

Merrimack Parks & Recreation Minutes
Wednesday, January 20, 2021
Virtual Meeting
7:00 pm

Virtual Meeting Attendees: Laura Jaynes- Chair, Tracy McGraw- member, Shannon Barnes-School Board Representative, Abbie Cote- Student Representative, Rick Greenier – MYA Rep. Maureen Hall, Senior Citizens Club, joined in at 7:20 pm which gave us a quorum.

Virtual Staff: Matt Casparius- Director

Public: Kishan Sreenivasan, Troop 424, to present completion of his Eagle Project.

Excused: Christine Lavoie- Co-chair, Michelle Creswell- Secretary, Julie Poole- member, Lon Woods-Town Council

Start time: 7:05 pm

1. Open Meeting/Introductions

2. Approval of minutes from December 16, 2020:

- Shannon Barnes made the motion to accept the December minutes.
- Tracy McGraw 2nd the motion
- 7-0-0 motion passed

3. Old Business:

Eagle Scout Completion Report - Kishan Sreenivasan, of Troop 424, started with a detailed power point showing the steps that led to the completion of an ADA Access ramp at Wasserman Park. Kishan ran into several challenges with this project. He was commended by the group for a job well done, especially as he is a freshman in High School.

- Due to Covid-19, his projected budget increased due to the price of lumber.
- The building of the ramp was more difficult to build due to rock and ledge.
- He thanked Troop 424 for their help and Matt Casparius for coordinating this project with the DPW to dig post holes.

Update from Merrimack Dog Park: Dog Park Fund Balance - \$1,762.59

- Tracy McGraw reported that the Dog Park is presently in good condition with bark mulch helping the drainage. However, the weather has been very dry, so this could change. There is always a need for doggie bags.

4. New Business:

Discussion on Athletic Field Rentals: Matt stated that one of the items that came up in his budget presentation to the Town Council was looking at the fees that we charge people to use our athletic fields. He said that in the next few years we are envisioning in the next few years starting to invest more in our athletic fields which led to a discussion about what we charge currently.

Matt stated that as far as he could tell, our fee structure was last changed 11 years ago in 2010. The Town does not currently charge any Town based team (with 80% residents) to use our athletic fields. For everyone else, its \$30 a day for a field with no lights or \$125 a day for a field with lights. 99% of what we do get is from Adult Sports (mostly Adult Softball) who are renting on a routine basis. Looking at a normal year we typically generate around \$6,500.00 a year.

The Town Council has asked us to compare our fees to other communities to get a sense of the market and see whether we should be looking to raise those fees. When we meet in February, we can review the fees again and also look at our policies and make some recommendations to the Town Council at that time.

Aside from trying to generally improve our field's quality, some of the bigger CIP projects in our current 5-year plan include:

- Tentatively for FY2022 – 2023. We're looking at irrigation for Wasserman Park Football Field area. If you've been there for practices, it very quickly turns into a dustbowl even though Football is the only group that uses that field.
- In 2023- 2024 we currently have a place holder for hopefully 2 brand new fields at Fields Farm. This isn't a definite yet, but a possibility
- In 2024–2025, we are looking at replacing the lights at Martel Field which are nearing the end of their life span.

5. Director's Report:

BUDGET UPDATE: Matt reported that he presented his budget to the Town Council last week and felt it went really well. He stated that we really only had 2 line-items that we were looking to change from current have:

- Proposal to restore weekend lifeguard & Park Attendant coverage at Wasserman Park Beach which would also include expanding the hours for the coverage over what we have historically had. No real questions on this from the Council.
- The second item was related to **Wasserman Park facility improvements**.
 - We have \$26,000 to replace the Wasserman Park Docks which are falling apart and have been for a long time. It will tie in nicely to the beach renovation project and really make the beach a place people want to go to.
 - The other project was improvements to our office. The building needs a new roof estimated at \$4800 and the other piece is an ADA Access Ramp. The building is not currently ADA accessible and it really should be and the cost to build that is estimated at \$10,000 due to the long run needed. We got a lot of questions about this which surprised me.

