mgr, On track to complete Food Inspections for all facilities 2x this year, Have part-time inspector to focus on nights/weekends—very effective. Laura also talked about a project she's working on....this project is to outfit a trailer with supplies to be on the ready for an emergency situation. We have the trailer, its is parked at DPS facility, we have the supplies, we need some shelving etc within the trailer. We'll see this in the CIP request.

Suggestion by Cnclr Donahue to possibly partner with the COA for hard to find items like a wheelchair etc.

Q by Cnclr Donahue with regards to Animal Control: Cnclr was asking if the dept had enough staff? Ans: using a part time animal control for weekends, which is helping ease the burden. Good for now.

Finally, the discussion turned to summer festivals, Director believes that all inspections can be done in-house (vs hiring add'l part time inspectors as was done previously).

Motion to adjourn 3-0.

Additional Written Comments

I respectfully request that my letter (below is same as attached) be included as part of the information given to councilors on the Mayor's Parks Reorganization Plan.

Thank you.

Regards

Andy Simpson
1 ½ Greenleaf St.
Andrewsimpson53@comcast.net
617.325.3070

Dear Councilor:

I had a nightmare the other night. *I dreamt that the mayor fired the Youth Services director and announced a reorganization. The School Committee will approve all youth programming. Senior/community center staff will offer cooking classes, arts and crafts, and pre-school programs. The Parks Department will host the garden club and horseback riding. Youth sports will add a Dungeons & Dragons league. The mayor's office will plan special events including school vacations, summer trips and dances. The library will handle safe sitter classes. Public Health will provide all counseling services. And DPS will handle all administration, scheduling and budgeting with its proprietary software.*

Then I woke up in a panic. Just kidding. But you get the idea.

Kidding aside, Mayor Reardon's "new" parks reorganization plan is essentially the same plan that the mayor withdrew due to public opposition. The Parks Commission and the new Port Parks Alliance have done a good job defining their roles and goals. But there is still no dedicated parks department or parks director. The plan does not provide for central leadership, advocacy, oversight, coordination or accountability—the main concern raised by the public. It still spreads tasks across multiple agencies. Bottom line, nobody is in charge.

Ironically, the argument for a dedicated department and director is even more compelling considering the ambitious wish lists of the Parks Commission and Alliance.

The amount of work that the parks manager and the special projects manager are currently doing on parks is commendable but unsustainable. Parks Commission monthly meetings, with occasional appearances from key players, do not amount to adequate leadership or accountability, effective communication with the public and stakeholders, or familiarity with all that is happening in our many parks and within the parks community.

A dedicated Parks Department with a full-time director should not get in the way of coordination and cooperation. Presumably, the mayor wants all departments, not just Parks and DPS, to share wherever possible. Part of the job of any director is to improve efficiencies.

It seems irresponsible to be moving more responsibilities to the Department of Public Services given both the vacancy at the top of DPS and the pending departure of the DPS acting chief.

Without someone being held accountable, the volunteers of the Commission and Alliance will become frustrated, and their projects and plans will stall, maybe not at first, but eventually.

Without a dedicated advocate, Parks will eventually lose its identity and unique mission under DPS. No longer will the question be what is important for parks, it will be what is important for DPS.

Without someone overseeing everything, more things will fall through the cracks—not only problems but also opportunities. It may be a contract that is misinterpreted going from the mayor's office to the parks

manager to the business manager. Let's not forget that the city is embarking on several major park projects including the \$11 million Market Landing expansion and \$3 million Bartlett Mall renovation that will need to be closely monitored.

Unfortunately, too often it is the things that fall through the cracks —and not the achievements— that color the public's perception of government. Even one innocent mistake can be used to erase years of progress and ruin reputations.

There were comments at the recent hearing that the parks director job was too much for one person. But rather than support the position with resources, this plan inexplicably eliminates it. The saving of \$100,000 in salary and benefits by eliminating the director does not make parks better, no matter how many times the plan says it does.

