

WELLESLEY RECREATION COMMISSION MINUTES

October 5, 2015

5:00 pm at the Warren Building

Attending:

Matthew McKay, Steve Burt, Andy Wrobel, Tripp Sheehan, Mark Wolfson, Jan Kaseta, Brandon Fitts and Matt Chin.

Guests:

Petra Collumb (resident), Ellen Gibbs (BOS) Ria Stolle (Advisory), Linda Perlmutter (TGSC) and Ann Marie Gross (TGSC).

Minutes from September 21, 2015:

Motion: To approve, Andy Wrobel

Seconded: Matthew McKay

Vote: All in attendance in favor (Mark Wolfson not in attendance at this time)

Schofield Tennis Courts:

Petra Collumb, a resident of Wellesley and an avid tennis player spoke to the Commission about her initiative to put a bubble over the Schofield courts for winter use. She is working with a group to raise money to both renovate and put the bubble over the courts. This would all be done with private money. The NRC, who owns the land, is in favor. School Superintendent, Dr. Lussier is in favor. They have hit a snag with Planning and ZBA as the area doesn't have enough space to encompass all of the courts under the bubble and still adhere to commercial zoning. The ZBA sees this building as a commercial endeavor and the way the land is currently zoned doesn't allow for building. Andy suggested the one way to get around zoning might be to take the project and the subsequent business under Recreation. Andy Wrobel and Steve Burt will try to work with Petra Collumb on the zoning issues.

Town Government Study Committee:

Members of TGSC attended and the Commission discussed the following:

Town-Wide Strategic Plan: TGSC made an addendum to this which stated that the plan must be reported on each year at Town Meeting and reviewed every 5 years. Tripp reiterated that active recreation space (outdoor and indoor) needs a place and a champion in the strategic plan.

Commissioners asked that the term "orphan projects" be used to describe projects, like the proposed bubble over the tennis courts, that fall under no particular department.

Motion: Was made by Andy Wrobel stating that the Recreation Commission is supportive of a strategic plan for the town. They are supportive of the concept that the plan be reported on at annual town meeting and reviewed completely every five years. Furthermore, the Recreation Commission requests that the strategic plan pay special attention to "orphan projects" (those projects that fall to a variety of town boards).

Seconded: Tripp Sheehan

Vote: All in favor (5-0)

Land Use Department:

Ann Marie Gross explained that the formation of this department will be put out as a motion at Town Meeting. It will not be a by-law change. This allows the change to happen immediately and would also allow for easier changes should the next town leader want to tweak the concept.

Steve Burt felt that by supporting this initiative, it would also indicate that you would be supporting a Town Manager. Ann Marie said that you could support this initiative, which will come up as a separate motion at Town Meeting, as a separate issue.

Andy Wrobel made a statement in which he outlined what he saw as the purpose of this new Land Use Department. He saw it as having two primary reasons, to advocate for Land Use and to advocate as a Permitting Authority. The development of a group of Permitting Authorities would significantly improve both the resident's and developer's experience with the Town.

Motion: Was made by Andy Wrobel stating that the Recreation Commission sees two different aspects of the Land Use group; the Permitting Authorities and the Advocates for Land Use. The Recreation Commission agrees that consolidation of these functions will streamline the process and improve the resident/developers experience. Additionally, the Recreation Commission champions an effort to include the Playing Fields Task Force as a voice for both active outdoor space and indoor recreational facilities.

Seconded: Mark Wolfson

Vote: All in favor (5-0)

Town Manager:

Andy Wrobel stated that he is in favor of a Town Manager, recognizing that Hans Larsen has, in effect, been functioning as such. Anne Marie Gross did make it clear the by-laws do not currently support the current Executive in doing some of the functions he is doing today. Andy stated that he is comfortable with a number of different models. He is especially concerned that the Commission or Board would lose power to hire and evaluate the Director of the Department. Linda Perlmutter stated that Andy Wrobel's interpretation was incorrect, that both the Board and the Town Manager would be part of the review. Andy Wrobel referred to the statement from NRC and said that he felt that it held a number of valid points. Matthew Wolfson felt that there needs to be clear mechanisms for conflict resolution between Boards and the Town Manager. Would the Board go to the Selectman or Town Counsel?

