MEETING MINUTES
Parks & Recreation Commission Regular Meeting
May 12, 2022 (Thursday) 8:00pm via Zoom

Commissioners In Attendance: Joanne Baecher-DiSalvo (Chair), Gene Calamari, Mike Jacobs, Amy Listerman, Angela Reeve, Aaron Golembiewski. A quorum is in order.

Also in Attendance: Aaron Podhurst (Superintendent), Nicole Higgins (Pool Director), Morgen Fleisig (Board of Trustees)

1. Call to Order

2. Public Comment

Peter Wolf of Hastings. Regarding the Chemka Pool situation, where is the pool on the list of things to do? He wants to convey that he is very upset that the pool will not be opening. Mr Wolf also asked if there is any possibility that a new contractor could be found?

3. Old Business

- Approve April minutes - approved.

-Skate Park - update. (Mike Jacobs).
Mike reports that a lot has been happening behind the scenes. A topographical survey was made (just over a month ago). Skate park designers have been engaged by HoHSkate and are in the process of analyzing the topography. This afternoon Mike met with one of the skate park design team members from Philadelphia to walk the property. Mike was impressed that they would take the time to come the distance and walk the property. Hopefully within the next few weeks (not exactly sure of HoHSkate’s schedule) a schematic might be ready to present. Members of HoHSkate (youngsters) met with the Mayor, and Mike understands that there was a nice dialogue between the youngsters and the Mayor to talk about large scale community projects and discuss generally the next steps.

Aaron G wants to pass along some feedback that he received when he met some skate enthusiasts off the south county trail – these skate enthusiasts wanted to share that they don’t like that the Ardsley skate park is always locked, and they hope Hastings park will have lights.
4. New Business

- Upcoming / New Programs

A current listing of Recreation programming can be found on the department's section of the Village website. Found here: https://www.hastingsgov.org/parks-and-recreation-department

-Bike Rodeo
-Spring Fling (with Green Fair)
-Memorial Parade
-Friday Night Pride
-Bugs decorating cupcake workshop

-Hastings Day Camp - (update from Lisa O'Reilly). Enrollment is going really well. While it is sad that the day camp will not have use of the Chemka Pool this summer, Lisa is happy to report that the Rec Dept has negotiated 2 hours per day of swim time at the Children's Village in Dobbs Ferry (see the Village wide email that went out). The Rec department has hired a new rec specialist to bring water games and activities to campers.

- Playing field crisis in Hastings (presentation by David Downs)

David Downs, former Parks & Recreation Commissioner, current trainer for Rivertowns United FC, current coach of JV soccer at Master’s School, and resident of the Village of Hastings since 1985. David is here this evening at the invitation of Joanne (Chair) to present to the P&R Commission on the notable lack of rectangular playing fields in Hastings. (reference David’s April 25, 2022 letter to the Mayor, Village Manager, Board of Trustees, Parks Superintendent, P&R Commission, Superintendent of Hastings UFSD, School Board, and Athletic Director.)

David has spoken with the Mayor and Joanne about the issue (note that the shortage of playing fields was identified in the “Long-Range Plan for Strategic Management of Parks and Recreation Assets, which David authored on behalf of the P&R Commission and Village in 2016). David has also met with school district members to discuss short term solutions. He notes that the school district owns 4 fields, but does not allow casual play on any of those fields. Since the school district received his April 25th letter, they are now allowing play on Reynolds field.

David shared some national averages for a community our size and notes that Hastings is lacking in rectangle playing fields. David highlights that we have a physically active population in Hastings (between Hastings High School, Farragut Middle School, plus 380 AYSO soccer youth athletes, plus 75 Hastings soccer athletes.

Compared to other Rivertowns, our 4 Hastings playing fields are all controlled by the Hastings school district.
David was training his team at Reynolds field this past Tuesday, and noted that it is filled with bare patches, uneven surfaces, weeds, etc. The field is heavily used, and has heavy restrictions on use of fertilizers, etc.

To share a bit of the history with the Commissioners, David outlined that:

1946 - Village owned Reynolds. The school did not have a field at that time. The Village authorities transferred the ownership to the school district so the school would have one field. The deed pointedly says that the school shall never deny the Village the use of that field.

1970’s - the school district created the playing fields at the Burke Estate.

2003 - the upper Burke Field was created and a lower baseball diamond was created.

You’d like to think based on the history that we have made progress, but we have NOT. Seemingly we are going backwards. Since the 1990’s, enrollment per grade has increased.