Since this all started, many of us have asked, why? Remember the mayor's Paradigm study? That states that the goal is to help "reduce the number of management positions in the city and direct reports to the mayor." In the very next paragraph, the report recommends moving Recycling/Energy/Sustainability into the mayor's office. Why? Because "this would send a message throughout the organization of the importance and significance of these functions."

So, the message is that parks are less important and less significant. That's the wrong message to send.

For months the mayor has operated as if the plan has been approved even though it has not been. He has not appointed a new director as the city charter instructs, and, unfortunately, the City Council has let him slide.

Some have mistaken a flurry of post-pandemic activity magnified by public relations as a sign that everything is just fine. But with the mayor's plan and public relations efforts, we — and perhaps even he — may not know what is really happening with our parks and fields, not because people don't care, but because the reorganization has a bias toward separating responsibilities— and nobody is in charge.

Nobody got elected to dismantle the parks department. I urge you to again exercise your influence to have this plan withdrawn.

Thank you for all you do and for your consideration,

Andy Simpson
1 ½ Greenleaf St.
Newburyport

From: Paul LaRosa <larosafam@gmail.com>

Date: February 20, 2023 at 8:33:03 PM EST

To: HShand@cityofnewburyport.com, AfrozK@cityofnewburyport.com, bruce@vogelatlarge.com,
Christine Wallace <christinewallace.ward4@gmail.com>, byron@byronlanenbpt.com,
jdonahue@cityofnewburyport.com, edcameronNBPT@gmail.com, cpreston@cityofnewburyport.com,
mwright@cityofnewburyport.com, szeid@cityofnewburyport.com, mccauleyward5@gmail.com

Cc: Erin LaRosa <erinleighmoon@yahoo.com>

Subject: Re: Newburyport Parks Department

Dear City Councilors-

I'm writing to you again as a follow-up to my email from September 5 regarding the Mayor's "revised" Parks Reorganization Plan dated January 24, 2023. While the revised plan may include some nominal changes from the August 8, 2022 plan, the bulk of the proposal appears the same. Therefore, the concerns we raised in our original email also remain. We continue to be concerned about the lack of leadership for

our parks. Reliance on volunteer groups to develop the vision, fundraise, advocate, and create accountability is unrealistic and not sustainable as a long-term model for the community. Spreading the significant workload of the previous Parks Director position to a large number of administrative positions and other staff appears contrary to the Mayor's plan to "deliver a high level of service in an efficient manner."

Thanks

-Paul and Erin LaRosa

On Mon, Sep 5, 2022 at 8:40 PM Paul LaRosa <larosafam@gmail.com> wrote:

Dear Newburyport City Councilors-

We are writing to express our concern with the Mayor's proposal to eliminate the City's Parks Department and merge the functions of that department into the existing DPS. We have read the Mayor's "Newburyport Parks Reorganization Plan" dated August 8, 2022 and agree with the primary goal of the proposal, which is to provide high quality public services in order to strengthen the city's position as a desirable place to live, work, and visit. However, we have serious concerns that the proposed plan will achieve that goal and also with the process followed by the mayor to put forth this proposal.

While we agree that the proposed reorganization may improve some of the operational efficiencies (e.g., plowing, equipment) and cost savings (e.g., equipment rental), we strongly disagree with the elimination of the Parks Director position, recognizing that this represents the majority of the projected cost saving with this reorganization. Having worked closely with the former Parks Director (Lise Reid) through our involvement with Friends of Newburyport Track in advocating and fundraising for the Fuller Field Project, we quickly came to recognize the significant contributions of Lise and this position as a whole. Her commitment to pursuing funding through the Community Preservation Act and other sources were critical to the success of the project. However, that project is still not complete and we need the dedication of a Park Director to finish this and other key projects for the City.

