

**TOWN OF BEDFORD
PARKS & RECREATION COMMISSION
MEETING MINUTES
January 16, 2019**

Present were: Chairwoman Michelle Casale, Sheila Quick, David Gilbert (TC Rep), Steve Grocott (Alt). Bill Duschatko (TC Rep alternate) arrived at 7:22 pm.

Chairman Casale opened the meeting at 7 PM and welcomed all present.

NEW BUSINESS –

A. Discussion of Proposed Recreation User Fees

Chairwoman Casale introduced the topic of potential recreation user fees and stated that the Commission would not be voting on this item tonight, noting that this topic has not yet been reviewed by the Members of the Outdoor Leagues Discussion Group (M.O.L.D.). Chairwoman Casale invited Councilors Dave Gilbert and Kelleigh Murphy to speak on the topic.

Councilor Gilbert stated that Town Council was asked to develop a proposed plan for possible recreation user fees as part of a long-term plan for sustainable field maintenance in the Town. Three (3) emails were received by the Commission in relation to this topic. One in support from Erin Murphy; two opposed – one from Bill Greiner and one from Diane Phelps.

Councilor Murphy stressed the fact that the proposed fees are part of a long-term plan, emphasizing the need for a 6-month to 12-month evaluation period, to allow time for all affected parties to come together and discuss the topic. Councilor Murphy went on to explain that at a recent Town Council meeting the proposed \$3.9 million bond for recreation park repairs and upgrades was discussed, and residents pointed out the need for there to be a long term maintenance plan to support such improvements, or else they will quickly fall back into disrepair.

Councilor Murphy addressed some of the biggest mistruths that have been circulating online. Specifically:

***Mistruth 1:** We are going to charge the schools to use the fields.* While other communities do create chargebacks from the schools for town field use, this is something that the Town Council sub-committee discussed and decided against.

***Mistruth 2:** The user fee plan is being shoved through.* There needs to be at least a 6-month discussion period in order for all aspects of field use to be evaluated properly. There are many variables to consider and we believe Town leagues should have first priority.

Councilor Murphy stated that while the current proposed user fees document is more like a document of future talking points, some councilors said they would not support the proposed

field repair bond unless it included language to the effect that the Town would implement a user fee plan to offset future maintenance costs, which prompted more discussion about user fees. Chairwoman Casale opened the discussion to public comment.

Dave Costa – 53 Greenmeadow Lane – Babe Ruth Baseball

Mr. Costa stated that he would like to see the Memorandum of Understanding (MOUs) between the Town and the schools reopened from when they were established 15+ years ago, particularly for the 90-foot diamond fields. Mr. Costa explained that his group uses Riley Field, but that the school needs to get on the field sooner, and keep using it longer into the season, than his league. Mr. Costa noted there are many differences between the rectangular fields and the diamond fields, i.e. buildings, infields vs. outfields, etc. Mr. Costa stated that he can rent fields in both Concord and Manchester for \$75 an hour, which are fully-prepped (i.e. grass is pristine, bases are out, fields are lined, etc.).

Steve Grocott asked for an estimate of how much time and money Mr. Costa spends to maintain and prep Riley field each year. Mr. Costa estimated it costs \$3,000 to \$5,000 per year, plus tons of man hours to maintain Riley field, depending on weather. He estimated when dealing with weather effects, such as seasonal rain, it can take 2-4 hours to prepare the fields before each game.

Councilor Dave Gilbert mentioned the Town spends \$313,000 each year on field maintenance and asked Jeff Foote, Director of Public Works, to elaborate. Mr. Foote stated that the \$313,000 includes weekly mowing for all the fields, periodic application of fertilizer and pesticides as applied by third party contractors, capital costs of machinery, wages, irrigation system repairs and maintenance, as well as utility costs. Mr. Foote did note that electricity for Riley's fieldhouse is paid for by the league. DPW estimates that turning just one field, Sportsman field, into a turf field would cause an annual maintenance cost increase of about \$70,000.

Mr. Costa asked that the Commission consider asking the schools to be more involved in the maintenance of Riley field due to the fact that the school needs the field around April 1st each year, but the Babe Ruth League does not begin using the field until at least a month later. Even though the league does not use the fields until a month after the school starts using it, the current MOU puts the burden on the league to open and prepare the field before the school season starts. Additionally, when the MOU was developed, there was only one high school baseball team, there are now four teams. The Commission recognized the concerns and agreed to consider the information moving forward.

