

# AYER PARKS DEPARTMENT

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## **Minutes of February 17, 2021 - Ayer Parks Commission**

Location: Parks Building, Pirone Park, Bligh St Ayer, MA

**Members Present:** Jason Mayo, Chairman, Ms. Sarah Gibbons, Mr. Gerald Amenta and Mr. Scott Copeland (all participating remotely)

**Also Present:** Jeff Thomas, Ayer Parks Director

**At 7:00 PM Chairman Mayo read aloud the COVID-19 Emergency Order from Governor Baker allowing for remote participation meetings.**

**Chairman Mayo went over the agenda items Mr. Jeff Thomas wished to discuss.**

### **Town Beach, Upcoming Beach Season**

Mr. Thomas stated that he spoke with the Town Manager, Mr. Robert Pontbriand, about having a meeting with Chairman Mayo, himself, Mr. Pontbriand to discuss the opening of the beach this year. Mr. Thomas stated that it is still early to hold that meeting but wanted to keep the discussion open with the Commission, about how important it is to them to have the beach open this year.

Chairman Mayo stated that it is very important that the beach be open this year, but the restrictions on that will depend on how everything looks with COVID come May.

Mr. Thomas asked if the Commission had any thoughts about how the beach opens this year.

Mr. Amenta stated that it is very important to the Commission and the residents that the beach open. There was a lot of disappointment that the beach did not open and feels that the plan that was submitted last year for reopening was strong and would work this year as well.

Mr. Copeland stated that opening beach is important and think that submitting pictures as part of the plan showing the beach and how people use the either sand or grass area.

Mr. Thomas stated that including pictures is a good idea since last year there appeared to be a disconnect at the space used for the beach.

Ms. Gibbons agreed that opening the beach is important.

Mr. Thomas stated that one of the concerns that the Town Manager expressed to him that come from the Board of Health was the ability of the beach staff to enforce masks and other state and local mandates. Mr. Thomas expressed his confidence in the staff that it would not be a concern but to show

that to the Board of Health and Town Manager it maybe that Ms. Jan or himself are present at the beach for the first few weeks to help staff.

Ms. Gibbons stated that all the Commission members are a text away as well to assist staff.

Chairman Mayo stated that everyone has been dealing with restrictions and masks for some time now and feel that it would not be too difficult to enforce at this point but if a staff member or parent have concerns, they can always contact the Commission.

#### **Nomination of New Soccer Representative**

Mr. Thomas went over the process for the representatives for the joint basketball and soccer boards with Shirley. Due to a vacancy left by a prior member a nomination will be brought to the Commission by a sitting member of the Board which will then need to be voted on by the Commission. Ms. Gibbons would be the soccer committee member to bring the nomination to the Commission but can take suggestions from the Commission as well.

Ms. Gibbons stated that she does not have a nomination in mind. Ms. Gibbons stated that Mr. Amenta expressed interest and didn't know what his thoughts were.

Mr. Amenta stated that he would like to talk to Ms. Gibbons more about the program and how he can help before making any commitment at this time.

Ms. Gibbons suggested sending an email to the current Ayer-Shirley Soccer families to see if anyone one is interested in the older age kids.

Chairman Mayo asked if there were any current coaches interested in being on the Board for the older kids.

Ms. Gibbons stated that she was not aware of any, mentioning that with COVID many people are focused on other things and sending an email looking for help.

Mr. Thomas mentioned if both Ms. Gibbons and Mr. Amenta could talk outside the meeting and reach out to the parents and hopefully get a nominee for the next meeting and relay that information to the Ayer-Shirley Soccer Committee.

#### **Input for Spring Soccer**

Ms. Gibbons stated that they surveyed the older kids' parents to see what they would be more comfortable doing this year, travel or in town. The results were more then 60% for in town, so it looks like there older kids will just be playing in town same as the fall, with their own in town league.

Chairman Mayo asked what Nashoba Valley was doing this year.

Ms. Gibbons stated that the Nashoba Valley league has not stated what their plans are for this year yet.

Chairman Mayo asked Ms. Gibbons if she knew what other towns are are doing.

Ms. Gibbons stated that they reached out to other towns, but they all have not come up with a plan at this time either.

Chairman Mayo asked if we are pressured to put a team into the league.

Ms. Gibbons stated that everyone understands that COVID has changed things. Ms. Gibbons went over the details in the survey that was sent out to parents to see what they would like to see.

Mr. Thomas stated that it would be important to Ms. Gibbons report back to the Soccer Board on what the Parks Commissioners want to see for the soccer season.

Chairman Mayo stated that he would defer to the other Commission members to see that they prefer.

Mr. Amenta stated that he would like to see more of a travel team but understands with COVID it is harder and would go with what the parents stated that they wanted. With the survey that Ms. Gibbons conducted the parents showed more interest with an in-town season again.

Ms. Gibbons mentioned that they talked about possibly getting together with another town that might do a similar in town program and have a game or two if COVID looks better come later in the spring.

Mr. Amenta stated that it was a good idea to do that with another town on a limited basis. Mr. Amenta asked what the next steps would be in moving forward with soccer.

