

RECREATION COMMISSION MINUTES

February 16, 2023

7:00 PM

Remote Zoom Meeting

Present: **Hema Santhanakrishnan, Commissioner; Joe Will, Chair; Steve Trimble, Clerk; Nancy Corcoran, Commissioner; Melissa Settipani-Rufo, Recreation Director.**

Public Attendees: Rohit Saini, Adam Smith, Jimi Two Feathers, John Epping, Patrick Hearn, Wanjiku Gachugi (Acton Equity and Inclusion), Gail Sawyer, Johar Sunkavalli.

I. Regular Business

1. Review of meeting minutes from December & January
 - a. January minutes approved with revisions.
 - b. December minutes pending Joe's review.
2. Residents' Concerns
None
3. Field and Facility Reservation Process (taken as item 4)
 - a. Melissa reviewed the revised permit process noting this is a work-in-progress and the Recreation Division will test and learn from this alteration next season and adjust as noted.
 - b. Melissa reviewed the principles added to the document at David Martin's suggestion.
 - c. Comments raised:
 - i. Rohit noted the number of people again should be a consideration and noted they might have each Acton cricket member submit a permit request implying they might test the process.
 - ii. Jimi noted they are paying a day rate and since the decision was made to start their use at 2 PM after cricket ended at 1 PM, what is the rate? Melissa stated over 2 hours of consecutive use requires the day rate.
 - iii. Adam noted the principles in the document represent a conflict resolution policy and these principles do not clearly state the decision points used to grant the permit and remained arbitrary without specific rules for the decision process and understanding the Town's priorities. Joe suggested the principles try to address the arbitrary point noted by Adam. Adam wants to know, for example, is one criterion the number of people? Melissa noted the decision to give the Charles River Radio Controllers (CRRC) the PM slot was made due to the sun position in the AM. Adam stated that is not the case.
 - d. Nancy noted the discussion was rehashing the same points made in the past two monthly meetings. Still has reservations on sharing and the Town does not have a staff member onsite to monitor the handoff. We will have to wait and see what happens. She stated the Recreation Commission tries to minimize conflict.
4. School Street Fields Scheduling (taken as item 3)
 - a. Melissa reviewed the scheduling conflict timeline from a prepared statement. The new information that was presented was that Saturdays will be split. Cricket can play until 1:00 pm and the CRRC will be able to fly from 2:00 PM forward. There is an hour buffer period to clean up and vacate the field. Melissa understands this isn't the news that either party wanted, but it was a decision made by Town Management due to the groups not being able to come up with a solution. If this schedule doesn't work, we'll revisit this conversation in the fall and work together to come up with a better schedule for 2024.
 - b. Comments:

- i. Rohit requested a start time at 7 AM (suggests ending at 2 PM and a 15-minute transition period). He reminded that cricket spent \$50k on the field (Editor's note: This figure is not confirmed and was never brought to the Recreation Commission for comment). They are prepared to move to another field but do not have the funds to invest in a new location.
 - ii. Jimi (CRRC) suggested it takes time to remove cars; also noted total sunlight hour issues in the Spring and Fall. This decision to take away greater than 50% of the CRRC time on Saturday does not feel fair.
 - iii. Nancy said sharing field is too difficult and could they do every other week?
 - iv. Joe disagrees with Nancy and thinks the rules would help the scheduling conflicts.
 - v. John Eppling stated Rohit would not negotiate before. The CRRC wants the whole day due to prevailing wind and other weather-related disruptions. He noted there was no point in arguing this any further and they would abide by the Town's decision. He again noted they picked up a lot of debris after cricket use and does not think dog droppings is an issue.
 - vi. Melissa stated that enforcement would be made based on CRRC photos taken at the time of transition to which Rohit noted that remaining cars could be anyone so it could not be enforced.
 - vii. Adam Smith doesn't feel we have basis for sharing but the CRRC will abide by the Town's decision. The CRRC, however, does not want to be responsible to have cricket thrown off the field and this is a difficult position to be in.
 - viii. Jimi noted that he feels broadsided, and it is unfair to both groups.
 - ix. Melissa noted that Town Management made this final decision, and the cricket end time will stay at 1 PM.
 - x. Steve stated he would like to be on record that he does not favor splitting the field use and the CRRC should have full used on Saturday. The past two meetings provided convincing evidence that the decision leaves room for further conflict.
 - xi. Joe stated that he believes this field can be shared and showed documentation of the daylight hours at three points in the calendar year.
 - xii. Wanjiku noted that Melissa did the best she could during this process to be equitable and give everyone use of the field.
5. Conservation Restriction (CR) for Morrison Farm (Patrick Hearn)
- a. Patrick reviewed the timeline and decision by the Select Board not to bring the CR to the Town Meeting until a financial plan to maintain the buildings is prepared. The CR is to make a commitment to not allow Morrison Farm for municipal reuse or sale.
 - b. Joe wanted to understand why the Select Board wanted this brought our attention. He noted the Recreation Department was involved with the gardens but now with Cemetery oversight of the gardens, our only concern would be passive recreation use. Joe asked Melissa if she had any involvement with Morrison Farm. Joe thinks everyone in Town should support this. There have been situations where the Town did not see a sense of urgency since Acton owns the land. Joe cited that when the Senior Center was being pursued, the Town said there was time, and seniors disagreed, saying that time is precious for them. He noted the Town has held this property 25 or so years and considering the idea of a CR on the passive recreation part of the land need not be delayed. Soccer was a driver of acquiring the land, but eventually got other fields, so use of the land for active recreation became a non-issue. He did note that at its last meeting the Morrison Farm Committee voted unanimously to raze the farmhouse.
 - c. Patrick noted the Agricultural Commission is cataloging the CR eligible land in town, which is approximately 450 acres consisting of ~145 acres in horses with the remaining 300 acres cropland (defined as tree and farmland). The State owns and manages 130 of the 450 acres with the remaining mostly in private ownership. He noted that New England only grows 5-10% of its own food at this time.
 - d. Steve asked to understand if the CR intent was to restrict the town from changing the use of the property and buildings.

