

RECEIVED
2021-09-01
9:37 AM

Meeting Minutes (Rev 2)
Roberts Field Advisory Council

TOWN OF CHELMSFORD
PATRICIA E. DZURIS
TOWN CLERK

Date: May 20, 2021; 7:00pm

Place: Video Conference

Committee Attendees: Amanda Hall, Elisabeth Bobrow, Bill Askenburg, Marcus Bush,
Barry Jefferson, Adelle Stavis

Other Attendees: Jim Martin

Next meeting target: May 25, 10:00am on-site at Roberts Field

7:10pm Marcus called the meeting to order and turned it over to Barry.

Barry reviewed the RFAC member list and indicated that Amanda Hall would soon be added.

The January 27th and March 11th RFAC meeting minutes were voted approved subject to the correction of Elisabeth's name.

Barry then displayed the three plan drawings that Steve Jahnle had submitted to the committee, including the topographical map, the proposed grading plan, and the proposed field layout with exercise stations. Barry read some correspondence that he had received from Steve saying that there were some conflicts between the locations of exercise stations #2 and #4 and the preservation of a few of the protected trees. Steve said that there was plenty of room in the back to miss the cherry tree. However, he recommended taking down the two butternut trees, #58 & #59, near the larger station, #4, and cleaning up the entire area from bittersweet, and then planting trees elsewhere on the property. Barry then displayed the same map that he had received from Jim Martin with markings showing missing protected trees. Steve said that he could probably move the exercise station slightly to preserve the trees and work around them with his equipment, but doing this would prevent him from clearing the bittersweet the way he had planned to.

The committee agreed that we needed to hear Steve's thoughts about not being able to take out the invasives if the butternut trees are preserved. They said more information was needed and expressed an interest in meeting with Steve at the park the following week. The group advised Barry to set the meeting and post it as an official committee meeting per town requirements. Then if a quorum of committee members were present, open meeting laws would be followed.

Jim Martin raised the question of how Steve was proposing to get rid of the bittersweet. The group responded by saying that they thought he was planning on using heavy equipment to scalp the top foot or so of soil in a similar manner to what he did for the playground. Jim said that there were other ways of accomplishing that. Bill added that Steve could give us a 15' circle around the trees for hand clearing, and then Steve could use heavy equipment for the rest. The group reflected that we would know more after meeting on-site with Steve.

The group next reviewed Jim's spreadsheet in the deck which confirmed that the butternut trees are in fair condition. Jim indicated that they would likely improve further with the removal of the bittersweet. Bill noted that one of the butternuts is 28 feet tall and the other is 41 feet tall. Jim said that if new 10-foot trees were planted to replace them, it could take 30 years to grow to 28 feet, and that is only if the new trees survived, which is questionable. Bill added that these trees drop fruit which feeds the park wildlife as well, giving benefits similar to the apples at the front of the playground.

Barry next displayed the diagram that Bill provided showing the potential location of new benches near the pond. He said that the Friends of Roberts Field had received a request for a sponsored bench near the pond and wanted to discuss with the committee a bench plan for the entire area. He said that if Steve had not yet submitted his plans to the conservation commission, that he wanted to get proposed bench locations added to Steve's plan so that they could be approved.

The committee agreed to discuss the bench plan (types and locations) at a future meeting. It was agreed that, for consistency, we would use the same types of benches that are in the playground. Bill said he is investigating costs for building new steel and wood slat style benches. The sitting stones cost \$400 each. He expects the steel and wood benches to have similar costs.

Barry said that he would take pictures and include bench images and models in the deck for the next meeting. Bill noted that the Friends of Roberts Field would have to fund raise for these. He suggested that a prioritized location list could be developed, along with a tree plan as well.

Barry said that Steve Jahnle had indicated that he would be doing grading around the end of July or early August. He said that to the best of his knowledge, Steve has not started on the irrigation well. Bill noted that the well location was marked on Steve's plan, near the garage building where power was available. Barry added that the well will have to be drilled and tested for yield before the rest of the irrigation system can be planned.

Barry displayed the survey demographics pie chart, indicating that people were clearly coming in from surrounding towns, but it is not clear whether the graph accurately reflected the proportions of people from those towns. Amanda then shared what she learned from her visits to the park four to five times a week. She said that she often asks any parent next to her where they are from, and their answers indicate that at least half are not from Chelmsford, and sometimes from far away like from the north shore.