David suggests a number of solutions… probably in reverse order:

1- Village purchase some land, and create rectangle fields on that land;

2- Village develop existing park land as playing field
   (reference the P&R Commission’s prior interest in the 9A parcel, and note that we were disappointed to learn that a significant portion of that parcel was under the Saw Mill River and it was determined that parcel could not be developed into a playing field);

3- long run intelligent solution would be to zone a portion of the waterfront to a professional sports facility that could develop that and agree to allow access to residents

The most viable solution (recognized by the school district), is to somehow incentivize the school district to resurface one of the two fields to artificial turf to increase playing capacity (the field would be available more months a year if on turf). This would also allow for play before and after rainstorms.

One thought David had (and the school district seemed interested), if they were to resurface one of their Burke fields, and could also redo a baseball diamond, then we may be able to get more populations/sports on board with this idea.

In a 2017 presentation to the Village Board of Trustees, it was noted that we cover so many active amenities for active recreation, but we just do not have field sports covered under the control of the Recreation Department.

What can the P&R Commission do? If school is headed into the direction of increasing usage/capacity of existing facility?

Remember that we are so far off the recommended standards (88% of our parks are for passive recreation, and about 12% for active recreation).
David encourages the Parks & Rec Commission to push for the school district to resurface with turf.

Joanne questioned the 9A parcel…. David reminded us that it wasn’t large enough to fit a full or even half field at that location.

Amy Listerman reminded us of the controversy surrounding the last suggestion of a turf field. David suggests that part of that controversy was due in part because the turf field was put in the budget as a part of the $8M bond at that time. David also notes that a couple of the most vocal opponents of turf at that time were opposed to the aesthetics (and happened to live close to the Reynolds location). The beauty of putting turf at the Burke Estate location is that it really is not visible to the neighbors.

Gene seemed to recall the prior discussions included concerns that turf meant “ground up tires” and concerns that the material was toxic. Technology has advanced, so turf now is ground up cork (not tires) avoiding overheating. Gene suggests Reynolds would be the location would be ideal, and noted that turf fields need to be redone every 15 years or so. The other concern the Village had back then was the temperature of a turf field gets much hotter than a grass field.

NYS high school regulations stipulate no play if field heat index is 96 or higher. (almost never occurs in April/May, nor October/November). Turf fields are used during the summer months.

David shared that the school district supports the idea of turf.

David suggests that the Recreation Department could pledge capital and ongoing usage fees. As a Commission, let’s make sure we are talking about this… and when we are talking with the school district about use of the tennis courts, or Zinsser fields, for example,

Registration fees could contribute to fields.

Aaron G wants to talk about turf, and the environmental concerns… he needs a better understanding of the water retention and environmental considerations before he could be on board with the suggestion of turf.

Joanne expressed appreciation for David's input and guidance. David will email the presentation to Aaron and Angela (please distribute to the Commissioners).

David would like to end his presentation/discussion by saying that it is true that the problem lies with the Hastings school district, but it is our (Village parks and recreation) problem too.
Ideas for improving entry to Hillside Woods at Edgewood/Taft Aves
(presentation by Cassandra Sweet, Lincoln Avenue, Hastings.)

Ms. Sweet shared that neighbors of this area have been talking for years, but have not had a formal meeting on the specifics. Ms. Sweet is here to share some initial ideas that are going around about improving the access point to Hillside Woods in this area.

This is referred to as the “Vernal Pond” entry among the neighbors in this area. The problems:
- Treacherous
- Uneven
- Stumps, looks sad
- Chain link fence, not very aesthetic
- Lack of info about how to support the woods
- No cohesive design vision
- (entry to Padj, so it is being used at night)
- Looks like a “junk yard” in its current condition

Brainstorming:
Involved Parties could include:
- P&R, Conservation Commission, Hillside Woods Steering Committee
- Additional groups that have exciting things going on at the moment… Hastings Historical Society, Hastings Pollinator Pathway, Arts Commission (sculpture) How do we make sure everyone is in alignment and contributing if interested?

We want this entryway to have a special meaning as we take on the Hillside Woods restoration project.

Process: How does this sound?
Right now, we have a group of people interested in “adopting” this spot. We have 8 families committing to long term maintenance of this spot (families in this area). Along the idea of an “Adopt-a-spot” … but, its something a bit more, in that this is an entryway to Hillside Woods.

1- Functional Infrastructure -
stairs that are safe, practical (possibly a handrail), emergency entryway
2- Ecology
3- Information and Community

Joanne thanked Ms. Sweet for her presentation.
- Superintendent's Report

-Chemka Pool - not opening in 2022
(reference email that went out from the Recreation Department to the Commissioners and the Village)

Children’s Village pool (Dobbs Ferry) has been secured for the Hastings Day Camp. We’re still in discussions to see if swim lessons and senior swim options might be an option.