The Mayor's plan to spread the responsibilities of the Parks Director position to a large number of other staff and volunteers is short sighted. This is illustrated by Exhibit A of the Mayor's plan, which lists no less than 34 separate responsibilities of the Parks Director, which are proposed to be delegated to at least 9 different existing staff or volunteers, many of whom are already overburdened with other responsibilities. Having worked alongside the Parks Director, it was clear that a single, dedicated coordinator of all these responsibilities was essential.

We strongly encourage you to vote against the Mayor's proposed reorganization of the Parks Department and reinstate the Parks Director role. However, we would support some reorganization to capitalize on the operational efficiencies and other cost saving

opportunities. The fate of this city's parks and our goal to be a desirable place to live, work, and visit should not be compromised.

Thanks

-Paul and Erin LaRosa

From: Judy Mouradian <jmouradian@hotmail.com>

Date: February 20, 2023 at 9:00:22 AM EST

To: AfrozK@cityofnewburyport.com, HShand@cityofnewburyport.com, edcameronNBPT@gmail.com, mwright@cityofnewburyport.com, szeid@cityofnewburyport.com, christinewallace.ward4@gmail.com, byron@byronlanenbpt.com, jdonahue@cityofnewburyport.com, cpreston@cityofnewburyport.com, mccauleyward5@gmail.com, "Bruce Vogel (bvogel@cityofnewburyport.com)" <bvogel@cityofnewburyport.com>

Subject: The Revised (?) Parks Reorganization Plan

Dear City Councillors:

I was disappointed to hear that the mayor's revised Parks Reorganization Plan is being supported by all of you, since there is no discernible difference between the initial and so-called revised plan, and many of you voted no to the plan when it was first presented. Andy Simpson's letter to the editor in Friday's *The Daily News*, *Parks déjà vu*, is spot on. If you haven't seen it, here it is - https://www.newburyportnews.com/news/local_news/letter-parks-deja-vu/article_98561f0c-ab9b-11ed-9bbb-5749b5cbd4f3.html.

Judy Mouradian
5 Beck Street

19 February, 2023

By email citycouncil@cityofnewburyport.com Heather Shand, President Newburyport City Council
RE: Parks Plan?

Dear President Shand and City Councillors,

In reviewing the the proposed Parks Plan we feel strongly that its approval will not make Newburyport's parks better developed or maintained. More importantly, it will not allow for adequate long term planning. Without a clear long-term vision for Newburyports Parks we are skeptical our parks will thrive. Additionally, without real leadership, expertise, and decision making we are skeptical that we will create an atmosphere that makes the magic of volunteerism occur. In reading the latest (and previous) version of the plan, the elements of this plan are crystal clear and simple. Subtraction and Consolidation. The claim of saving \$100,000 has in no way made the situation better for the future of our Parks. Present maintenance efficiencies could have been solved without removing an acting director. More than half a year has gone by since the City removed its director and since then, what seems to be left on the "table" is consolidation of the parks into the DPS, which remains void of two (2) leadership positions. We can't expect good volunteers to stick around while the City gets its act together and shows that the City sincerely values their time, their imaginations, and expertise in helping the City (the Leader) take strategic planning into 2033 and beyond. We — the people serving as City, "on deck" volunteers need to see a plan — with real City-budget backing, accountability, and room to take our climate-anxious Parks into the mid-century. As you review and discuss the new, revised Parks plan, please consider the hundreds of volunteers who share their passion for our Parks with you and our City. Volunteers are only as good as the "value investment" the City bestows. A plan this important based on a Report without an adequate City employee audit and input from

members of the Parks Commission (PC) and the public on the outset is not acceptable. So we don't "right a wrong" or better our Parks simply by tasking PC volunteers (with City Parks Manager and Mayor's Office Mgr of Special Projects) with updating its Mission Statement and rushing a 10+year Visioning process into 3 "special sessions" if the "revised" org chart can't be tested and challenged. The Parks re-org plan lacks transparency, vision, and accountability. If approved it places unsustainable reliance not only on a leaderless DPS staff, "homeless" NYS, and an overburdened Parks department, but also on volunteers serving on its present and future City Commissions, Boards, community "friend" groups, and 501(c)3 nonprofits.

