

## **Minutes of the Newburyport Parks Commission 16 October 2014**

Call to order at 7:02 p.m.

A quorum was present.

In attendance: Bob Uhlig, Ann Lagasse, Steve Sawyer, Karen Popken, Kim Turner

Also in attendance: Lisë Reid, Andrew Port, Donna Holaday (briefly), Jared Eigerman, Charlie Tontar, Alison Heartquist, Meghan Kinsey, members of the public (see attached list)

### ***Election of New Commission Chair***

Ms. Reid asked commissioners to state their choice for new commission chair. The commission elected Kimberly Turner by the following results:

Commissioner Uhlig – Kim Turner

Commissioner Lagasse – Kim Turner

Commissioner Popken – Kim Turner

Commissioner Sawyer – Kim Turner

## **NEW BUSINESS**

### ***Issues***

#### ***Inn Street***

Mayor Holaday welcomed the audience citing the city's paid parking program as a major source of funding for the Inn Street project.

Andrew Port presented a summary of the Inn Street Improvement Project. He said the historic and interactive elements of the fountain are key to the project.

Commissioners listened to questions and comments from the audience.

Esther Sayer thanked Andrew Port for his work on this much needed project.

Deb Woron-Masia asked about irrigation for new landscaping. Mr. Port answered the cost-benefit ratio did not favor in-ground irrigation because there are so many disparate watering locations. He said that instead there would be spigots installed for volunteer or paid watering during the establishment period. He indicated that maintenance of the park is a priority.

A business owner asked about access to businesses during the construction period. Mr. Port answered that construction would not disrupt businesses.

Rob Germinara asked about project cost. Mr. Port replied the fountain would cost approximately \$200,000 but that the city was still waiting for final cost estimates from the designer.

A business owner asked how the city was going to address the problem of children climbing on the fountain and vandalism. Mr. Port answered that interactive water components would help to distract children from climbing on the pillars and that the fountain being operational would help to deter them too. Ms. Reid added that there was a potential for signage to discourage people from climbing on the structure.

Someone asked if the city had considered removing the columns. Mr. Port answered the columns are part of a registered historic structure and they would not be removed.

The owner of the Brass Lyon store asked when the Inn Street dedication plaque was going to be reinstalled. Mr. Port said he would investigate and let others know what he finds out.

Mr. Port said the brick style will not change, when one resident suggested the current bricks are very slippery when wet. He also indicated he would put a project update on the city website.

### *Dog Park Alternatives*

Pam Pearson of Pop Crowley Way said she feels the city needs clearer off leash rules.

Jim O'Mally from Boxford has noted more people in the dog park than in Cashman; he feels the issue is about people not about dogs.

An Inn Street business owner said dog parks elsewhere are always fenced in with a gate and dedicated use and asked if we can do that here.

Ms. Reid asked where we should put a fenced in dog park.

Mr. Uhlig stated that the Parks Commission had endeavored to seek balance for park use but has worked to eliminate obstructions and visual clutter from Cashman.

Rob Germinara said he sees dogs run across the path. He feels kids shouldn't be in a dog park and thinks we should make Cashman a permanent dog park with a black chain link fence.

Joel Rusnak said they go every day. He said dogs don't read signs. He thinks there needs to be a barrier, maybe with plantings and a nice low fence, something aesthetically pleasing.

Kim Turner pointed out that plantings die as a result of dog urine and feces.

Deb Woron-Masia said that it's not the off leash users' dogs who are defecating in the garden.

There was a comment that a partially fenced park can still be used by others.

Commissioner Popken replied to a question about using 270 Water Street at Perkins saying that it is not centrally located and there is no parking. Ms. Reid added that the city's license agreement with National Grid is that the park be dedicated to passive use. She would have to check with National Grid to determine whether off leash use was acceptable. There would also be a need to erect a fence to keep the dogs off the ball field.

Richard Corsetti said when he exercises he sees dogs off leash everywhere. He said we need better Animal Control Officer response. He called the phone number posted at the park and no one answered.

Andrew Masia summarized that the rules are not clear, they should be issued with every dog license, we need a barrier, and we need enforcement.