Tripp Sheehan felt strongly that the Boards needed to be involved in and responsible for at least some of the Department Director's goals.

Motion: By Andy Wrobel to accept the TGSG proposal on a Town Manager

Seconded: Mark Wolfson

Vote: 4 opposed, 1 in favor. Discussion followed resulting in another motion.

Motion: Was made by Andy Wrobel stating that the Recreation Commission has concerns regarding the Town Manager's authority over setting goals for and evaluating the performance of Department Head. The need for the Town Manager and the Recreation Commission to create shared goals is critical. If specific Policies and Procedures to codify a shared goal setting and subsequent arbitration process could be created, the Commission would unanimously support the Town Manager doing the evaluation, with Commission input. This could be included in HR Departmental policies and this would need to be in place before the STM vote. The Recreation Commission had similar concerns regarding the budget that is submitted to ATM being changed from the Board's request to the Town Manager's request. If this is accomplished, the Recreation would support this version of the role for Town Manager.

Seconded: Mark Wolfson
Vote: All in favor (5-0)

Attached addendum are additional notes from the meeting compiled by Andy Wrobel.

Morses Pond Report:

Matt Chin presented the end of the season report for the beach. The Commission received handouts outlining the beach revenue comparisons over the last few years, including attendance.

Camp Report:

Brandon Fitts distributed information outlining revenue, scholarships and registration numbers from this past summer. Brandon also included some ideas for improving camp for next year. Brandon is going to provide, to the Commission, comparable camp fees for neighboring towns. The Commission will review with the possibility of raising camp fees for 2016. This would need to be done very soon as the camp information will be in the winter brochure. Mr. Burttt said that it may mean that the Commission will need to meet again, prior to the next scheduled meeting.

Recreation Director's Position:

Motion: Was made by Tripp to promote Matthew Chin to the Director's position upon Jan Kasetta's retirement.
Seconded: By Matthew McKay
Vote: 4 in favor. Mark Wolfson abstained as he was not in attendance at the interviews.

There was a discussion regarding the next steps for replacing the Deputy Director. Steve Burttt will be speaking with HR about posting the position as soon as possible.

Citizen Speak: None

Next Meeting: To be announced

Motion to Adjourn: Trip Sheehan
Seconded: Matthew McKay
Vote: All in attendance in favor
Meeting adjourned at 8:00 pm

Respectfully,

Jan Kasetta

ADDENDUM

On Monday Oct 5th, the Recreation Commission met to discuss and vote an official position on the TGSC recommendations for the November STM. This was the fourth meeting in which this topic was thoroughly discussed with the TGSC representatives present at three of those meetings. All five commissioners were present. The following summarizes the Recreation Commission's position.

1. Creation of a Strategic Plan – The Recreation Commission is enthusiastically supportive of the creation and use of a strategic plan in making decisions in Town. The board's feeling is that the current 10 year Comprehensive Plan is a nice document "with no teeth" in the Town's prioritization and decision making. Therefore, reporting on the progress made on the priorities in the Strategic Plan to ATM, and perhaps even creating metrics, is an important component that the TGSC has included in this process. A requirement to keep the Strategic Plan up to date by reviewing it every 5 years, that we interpret to be an extensive review similar to writing a new Strategic Plan, is very important to keep the Town's priorities fresh in a rapidly changing technological, social, and economic environment. The Recreation commission would also like to highlight the importance that the committee developing the Strategic Plan pay special attention to the "orphan projects" (projects or needs that fall between the normal range of responsibilities of the Town departments and boards). Vote: 5 - 0

2. Creation of a Land Use Group – The Recreation Commission observed that his new Land Use Group would consist of two parts: the permitting authorities (ZBA, Wetlands, etc) and some of the advocates for the land use (NRC, WHC, etc.). The Recreation Commission agrees that consolidating the permitting authorities into a group and identifying opportunities to streamline and coordinate the Town's processes and forms could improve the resident / development experience. This improvement may require incremental investment in systems or personnel which is perhaps merited.