Adelle said that from the chart showing draw from surrounding towns and additional anecdotal information, she had what she needed to write grant applications. She is hoping for a call back from the subcommittee managing the allocations for the grant she has been working on, but it may be too late to get it in this year. Barry then asked Adelle if it would be worth the effort to do some direct polling from the park in hopes of the results showing a much wider distribution than what the chart shows now. She answered that it might be quite helpful for some grants.

There was considerable back and forth about the best process for conducting the survey. The team generally liked the idea of a combination: using a QR code, perhaps on a laminated sheet, to aim their phones to the survey website and, as backup, entering what information we can get verbally on either paper or our own devices if they do not want to take the survey. If they wanted to take the survey but couldn't do so right there and then, they could simply take a picture of the QR code and complete the survey later. Amanda said that she would be willing to help with this and would link up with Barry for support.

Once Barry and Amanda try out the process, others said they would be available to help. Amanda typically goes in the morning, Elisabeth the evenings and weekends, Adelle can do afternoons after 2:00, and Marcus can do it during his noon time dog walk. In terms of the time frame for doing this – sometime in the next few weeks as the pandemic settles.

Barry walked through the remaining survey results and people asked if they could get information on all the responses. Bill asked if all the responses were listed. Barry said no but that that he would get the latest from Ted Lutter, edit it to add the pie chart, and forward it out to the committee.

The next topic of conversation was hand sanitizer. Barry told the group that Justin Whitehouse has already bought a dispenser for the park. Barry reported that he spoke with the fire prevention officer and was told that there was no concern providing that any dispensers were under 42 oz. and 6 feet apart. Barry also received feedback from the town health department nurse, Sue Rosa, who voiced several concerns. There must be a solid plan for refilling and maintaining the dispenser(s), and for receiving any complaints or questions that come from the public. The committee raised many additional questions about the dispenser, ranging from where it would be located, how often it would be inspected, how it would be mounted without damage to existing structures, how vandalism would be handled, and for what period of time it would remain installed.

The committee finally decided that there were too many unknowns to move forward with this now, and voted to table it until more information becomes available.

On the subject of volunteer projects, Bill brought up the upcoming May 25th gardening event whereby volunteers, under the coordination of Sandie Rainey, would be doing weeding and other maintenance on the pollinator, skate shack, and playground gardens.

Barry next asked Bill to discuss the new signs that he has been developing. He is having new Pollinator Park HDPE plastic signs carved to replace carved wooden signs installed in 2016 that haven't weathered well. He is also having new directional signs added along the trail on the southwest side of the park. The committee enthusiastically endorsed the work that Bill has been doing.

Bill also showed us new replacements for the parking lot sign, which will be printed on ¾ inch PCV and not carved. These have been approved by both Steve Jahnle and Steve Callaghan.

The next topic was the walking path and bridge repair projects that Bill led in conjunction with some volunteers. One event involved weeding and spreading 10 yards of wood chips along the trail at the back of the pond. The *Friends of Roberts Field* bought and used donated materials to replace two bridges and add 48 feet of boardwalk in some of the seasonally wet areas. They also applied some wetland friendly poison ivy control at the back of the pond. (1 gal. vinegar, 1 cup Epsom salts, 1 squirt Dawn dishwashing detergent)

Adelle mentioned that the survey contained comments about problems with dog waste, and asked if we should be providing waste bags. Bill responded by saying that we already have large trash bins which are emptied regularly by the DPW. This is significant and something that other parks do not have. We also have signs asking people to pick up after their dogs. Bill added that we have lots of geese, and often the dogs get blamed for their droppings.

Adelle next told us that some people are requesting the playground be declared a peanut-free zone. The committee's response was that it would never be enforceable, and that such an action would create a crutch and not be reliable because people would not always abide by it. This could create a liability issue by setting expectations for something that we could not enforce. Bill said that if someone felt really strong about this issue, then they should take it up with the town board of health.

Adelle confirmed that she still has the action on her to-do list to add Friendship Park to certain websites that listed ADA compliant parks.

The committee revisited the idea of doing a neighborhood site-walk and whether we should still plan to do this. It was agreed that we should but the timing was not right yet. We needed to wait until Steve Jahnle is ready to begin work with a final plan that reflects installation of the exercise stations and preservation of the butternuts and other trees marked for preservation.

Barry asked if we needed to get a special Zoom account for hosting our meetings. Attempts to have the town provide an account for us was problematic. After some back and forth, the committee agreed to table the idea and continue using Marcus' Microsoft Teams account for as long as it was available.

The next meeting is going to be on Tuesday, May 25, 10:00am as a site-walk with Steve Jahnle. Barry will register this as an official RFAC meeting.

This meeting was adjourned at 9:10pm.