Ms. Gibbons stated that they met this evening, but a member was not present to give input, at the meeting, more members voted to stay in town and then we will plan from there with schedule, coaches ect.

Mr. Thomas stated that he favored the in-town league himself with COVID as it is now and can make changes as far as masks, ect. if COVID restrictions change later in the spring. Mr. Thomas also mentioned that a game or two can be added with a neighboring town if desired if COVID changes enough to allow. Mr. Thomas mentioned that there was no U4 in the fall but U6 and U8 was offered and seemed to go well.

Ms. Gibbons stated that the goal is to continue with the U6 and U8 not sure about U4 with the age it is difficult with masks and distancing.

Mr. Amenta stated that he has been approached about having a U4 group this year but believed the parents will feel the same way that it would be difficult with restrictions. Mr. Amenta stated that maybe having another survey to see what parents want might be helpful. Mr. Amenta stated that the U6 and U8 groups went well.

Chairman Mayo stated that with the U4 program we would need to know if there are the parents available to help run it before we can decide if we will have a program for U4.

Mr. Amenta agreed that there is a huge need for volunteers at that age.

Ms. Gibbons stated that the discussion should start internally with the current coaches and then open a survey up to parents that may be interested but will be difficult to find out who to send the surveys to as it is a first-year program.

Mr. Thomas that the Commission should think about, and he can work on as well as he would like to see the camps reopen this summer. Mr. Thomas mentioned that a U4 program could be offered as a summer camp and stated there is a lot of benefits to that and they are also considering this for basketball as well.

Ms. Gibbons stated that she will set up a meeting with the younger soccer board and will report back to the Commission. Ms. Gibbons stated that they were contacted by the police athletic league to partner up with the U6 soccer this season.

### **Skating Rink**

Mr. Thomas stated that the rink has had a good showing this season at the park and is clearing a better location. Mr. Thomas mentioned that the new building's water has been able to service the rink and it is in good staking condition with some of the best ice they have had.

Chairman Mayo mentioned that he asked about having a night skate at the rink and wanted to know if Mr. Thomas got any information on lights.

Mr. Thomas stated that lights are inexpensive around a few hundred dollars unless it is every night need to set up a specific event date and time. Mr. Thomas stated that his concern with having an event type evening would be not being able to keep with social distancing guidelines. Mr. Thomas mentioned that they could just place the light at the rink a few nights and see how well it is received. It would cost around \$500.00 and did check with DPW to see if they have any light to use and there maybe.

Chairman Mayo stated he agreed with the event type evening stake but could do a Friday and Saturday stake night that would be good.

Mr. Thomas stated that they can try to make it happen this year if the commission would like.

Chairman Mayo stated having a night skate is something that can wait till next year since a commission member or staff will have to be present at the time.

Ms. Gibbons suggested that Mr. Thomas reach out to the Devens Recreation Department to see how they are lighting their rink.

### **Storybook Walk**

Mr. Thomas stated that Ms. Gibbons put together the Commission first Storybook Walk posters in time for the 150th anniversary of the town. Mr. Thomas stated that they are still working on future stories and is working with J&S Solutions here in town on getting another story printed and the cost. Mr. Thomas mentioned that the library is interested in working with the Parks Department on story walk. Mr. Thomas mentioned that there are other techniques for the story walk if J&S ends up being too expensive including jokes.

Chairman Mayo mentioned that there could be ones for every month and even include quotes for something like black history month.

Mr. Thomas stated that he liked the idea to change the items up every month and include the residents on what they would like to see. Mr. Thomas stated that the current system that are using for the storybook walk is working well so far. Mr. Thomas stated that he has a few leads on Eagle Scout and Silver Scout projects for the storybook walk as well.

**Other Family Friendly Events**

Ms. Gibbons wanted to ask the Commission about other family friendly events about working with Mr. Thomas and town for a possible timed social distant egg hunt.

Mr. Thomas asked if he should ask the Town Manager's office about it.

Mr. Amenta stated that he would be glad to help with an egg hunt if possible.

Ms. Gibbons will send an email to Mr. Thomas and Mr. Amenta with more details.

**Finance**

Mr. Thomas stated that he will be going to the next Finance related meeting, is in two weeks which he will attend. Mr. Thomas stated it is a public form for the budget and mentioned that he does not anticipate any push back on the proposed budget as both the Select Board and Finance Committee agree with the proposed budget.

**Park Signs**

Mr. Thomas mentioned that he has not heard from the Town Manager's Office or the Treasures Office about converting that account to the Parks Department. Mr. Thomas mentioned that the Commission will want to discuss what they will do with the field 6 with Tim Nolan as a memorial.

Chairman Mayo stated that the Commission voted to at the last meeting to rename field 6 for Mr. Nolan contingent on the Town Manger's office approval.

Mr. Thomas stated that the office has been made aware of the request.

Chairman Mayo stated that the next item for the Commission is to figure out what type of signage they will use for the field.

**Incidents**

Mr. Thomas stated there have been no incidents and he has been snow blowing the path to keep it clear along with salting.

**Next Meeting**

Will be the week of March 15<sup>th</sup> depending on availability

**Adjourn**

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