The Recreation Commission notes that the number of "advocacy groups" in the proposed Land Use group has been reduced significantly from the earlier presentations. We would like to see the Playing Fields Task Force (PFTF) have a better integrated voice in the advocacy for the use of land when available for purchase or development. Often this orphan group (consisting of elected board members and Town employees from BoS, Schools, NRC, DPW, and Recreation, as well as representatives from the key sports user groups) feels it is "on the outside" in trying to improve and expand the outdoor active recreational spaces vis-à-vis the passive recreation or some of the other potential uses. Furthermore, there is no Town organization chartered with considering the quality and quantity of indoor active recreational spaces. The PFTF has been discussing whether it should seek approval for this increased scope to help fill this gap. The Recreation Commission hopes that this new Land Use Group will provide an opportunity to address these concerns. Vote: 5 - 0

3. Creation of a Town Manager role with increased responsibilities vs. the current executive director – This has been the hardest issue for the Recreation Commission to reach some type of consensus. Our commissioners had preconceived biases on the degree of centralization that would be best for the Town ranging from "a preference for a very strong Town Manager and eliminating Town Meeting" to "a preference for keeping the existing role Hans has carved out". As a result, we could not reach unanimous agreement on the existing TGSC proposal. Only one commissioner is in favor of the TGSC proposal as written. Vote: 1 – 4.

A majority of the Commission expressed deep concerns over relinquishing to the Town Manager the Board's current authority to hire, establish goals for, evaluate performance, and if necessary replace the Board's director. The Commission does not question that the current evaluation process could be improved or that there is value in having a more consistent HR review process across the departments but the need to maintain the Board's ability to pursue its mission and goals, as promised to the voters, is important. Some of the commissioners expressed that perhaps this ability for the boards to pursue the board's goals and mission is the "secret sauce" that has kept Wellesley's volunteerism so active and the Town's government so vibrant leading to the great Town we live in. The recent changes the TGSC has made to the hiring process, specifically the 14 day Board review of the Town Manager's selected candidate and ability to reject the candidate, addresses the Recreation Commissioners' concern during the hiring phase. However, the need to have shared goals with the Town Manager in the annual review process would be critical to maintain the Board's effectiveness year after year. For the Recreation Commission this concern is not existential. The Commission has not had shared goals with "Town Hall" on basic questions such as whether the primary role of Recreation is to be a profit center to fund the Town's general fund or to provide quality of life enhancing programs and activities to its residents.

The Recreation Commission believes that a process to create shared goals between boards and the Town Manager is needed before accepting the TGSC recommendation. If specific policies and procedures to codify a shared goal setting process and "arbitration process", should agreement be difficult, could be created then the Commission could unanimously support the Town Manager writing the review of the department director with the Board's formal input. It was suggested by a TGSC representative that perhaps the Personnel Policies of the Town could be altered by the HR Board to create this shared goals requirement. However it is accomplished, some type of policies and procedures need to be in place to protect the board's role for all of the Recreation Commissioners to support this expanded role of the Town Manager.

Similarly, the Recreation Commission expressed its concern over losing the ability to submit its budget to ATM (TGSC's proposal has the Town Manager able to change the board's request). Perhaps a shared goals process would reduce this risk but the board's ability to execute on its mission could be compromised by disagreement over the board's budget request. The Recreation Commission did not vote on language around the funding question but views it as part and parcel with the shared goals. The logic goes, if we have shared goals and priorities then we should be able to reach agreement on the need to fund those goals. At least one commissioner views this change in who will submit the budget in article 8 "as potentially profoundly impactful as the change in the hiring, evaluation, and firing change".

Vote 5 - 0.

It is the Recreation Commission's plan to share this record with the TGSC, Board of Selectman, Advisory, and other interested boards and parties. We want to thank the TGSC members for their long and hard work. Changing a culture is very difficult – especially one that most feel has been producing an outstanding result – the Town of Wellesley.