Use of Gould Pool - non-resident memberships have sold out.

Use of Tarrytown Pool (being discussed at the Board of Trustee level)

Use of Anthony Veteran Pool in Ardsley (also being discussed at the Board level).

Update from Nicole Higgins (Chemka Pool Director) -
Swim Team - the “Hastings Swarm” has secured the use of Gould Pool (in Dobbs Ferry) and is working closely with Kendra Garrison, Superintendent of Recreation for the Village of Dobbs Ferry. The Swarm will have practice time, and be able to host 3 home meets at Gould Pool. Nicole has communicating with Coach Don Wember and Melissa Marsh (Swarm parent boosters) to make sure the swim team has a home.

Children’s Village pool has been secured for two hours each weekday for use by our Hastings Day Camp. Nicole is still discussing the possibility of swim lessons, senior swim, and possibly even lap swimming at this location. It is a smaller indoor facility, and is a promising lead for us.

Staff affected by Chemka Pool closure - Angela Reeve has been sharing aquatic related job postings with Nicole who in turn has been sharing with our staff. Note that roughly 80 employees were affected when we announced the Chemka Pool would not be opening this summer. Nicole has offered to serve as a job reference for former aquatic staff, and we are trying to locate work opportunities for the staff affected by the pool closure. Some of our aquatic staff have been offered opportunities to work for our Day Camp.

Chemka pool repairs - At the recommendation of the aquatic engineer, the one bid that the Village received for the repairs has been rejected. The bidding process will go out again in June, and we hope that it will be awarded in July. The aquatic engineer recommends the June/July timeframe. We hope to have a better idea of the supply chain issues as we move forward.

Joanne asked Aaron P if we know why no other =companies didn’t bid on our project? Aaron noted that they could not meet the bid requirements (staffing, supply chain issues, etc). The one company that did bid on the project would not even guarantee that they would be able to meet the work and the timeline as outlined.

Public Comment -

Val Harmon, High Street, Hastings (and former Director of Chemka Pool) - Thank you to Lisa
and Nicole for finding our staff the possibility of some type of employment. When she heard the pool wasn’t opening, her first thought was that our college-aged staff were in the middle of taking their exams and would be finding out late that they will not have a job at Chemka this summer. Val would like to suggest that for next spring, we need to plan on offering more lifeguard training courses and water safety instructor courses to gear up our staff for 2023. And again, thank you to Lisa and Nicole.

Jeff Alterman, Hastings. Maybe some Hastings residents would have some limited access to Dobbs Ferry (noting that Dobbs Ferry helped us out last summer).

Aaron Podhurst noted again that the non-resident pool passes for Gould Pool have sold out.

Mike Jacobs would like to offer a few thoughts… The Chemka Pool closure is a massive disappointment to the Village. Residents have a lot of questions as to why the pool will not be opening, and have questioned the process and timeline of how we have arrived here today. (from September when Tropical Storm Ida caused the damage). As a Commission member, I wonder if we perhaps underestimated the importance of ensuring the pool got back up online. Mike wants the Commission to be accountable on how we approach this need. This is not to suggest that Aaron Podhurst, Nicole Higgins, and Lisa O’Reilly have not given this their full effort and attention.

Joanne stressed that we all agree that the Chemka Pool is a top priority. Some things were just not in our control. Joanne stressed that the Commission would ask Aaron for monthly updates on the pool, and we need to do what we can to ensure that the project is rebid soon (before August, noting that certainly the Village Manager, Aaron P and the aquatics engineer would be looking to the optimal time to have the work rebid).

-Hastings Spring Thing / Green Fair (update from Amy Listerman, who is also liaison to the Hastings Conservation Commission)
- Spring Fling / Green Fair is this Sunday, May 15th - 12-4pm
- Angela will staff the table representing the P&R Commission
- Everyone should come on down.. there will be sidewalk sales, restaurants with tables, “Bash the Trash” with a craft and musical parade, green vendors plus representatives from the various Village commissions/groups (the Conservation Commission, Pollinator Pathway, Hillside Woods groups, Vine Squad, reps from the Village tree board). There will be electric vehicles parked/displayed, e-Bikes displayed, a geothermal display, a solar display, ConEd, folks that do home energy audits, landscapers, etc. The Hastings High School environmental club will be there with an activity for youngsters. Weather forecast is great, come on down!

- Hillside Woods - update.
The next Hillside Woods steering committee meeting is next week (so we’ll have a better idea of next steps after that meeting)
5. Adjournment

Next Meeting: June 9, 2022 (Thursday, 8:00pm via Zoom)

Minutes Prepared by: A. Reeve
Minutes adopted on: June 9, 2022