

Monthly Parks Department Update February

February 2 came with lots of clouds and no shadow for the groundhog to see, which according to lore means an early spring is coming. At the time we had had a record high temperature for the month of January, there was no snow on the ground and lakes were already starting to have their ice receding. A few blizzards and subzero days later, those high hopes were shattered, and it was looking like we would be socked in again and forced to delay all of our outdoor spring programs. But as of this writing, grass is starting to show and the forecast is promising, so we may very well be able break out of the winter doldrums by mid-March. After the last two years, where we were still waiting on playing fields to be snow free by late April, that would be a pleasant change.

After several month of research and review of legal counsel opinion, The Parks Commission will be making some changes to the facilities use policies at Sandy Pond Beach. These will be taking effect when the beach area reopens for swimming on May 28. The two most prominent changes involve non-resident use and non-resident parking. Starting May 28, the Sandy Pond Beach facility will be charging non-residents a \$5 entry fee for daily use. This fee is to help offset the cost of maintaining the facility, which is currently funded exclusively by Town of Ayer residents. Residents will continue to be allowed entry at no fee as long as they present a photo ID showing they are a Town of Ayer resident. Those who do not have a photo ID will be able to obtain a card at Town Hall that will allow them free access. The lower parking lot (along Snake Hill Road) will become a resident only parking area, and will require those using it to have a resident parking sticker. Those who have a valid transfer station sticker may use that as proof of residency, and those who do not may get a parking sticker at Town Hall. The upper lot along Sandy Pond Road will remain open to the general public, as well as the surrounding street parking spots. More details about these changes, including when and where stickers and cards can be picked up will be made available to the public in early March. We hope this will be a relatively easy transition for beach patrons as we develop the best ways to go about making these changes, which are designed to make our beach facility a more safe and enjoyable place for all.

We are in the last few weeks of our basketball season. The 5th-8th grade NPYBL teams have finished their season, with the 7th-8th Grade Ayer-Shirley Lady Panthers winning the championship in their division. The four Panther Elite teams playing in the North Central Mass League will be having their playoff games in the beginning of March, and we wish them well playing against some of the best teams in the area! The NPYBL program will finish February 27, while the PreK-4th Grade levels will have their end of year events on March 5. With the basketball season coming to a close, we will be looking ahead to many spring programs, including soccer, baseball, softball and volleyball. The Parks Department will also be offering some non-sports related youth programs, such as Tech Kids, Racketeering and YO! (Youth Outdoors). Information for these programs can be found on the Parks Department page at the Town website.

Let's keep our fingers crossed for an early spring!

Jeff Thomas
Ayer Parks Director