Gary Gilbert – 18 Carriage Lane – Bedford Little League

Mr. Gilbert stated that Bedford Little League has approximately 450-480 kids enrolled in their programs each year, depending on the session (i.e. fall/spring). They estimate field usage will cost the league approximately \$50,000 each year in fees under the proposed user fee schedule, which could double the registration cost for the players. Mr. Gilbert proposed the question, if we pay \$50,000 a year in user fees, what do we get in exchange? The league is currently spending about \$15,000 per year to maintain the fields they use, not including any capital improvement projects, like fence repairs/replacement, etc. Can the Town be responsive enough to maintain six fields that are being played on every night?

Sheila Quick asked what the current cost of a Little League registration is. Mr. Gilbert explained the cost ranges from \$75 to \$135 per year depending on the player's level. Currently the family cap is \$250. The league may not be able to offer the family cap if they have to pay field fees. Steve Grocott asked about qualifications for kids to play in the recreational Little League. Mr. Gilbert explained there is only a residency requirement and an age requirement. There is also a challenger division for children with special needs; there are no registration fees for the challenger division.

Brett Jaffey – 1 Bailey's Green – Bedford Athletic Club (BAC) Soccer

Mr. Jaffey stated that he feels charging a user fee is nearly like charging a double tax, since tax payers would need to pay for the fields through property taxes and then again through user fees. However, the club does support paying something towards field maintenance. The league is concerned about the use of the fees if they are pooled into the general fund and not put directly into the maintenance of fields. Currently, BAC pays for their own equipment for field preparation and maintenance (excluding mowing). BAC pays for supplies and equipment to line the fields; they also have town cleanup days at the fields.

Mr. Jaffey stated that 6 months is not long enough for BAC to evaluate the impact that user fees would have on their program due to the length of their season. BAC has two different programs, a recreational program and a competitive program, with about 250 youth enrolled. Currently the enrollment fee for the recreation program is \$60 per player for the season and BAC expect this would be doubled. The travel team enrollment is expected to increase by \$100 per player based on the currently proposed fee schedule. Mr. Jaffey stated that some towns have grandfathered existing programs when they have added user fees, and asks that Bedford consider doing the same.

Councilor Murphy clarified that funds collected as revenue have to go into the general fund, but that the Town can choose to assign the same number of dollars collected as revenue, towards field maintenance. Councilor Murphy referred to this as a dollar-for-dollar match for the funds collected.

Jay Joseph – 118 County Road – GPS/Bedford Soccer (private league)

Mr. Joseph stated he has been living in town since the 1980's and has been involved with town sports since then. Mr. Joseph noted the number of the fields in town has significantly increased over the years and agrees that the Town needs to come up with some creative ways for everyone to chip in on maintenance. A few years back, Bedford soccer cut a deal with GPS to build two rectangular turf fields down on Back River Road. At least \$600,000 was put into the Back River Road fields which took a lot of stress off of the other town fields. Mr. Joseph stated that he believes the Back River Road fields are valued around \$2 million, and that GPS may be paying upwards of \$50,000 in taxes on those fields. Mr. Joseph noted this may be something to consider when saying the private clubs do not pay towards taxes and the general fund.

Gary Gilbert – 18 Carriage Lane – Bedford Little League

Gary Gilbert asked if there is a timeline for when the proposed fees might be implemented. Councilor Dave Gilbert stated that a timeline has not yet been defined. Councilor Gilbert noted there needs to be more discussion with MOLD, and other related groups to gather data before making a decision, but emphasized the need for the data gathering process to get started now.

Frank Sledjeski – 2 Karolina Lane – GPS/Bedford Soccer

If user fees were charged, the expectations would likely be that the Town would have the fields prepped and the leagues wouldn't be paying their own maintenance any more. Mr. Sledjeski stated that Public Works is likely not staffed to meet those expectations with how they are currently set up, etc. Can they be ready for a weekend game tournament with weather?

