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AYER PARKS DEPARTMENT

Town Hall ♦ One Main Street ♦ Ayer, MA 01432
978-772-8217 ♦ 978-772-8222 (fax)

Minutes of January 7, 2021 - Ayer Parks Commission

Location: First Floor Meeting Room, Ayer Town Hall

Members Present: Jason Mayo, Chairman, Ms. Sarah Gibbons, Mr. Gerald Amenta and Mr. Scott Copeland and Mr. Jason Leone (arrived at 7:20 PM) (all participating remotely)

Also Present: Jeff Thomas, Ayer Parks Director

At 7:02 PM Chairman Mayo read aloud the COVID-19 Emergency Order from Governor Baker allowing for remote participation meetings.

Chairman Mayo went over the agenda.

COVID-19 Concerns

Mr. Thomas stated that there has been little change in the State and local restrictions regarding restrictions due to COVID -19. This has limited what the department can do, but thankfully do not have a lot going on this time of year except for basketball program. Mr. Thomas stated that he will be meeting with the Ayer / Shirley Basketball Committee next week to see if there is any hope of any kind of season this year but does not look like it will happen. The only item that the department has at this point is the skating rink and has spoken to the Town Manager regarding proper signage for the rink for restrictions number of people and mask wearing.

Chairman Mayo asked if there were any restrictions on outdoor basketball.

Mr. Thomas stated that those restrictions had not changed basically the same as the summer the amount of people gathering where there is restrictions. Indoor basketball has several restrictions.

Chairman Mayo stated that he thought that the Parks Department can look at doing something in the spring outside on a limited basis.

Mr. Thomas stated that is a good idea, but the basketball committee will be looking to see about doing something sooner but is not likely. The restriction with something a limited outdoor basketball in the spring it may interfere with regular spring programs that did not operate last year due to COVID restriction that were in place then. The basketball committee will meet next week and discuss all options.

Chairman Mayo stated that going forward into the spring there will be more COVID concerns to consider like opening the beach and allowing for more spring sports.

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Project updates

Mr. Thomas stated that he has a couple of projects to update the Commission on including the School Street sidewalk improvements. Mr. Thomas spoke to the contractor regarding the rain garden and drainage near field 6 to improve that area along with adding a fence in that area.

Chairman Mayo asked what the cost for the fence would be and if it would need to be added to the capital spending.

Mr. Thomas stated that the funds for the fencing could come from the signage fund and would be around three to four thousand dollars.

Mr. Thomas stated that other projects that the Department has going on are Scout projects that he has already reported on and recapped those items with the Commission including two gazebo pits, and a little free library and wanted to invite those scouts to a meeting. Mr. Thomas asked if the Commission would like to wait till that can be done in person or invite them to a zoom meeting.

Chairman Mayo asked when the Eagle Scouts are having their ceremonies.

Mr. Thomas stated he did not believe they have had those yet.

Chairman Mayo stated that he would like to do it in person and could do outside a meeting as an informal item to thank them for the projects and have a photo taken at the project locations.

Mr. Thomas will also check with the scouts to see their preference as well.

Mr. Thomas stated that the cutouts that the Department did for the holiday season went well and the have been removed from the perimeter path this past weekend. Mr. Thomas stated that he will be contacting those that ordered the cutouts to return their deposits for the cutouts.

Mr. Thomas gave an update on the Parks building and remaining items for the new building including lockers for the seasonal employees.

Scholarship Fund

Mr. Thomas mentioned that at the last meeting it was discussed about having a scholarship fund and naming of a field in honor of Tim Nolan. Mr. Tim Nolan oversaw the sign funds, which is separate from town funds and consists of money collected from the advertising signs along the ball fields. There is a discussion on what to do with the remaining funds in the account one of the suggestions would be to have a scholarship fund in Mr. Nolan's name. The idea would be to keep the scholarship going every year with money collected from the signs. The Town Accountant is looking into the item and the question has been sent to Town Council regarding the scholarship.

Chairman Mayo stated that the reason to move the funds for the signs to the town is to keep the funding more secure to ensure.

Mr. Thomas mentioned that the Town Manager's Office and the Select Board have no issue with the Parks Commission naming a field after Mr. Nolan, but the question is being asked to Town Council since it is town property.