WINTER PROGRAMS

- **Ice Skating Rink:** Initially opened up on January 11th, but then ended up closing on January 15th due to warm weather and rain between Friday and Saturday and all the ice melted. He was hoping that it will reopen again by this weekend, but we have to wait and see. For anyone listening at home, please pay attention to our website and Facebook page and also signage at the rink. If the rink is marked closed – please stay off the ice. One of the reasons it took so long to open this year was because people kept going on the ice even though the signs said closed and they broke thru.
- **Vacation Week Program:** After successfully running a vacation week program in December, we have now opened registration for February School Vacation week which is being led by my summer camp director and some of her staff. We have a variety of sports, games, crafts, outdoor time and more. The cost is \$45 a day which includes a hot lunch prepared by our camp cook – Cathy. There is a sibling discount available as well for families with multiple children. We are following the State of NH Childcare guidelines for COVID-19 and spaces are limited. Visit our website for details.
- **Winter Carnival:** Plans are now in the works for our 29th Annual Winter Carnival which will be held on Saturday, February 20th. It will be an entirely outdoor based event and similar to what we did with the Halloween Party this year, attendees will need to register in advance for a free ticket. We have not yet opened up attendee registration but hoping too by next week. Pay attention to our website and Facebook page for details. I could use additional volunteers if anyone from the Committee is interested in helping us out from 11:30 – 3:30 pm.
- **2021 Summer Camp**
Matt reported that during his budget hearing with the Town Council last week, one of his requests to them was for permission to open up registration for Summer Camp for Summer 2021. We normally open at this time of year and his concern was that they would make us wait until March or April to so. YMCA Camp Sargent and the other area day camps are going to be opening registration in the next few weeks and so if we didn't open until March or April, we would lose a lot camper to our competitors.

Matt sits on a Task Force from the NH Camp Director's Association representing all municipal day camps and we have been working for several months now with the Dept of Health & Human Services to update the Camp Regulations for this coming summer. We have already drafted revised guidance which we expect will be approved in either late January or Early February.

Historically we open camp registration in mid-January and typically have a number of families sign up right away. Where Camp didn't run last year, his concern was that if we hold off opening up registration until we see the new guidelines are set; many parents may assume we're not running again and go elsewhere.

Our biggest competitor is YMCA Camp Sargent which did run last summer and had 275 kids a week last year. They are expecting to open their registration in late January. To make a long story short, we have been given the Council's blessing to open registration for camp up – which just opened this afternoon.

This blessing comes with a requirement that once the revised guidelines do come up, I will have to go before the Council to address any concerns they may have. Last summer, one of the biggest concerns was over groups that couldn't be larger than 10 people (counting staff). Financially this was really tough for us to afford since fees had already been locked into place. The other big issue was the use of masks.

For childcare licensing they have already upped the limit from groups of 10 to groups of 20 and it is expected they will do the same thing for camps which are held largely outside anyway and so that issue should go away. As far as masks go, now that we have all been living with this for 10 months, people have gotten used to masks and it's not quite the issue it was last spring. For us the plan would be masks would be required for indoor activities and anytime social distancing can't be maintained.

With that said, we are now hiring for summer staff positions, so anyone interested should visit our website or the Town website to download an application.

EASTER EGG HUNT:

Looking ahead to the spring, the Annual Easter Egg Hunt is tentatively scheduled for March 27th. We have 10,000 Easter eggs sitting in storage since last year so matt stated that he really want to do something, but at this point he wasn't sure quite what yet. The timed ticket entry model that we're using for Winter Carnival and Halloween doesn't really work if 50 kids are running for the same stack of eggs. So, we're still working on what we might do there. More information will be presented at the next meeting.

6. Organization Reports:

Senior Citizens Club: Maureen Hall reported that the John O'Leary Center is still not open and that some members are walking are the outlet mall.

Student Rep: Abbie Cote reports that MHS students are back in school 2 days a week and most students seem to like it. An Early College Planning Workshop: January 26, is available to 9th and 10th graders.

MYA: Rick Greenier reports that softball and Lacrosse registrations will start on Feb. 1. Unfortunately, due to Covid-19, Basketball and Wrestling Leagues were cancelled.

School Board: Shannon Barnes reports that the Budget is ready to go to the Budget Committee. The Board continues to meet frequently and look forward to residents' input.

Town Council: Lon Woods was not present.

7. Comments from the Public: There was none.

8. Future Meeting Dates:

- **Wednesday, February 17, 2021**
- **Wednesday, March 17, 2021**

9. Meeting Adjourned at 8:00 pm. Tracy McGraw made the motion to adjourn at 8:00 pm. Shannon Barnes 2nd the motion and motion to adjourn passed 7-0-0

Respectfully submitted,

Laura K. Jaynes, Chair