- e. Dwellings:
 - i. Morrison was the longest running farm in Acton when it ceased operations. The house is classified as a depression-era farmhouse.
 - ii. Patrick noted the Town stores equipment in the outbuildings.
 - iii. Steve noted that he was uncomfortable with buildings being shuttered and unused given the need for housing. Joe stated that the Town voted against selling the property to Habitat for Humanity in 2016 as the Town would lose control of future activities on the site. Steve noted that more than \$1M was being spent on the Asa Parlin house and that the Town should invest in making the Morrison farmhouse fit for lease over letting it sit idle.
 - iv. Patrick noted that if the farm buildings are left closed, they do not need ADA compliance.
 - v. Patrick assumed Acton's historic-related committees would be responsible parties for the building alignment. Patrick, in response to Joe, noted as an example that in just the past two to three months a developer approached the Town to buy the land and put up a wedding venue there.
 - vi. Steve made a motion to have Joe write a letter in support of the CR on behalf of the Recreation Commission which was seconded by Nancy. The motion passed unanimously.
- 6. Reports:
 - a. Events
 - i. The LGBTQ+ Gay-La fundraising dance went great. Forty-two reservations were made although not all came.
 - b. Dog Park/Senior Park
 - i. This item should be changed to "Main Street Campus."
 - ii. Steve expects the update document Friday from Dale Associates and will distribute it at that time.
 - iii. This work will be presented to the Select Board on 02/27 shortly after the start of the meeting at 7 PM.
 - c. Human Services Committee (HSC)
 - i. Hema noted the past month there were briefings to the HSC by the Acton Housing Authority & Memorial Library. Next month Recreation will present.
 - ii. Recreation would appreciate volunteer help at all summer events.
 - d. Community Preservation Projects
 - i. Joe noted that project deliberations are scheduled over the next few CPC meetings.
 - ii. Gardner Playground Renovation land work was in discussion. No other updates.
 - iii. Elm Street Court Reconstruction – no updates.
 - iv. NARA Bridge Boardwalk – no updates
 - v. Steve noted his concern with the Elm Street basketball courts reconstruction since they were ruined and now holds parking for the new school. The School Administration and Board were going through major changes and there is no published schedule. At the CPC it was noted that the current location would remain parking and the court might be moved. Steve was looking for a schedule and to ensure the adjacent fields would not be impacted. Melissa would raise this concern with John Mangiaratti.

II. New/Special Business

- 7. 2023 Independence Day Celebration Proposal
 - a. Planning is underway with Police, Economic Development division, etc.
 - b. Decided to go a little bigger with a band and continue with fireworks as noted at a prior meeting.
 - c. Melissa noted that due to fireworks vendor availability the event would be Friday June 30th.
 - d. The event would cost the town ~\$35k with \$25k coming from free cash and ~\$10k from the town's celebration fund. The vendor firework minimum is \$18k. If the town does not vote to approve at Town Meeting these funds could be directed to the 250th Celebration in 2025.
- 8. Annual Town Report
 - a. Melissa has it underway.

9. Consent Items

a. None

10. Steve motioned to adjourn; seconded by Joe. Motion passed unanimously.

Upcoming Recreation Commission Meetings

Date	Time	Location
March 7, 2023	7:00 PM	TBD
April 4, 2023	7:00 PM	TBD
May 2, 2023	7:00 PM	TBD