Sincerely, Tom & Veronica Carleo

From: Jean Costello <earnestcitizen1776@gmail.com>
Date: February 21, 2023 at 12:39:55 PM EST
To: "James J. McCauley" <JMcCauley@cityofnewburyport.com>
Subject: Re: Specific request on Parks ReOrganization Plan

Hello - thanks for your reply. In public hearing I speculated that my request may not have been understood. So I've elaborated.

You noted two key management realms in your message: **goal-setting** and **project management**. My request is about the third critical realm: **operations management**.

I understand the Council cannot impose operational KPIs on the Administration. However, the Council can request data, ask thoughtful questions and foster high-quality dialogue about matters that come before it - like the Parks Reorg Plan.

In September, the Council signaled the Reorg Plan would not be approved, and this prompted additional work that has strengthened the proposal.

With the Administration focused on filling two open DPS leadership positions, the Council can maintain the focus on the Parks Reorganization in the coming weeks by continuing to guide the review/strengthening process. The effort will help Parks and DPS be successful with its new leadership and organizational structure.

Below are straightforward questions I'd like the Community Services Committee to ask about operational KPIs. I've also explained why this request is important, reasonable and timely.

Straightforward questions about operational KPIs

1. Are requests categorized in the DPS work order application? If yes, what are the categories?
2. Are there service level agreements (SLAs) entered into the application for the various request categories? If yes, what are they?
3. What reports are generated from the DSP work order application?
4. How frequently are the reports generated?
5. Who receives the reports and how are they used?
6. How will the DPS work order system be used for parks work?

The importance of operational performance indicators

The Parks Reorg Plan and public deliberations have touched upon service levels, work capacity and efficiency. The information provided has been largely anecdotal and this limits our ability to evaluate it.

More important – without operational performance indicators, how will we evaluate the impact of

the reorganization after it has taken effect? And how will we know what adjustments to make if particular areas need to be strengthened?

Your reply provides a third reason to ask for KPIs. We need a good way to assess the reorganization's impact for Parks as well as for departments taking on parks work such as DPS, Planning and NYS - and know which targeted adjustments are needed.

In the absence of KPIs and neutral facts, we'll continue to rely heavily on anecdote and conjecture.

A reasonable and timely request

Leveraging the existing DPS work order software has been held up many times as a key benefit of making Parks a division of DPS. Software applications like these are designed for effective intake of planned and on-demand work, due date assignment according to set service level agreements, and performance tracking against benchmarks.

Given the promotion/emphasis on the DPS work order system, it seems natural to ask specific questions about how it is used to track work and monitor performance today, and how the DPS foresees using it to good effect for parks work.

Mr. Tuccolo and Mr. Hennessey reportedly have a collaborative working relationship and the Mayor has been clear about his intent to quickly resubmit his reorganization plan. It therefore seems likely Jaime and Mike would have already given some thought to using the work order system. Answering the questions I've posed should not present an undue burden.

Additionally, the Mayor and a steering committee that includes three councilors have been interviewing candidates for the DPS Director position. Any candidate worth their salt will be proficient in managing large organizations in terms of goals, projects and operations. So I expect DPS operational management is being discussed in that context.

The Council, through its committees, has a great opportunity here to bring these important discussions together and provide meaningful information to the public about Parks and DPS management.

Using the responses well

If operational KPIs are already in place, they will provide a good foundation for assessing impacts of the reorganization.

If they are not, knowing this will aide the new DPS Director in her/his operational assessments.

Thank you

Please submit the straightforward questions above as part of your Committee's analysis of the Parks Reorganization Plan.

My efforts are geared toward helping tell a good news story about how the Administration, Council and the public has come together around the Parks Reorganization.

Let me know if there's anything I can do for the Council or DPS to obtain answers for the specific KPI questions above. I'm at your service.

Thanks and regards,
Jean