Loren Foxx – 79 Wentworth Drive – Bedford Little League/New program for girls baseball

Mr. Foxx stated, if we have to charge double, we may not have the ability to offer registration scholarships anymore. Currently when there is a game, there may be a dozen guys who volunteer over the course of 5 or 6 hours to prep the fields for a game. What happens if there is a trip up, and the Town isn't ready for the game?

David Lankford – 6 Jefferson Road – Bedford Girls Softball League

Girls softball is a small league that may go under if the registration fees spike because people may choose to participate in other sports that may have lower registration fees. Also, the proposed bond includes work on the town playground and a volleyball court, will you start charging user fees for those facilities as well?

John Cassidy – 27 Bartlett Drive – Cannons Lacrosse Program

Lacrosse has a complicated field layout, so we hire a third party to line the fields initially. Then board members line them as well, to refresh them. Primarily we use the Bedford High School turf and Joppa Hill. Mr. Cassidy would like to see all money collected via user fees to be used on the fields, not just the general fund.

Brett Jaffey – 1 Bailey's Green – Bedford Athletic Club (BAC) Soccer

Is the proposal on the table to have the user fees go through before or after the bond? Councilor Dave Gilbert stated that there likely wouldn't be any user fees charged until after the fields are done being repaired, if the bond goes through.

Frank Sledjeski – 2 Karolina Lane – GPS/Bedford Soccer

If the bond passed and all the work was done on the fields, it would likely take 5 years or so to complete, due to the limited rate at which fields can be taken offline. Are there any other towns nearby that have this fee structure that take care of the fields to meet the needs of the leagues? Does the Town know how many people may be needed for the additional maintenance?

Jeff Foote, Director of Public Works stated that there are currently two people who work in the highway department during the winter, and maintain the fields through the other seasons. Mr. Foote stated, based on what I'm hearing; I think we would need to add at least four people for the spring through fall. It would be significant. Mr. Foote explained that the initial schedule would be 4 years for the proposed repairs and upgrades covered by the bond; Starting with Sportsman Field, then Selvoski Field, perhaps then start Swenson Field. We think we can do it in about 4 years without preventing any league's ability to have their season.

Jay Joseph – 118 County Road – GPS/Bedford Soccer (private league)

Mr. Joseph would like to see a checklist of who is going to do what (i.e. the Town vs. clubs and leagues). Mr. Joseph expects the clubs will still have some stuff, like line the fields. Additionally,

Mr. Joseph recommends a maintenance plan that involves regular shut down of fields for a season to perform maintenance on some sort of rotating schedule.

Chairwoman Casale stated the Town will be back in touch to schedule an official M.O.L.D. meeting for further discussion in the near future.

OLD BUSINESS – UPDATES

A. Town Field/Facility Use Policy Review

Councilor Gilbert discussed a few minor changes that he proposed on the Town Field/Facility Use policy which was sent to the Commission members. Proposed changes included the addition of the phrase “and/or drugs” in reference to prohibited use, the correction of minor typographical errors, as well as the addition of the word “Town” in various places throughout the policy.

Based on recent discussion of the newly proposed user fees, it was made clear that no such updates would be made to the existing policy at this time, but that if user fees are added, the policy could be amended at a later date to reflect those changes.

During the discussion, it was clarified that currently pets are not permitted on Town fields or in Town recreational facilities per town ordinance.

Mike Therrien – 11 Gage Road

Mr. Therrien pointed out that the existing policy does include some user fees for non-town groups.

Based on the fact that there are multiple drafted versions of the policy in circulation, the Commission decided to hold the discussion of the Town Field/Facility Use Policy revisions until the next meeting. Councilor Gilbert will talk with Jane O’Brien, the Recreation Manager, to get one final updated version prepared and distributed for the next Commission meeting, for a vote.

APPROVAL OF MINUTES

- **September 11, 2018**

MOTION to approve September 11, 2018 minutes made by Councilor Dave Gilbert. Seconded by Steve Grocott. Vote taken. Motion passes.

- **October 9, 2018**

MOTION to approve October 09, 2018 minutes made by Steve Grocott. Seconded by Councilor Dave Gilbert. Vote taken – all in favor with Bill Duschatko abstaining. Motion passes.

NEXT MEETING – March 20, 2019

Meeting Adjourned 8:13 PM

Respectfully submitted by
Danielle E. Basora