Chairman Mayo stated that the Commission should vote on the item to vote to change the name of field 6 in remembrance of Mr. Nolan.

At 7:29 PM Mr. Gerald Amenta made a motion to rename field 6 Tim Nolan pending further decision from Town Manager's Office. Mr. Jason Leone seconded. No discussion. Roll call vote: Scott Copeland, aye; Mr. Jason Leone, aye; Mr. Gerald Amenta, aye; and Chairman Mayo, aye.

Finance FY2022 Budget

Chairman Mayo stated that he and Mr. Thomas had a meeting with the Town Accountant, Lisa Gabree, HR Coordinator, Kevin Johnston, and Town Manager, Robert Pontbriand to discuss the seasonal employees. With the beach not opening last year and a few seasonal employees laid off from other jobs the town was liable to pay some unemployment benefits. The meeting was to ensure that the Parks Commission understands and labels seasonal employees properly.

Mr. Thomas went over the details of what a seasonal employee means including that they are not legible for benefits and only work part time in a limited time frame.

Chairman Mayo stated that they also discussed the budget during the meeting and went over the impacts of COVID on the budget.

Mr. Thomas went over the budget for the next fiscal year with the Commission. Mr. Thomas stated the only increases in the budget are due to minimum wage increases and increased utilities for the new parks building. The Finance Committee recommendation on the budget shows only \$6,000 for lifeguard wages under the thinking the beach will not open.

Chairman Mayo stated that the thinking of the Finance Committee in changing the lifeguard wages was due to bringing the item to town meeting might raise concerns since the beach was not open last year. Chairman Mayo stated that the Select Board wants the Commission to take the reduced amount in the wages, but the money will be placed in a reserve to pay the lifeguards to pay them if it opens but will not be in the parks budget.

Mr. Thomas stated that he does not understand the reasoning for that but was given a guarantee at the meeting that the money will be there if the beach opens for the beach operations.

Mr. Thomas stated that there were two other changes in the Finance Committee recommendations which was discussed during the meeting with Chairman Mayo.

Mr. Thomas went through the steps of approval of the budget with the Commission as well as reviewed the budget from the last few years compared to this year and next fiscal year.

Chairman Mayo stated that the Commission should go with a more conservative budget to present at town meeting, which should be easier to get passed at town meeting.

The Commission discussed the budget and the reserve items and are comfortable moving forward with that proposal.

Capital Planning

Mr. Thomas stated that the Parks Department will not be requesting anything under capital spending this year.

Mr. Gerald Amenta asked if there was anything planned for Kiddie Depot.

Mr. Thomas stated that there is a plan for it but not this due to the amount of testing, bids that need to be done to replace the playground. Mr. Thomas also mentioned that with COVID and possible budget restraints it would be better to wait on that project.

Beach

Mr. Thomas stated when he and Chairman Mayo met with the Town Manager regarding the budget, they also discussed the town beach. At that meeting they discussed the issues that occurred with the beach not opening. Mr. Thomas expressed that the Board of Health refusal to meet on site at the beach was one of the biggest issues from last year. A meeting at the beach this year should be delayed to at least March to go over the details on opening the beach.

Chairman Mayo mentioned that the Town Manager was very supportive in setting up the meeting this year with the Board of Health at the beach as well as going over the plan that was drafted last year. Hopefully we can meet with the Board and make the case to open the beach this year, with the plan to have more strictions in place then possibly needed.

Incidents

Mr. Thomas mentioned to the Commission that there were a few minor incidents at the park, one with the snowman cutouts and another with a person putting a basketball on the ice rink before it froze.

Soccer

Mr. Thomas did not have anything for soccer.

Next Meeting

Chairman Mayo mentioned the next meeting would be the week of Presidents Day.

Mr. Thomas stated that he can check with the Town Managers office for available days, he reminder the Board that Ms. Gibbons can not meet on Thursdays the next few months. Mr. Thomas will get a date out for the next meeting to the Commission in the next few weeks.

Chairman Mayo stated that the Commission should meet after the Finance Committee votes on the budget so the Commissions can discuss at the next meeting.

Adjourn

At 7:57 PM Mr. Jason Leone made a motion to adjourn the meeting. Mr. Scott Copeland seconded. No discussion. Unanimous vote to approve.