There was a comment that Cashman is a good location for a dog park.

Ms. Reid said that when she inquired of the Conservation Administrator about permitting requirements for erecting a fence near the river at Cashman she was told that if the purpose of the fence was for the purpose of creating a dog park, which would invite concentrated use by dogs resulting increased dog feces in the river front butter area, there might be a requirement to demonstrate a stormwater runoff management plan of some sort. She was advised to discuss further with City Engineer Jon-Eric White. She said it was the opinion of Mr. White that because the river is classified as polluted the city has strict requirements related to storm water runoff into the river which might impact putting a dog park at the Cashman waterfront location.

Councilor Heartquist asked Karen Popken to research the topic further and present findings at a City Council subcommittee meeting.

Councilor Eigerman advised the group to set aside the storm water issue.

A resident commented that the city needs to maintain a supply of dog waste bags at the off leash area.

Ms. Reid said she would talk with the Health Department about better enforcement.

Commissioner Popken spoke in favor of using the Cashman lawn area for off leash but agreed it needs better signage. Commissioner Uhlig considered the idea of fencing in the grassy area near the Cashman tot lot. Commissioner Lagasse said she felt a low fence would not work to adequately contain all dogs.

Commissioner Uhlig said he might support a single-fence barrier along the river walk but would not support an “L” or a “U” of fencing in that area and he would not support chain link.

Commissioner Popken said she sees the need to protect walkers along the walkway.

#### *Permit Approvals*

McMullen Wedding at 270 Water Street, June 27, 2015 – **Motion to approve contingent on coordinating nature of park use with National Grid, parking be off-site, park user leave park as they found it and pay for any damages by Commissioner Lagasse, seconded by Commissioner Turner. So voted on a unanimous voice vote.**

National Multiple Sclerosis Society fundraising walk – April 11, 2015 - **Motion to approve contingent on approval by Harbor Master and City Council, that parking be off-site, that park user leave park as they found it and pay for any damages by Commissioner Uhlig, seconded by Commissioner Turner. So voted on a unanimous voice vote.**

#### *Reorganization of Parks Commissions*

Walt Thompson asked that the Bartlet Mall Commission not be dissolved. A discussion ensued about the pros and cons of having a commission dedicated to a single park including streamlining the permitting and parks-related communications for the public, reducing added workload of managing volunteers dedicated to specific parks, and the challenges of adequately supporting those volunteers.

Commissioner Uhlig said he had a hard time separating the issue of dissolving the satellite commissions from increasing the size of the Parks Commission.

Councilor Tontar mentioned an organization called Groundwork Trust. He recommended investigating best practices in other municipalities to see how they operate.

There was a discussion about hiring additional parks staff.

Councilor Eigerman spoke against increasing the size of the Parks Commission. He said he feels there needs to be a watch dog at Bartlet Mall. He also said there is not enough “pizazz” in friends groups as there is in an official commission.

**Motion to enter executive session to finish the discussion because the discussion may involve the personal character and/or reputation of city staff and others by Commissioner Turner, seconded by Commissioner Lagasse. So voted unanimously on a roll call vote.**

Commissioner Turner announced that the commission would be going into executive session to finish discussion and would not be coming out of executive session until after the meeting was adjourned.

There was a discussion about time involved to manage the number of volunteers involved in these three parks; and about the volunteers’ statement that they need better support from city staff. Ms. Reid said it is a challenge to offer more support unless she has more direct management over the parks. She acknowledged the valuable contribution made by volunteers but said she would like to see them focus on the fundraising and let the city relieve them of the responsibility of running the parks.

Commissioner Turner stated she is strongly against increasing the size of the commission. She suggested gaining more direct management within the current structure for Atkinson Common and Bartlet Mall Commissions, i.e. handling the financial management, etc. Commissioners agreed to evolve this process over time, addressing one commission at a time. **Motion to recommend dissolving the Moseley Woods Commission by Commissioner Popken, seconded by Commissioner Uhlig. So voted on a unanimous voice vote.**

Meeting adjourned 10:30 p.m.