

**WESTON RECREATION COMMISSION
MEETING MINUTES
THURSDAY, JANUARY 11, 2021 7:00 PM**

Pursuant to Gov. Baker's Executive Order dated March 12, 2020 modifying the requirements of the Open Meeting Law, the Recreation Master Plan Steering Committee, to ensure the safety of all participants, held its meeting remotely via Zoom: <https://zoom.us/j/84146796421>, Meeting ID: 841 4679 6421.

Members Present: Eric Rosenthal (Chair), Melissa Crocker, Trevor MacDonald, Julie Johnstone, Maija Cirulis-Gooch

Absent: Adam King, Marcy Dorna

Staff: Chris Fitzgerald (Director), Sharon Locke (Assistant Director), Lauren Smith (Program Coordinator)

Guests: Bharath Venkataraman

Resident Comments: None

Previous Meeting Minutes: The minutes from the December 10, 2020 meeting were reviewed and approved.

Memorial Pool Renovation

Chris Fitzgerald

Ms. Locke stated first Memorial Pool Citizen's Committee meeting was held on January 7, where they were introduced to each other, provided with the charge, and updated on the status of the project. Their biggest task right now was to help garner support for our Design Fee request, and as we go into design they will be more active with garnering public feedback and providing input on amenities.

Mr. Fitzgerald suggested the Recreation Commission consider speaking with other boards as well, including getting the project information in front of FINCOM, and also at least sharing awareness with Conservation Commission, Permanent Building Committee and Select Board.

Commissioners discussed strategies to build public support, including considering what Town Committees and Boards to visit. They decided to invite the public to their next meeting to introduce the project and begin getting feedback.

Little League Renovations

Chris Fitzgerald

Weston Little League is moving forward with their CPC application for \$75,000 for the renovation and repair of the infield at Burchard Park to help with the drainage. With the assistance of the Fields and Grounds department, the fields at Burchard should be maintained better moving forward.

Field Use Policy

Chris Fitzgerald/Trevor MacDonald

Mr. Fitzgerald stated that he has been researching field policies locally and across the country through his professional networks. The primary reason cited for establishing a policy for private instruction was liability, but none of his contacts were more specific than that. He then learned from the Town's Liability Insurance company that posting signs saying "use at your own risk" would suffice if someone did not specifically request a field for their use, no matter what activity they were engaging in. Further discussion took place about the goal of such a policy, ability to enforce, impacts on courts vs. fields, among others.

The Commission asked Mr. Fitzgerald to continue assessing the need and merits of implementing such a policy and/or changes and ways to strengthen the policy in place for Tennis instruction.

Budget Planning FY22

Chris Fitzgerald

Mr. Fitzgerald discussed a draft budget that was circulated prior to the meeting. The Town Manager's office called for a Level Service Budget, and this one reflected Level Service compared to what was planned for FY 21 in order to cover a return to more normal operations. Mr. Fitzgerald stated he would share any updates with the Commission after his meeting with the Town Manager and a Finance Committee liaison later in the week.

Annual Report 2020

Chris Fitzgerald

(See Attached) The Annual Report is due to the town manager on February 28, 2021 and will be published as part of the Town's annual report. The 2020 report reflected the effect of the pandemic on the recreation department and the efforts that Commissioners and Staff put forth to continue providing services to the town through such uncertainty. The Commission discussed minor edits but liked the general message, Mr. Fitzgerald confirmed that photos are always submitted to the Town Manager's office but don't always make the final publication.

Motion: A motion was made to accept the 2020 Annual Report

Moved: Ms. Crocker, Second: Ms. Johnstone

Roll Call vote was taken, all in favor none opposed

Departmental Updates

Recreation Staff

Ms. Smith reported:

- Youth Programs are holding steady within COVID Guidelines, with more than half of the offered winter programs running. One-day workshops prove to be extremely popular and fill very quickly.
- The spring session will offer a lot more outdoor programming.
- Planning for summer - we know that similar programming to summer 2020 will take place on a greater level but there are still some critical pieces to running a certified camp that we don't know will be available yet. We will keep pursuing this as many parents in Weston have inquired about camps.

Ms. Locke reported:

- Red Waves Swim Team is going well and that the team successfully participated in their first virtual meet in December and are looking forward to a second virtual meet in January. The swimmers did very well with many doing best times.
- Skating lessons are going well each Sunday. There is some problem with the Family Skate because it fills up so quickly that not everyone is getting in. Mr. Fitzgerald and Ms. Locke are working on solutions for this.
- Adult fitness classes are holding steady with virtual classes. The participants are very thankful for the virtual classes.

Mr. Fitzgerald reported that Men's Hockey is going very well and the participants are very cooperative and are working/playing within the state's Covid guidelines.

Next Meeting Mr. Fitzgerald will send out a Doodle Poll to the Commission.

Meeting Adjourned at 8:25 PM

REPORT OF THE RECREATION DEPARTMENT

The Recreation Department started off 2020 continuing to operate its traditional and new programs, including Ice Skating lessons, Men's Hockey and Free Skating at the Rivers Ice Rink. The first year of organized ice skating went very well, taking in revenues of around \$32,000 while expending only around \$27,000 on rental fees and instructor costs. New fees were developed for the upcoming Memorial Pool season, and marketing strategies were planned to increase membership, attendance and fun. Weston Red Waves was having a banner year under a new coach and Weston Junior Broadway had successfully transitioned to the Weston Friendly Society with an exciting show planned for mid-March.

Then COVID-19 hit.

All Recreation Services were effectively shut down with the Governor's Emergency Order on March 12. Members of the public were not permitted in Town buildings, most staff were forced to work from home, and strict cleaning and safety protocols were enacted. Recreation further suspended registration for camps and pool, ultimately having to refund all revenues collected for spring and summer programs.

Through the Spring, the staff collaborated with colleagues around the state and country, to try to make sense of what services could be provided when, and what the new safety protocols would entail. We worked with our colleagues at the Massachusetts Recreation and Park Association to assist with statewide safety protocols being developed, with the Assistant Director participating in meetings with the Governor's Task Force for Aquatics.

Ultimately, summer camps were cancelled. It was determined to be too dangerous to allow camps to take place within the Weston Public School Buildings, given the safety protocols that were developed, standards for cleaning and disinfecting, and other unknowns at the time. The Weston Memorial Pool remained closed for the season over concerns of staff ability to implement safety protocols, concern about adequate lifeguard trainings, further budgetary implications of limited attendance, the malfunctioning of a critical submersible well pump, and other unknowns. This announcement was met with strong opposition from the public, many members of whom noted pools in surrounding towns had developed protocols and were opening, though there were numerous other pool closings as well.

On May 18, the State announced "Phase I" of re-opening Massachusetts, which allowed for some in-person activities including the opening of fields and tennis courts. After some debate, the Emergency Management Team and Recreation Departments agreed to open fields to the public for general exercise. Signs were posted at all locations noting the conditions under which people could use the spaces, which essentially stipulated wearing facemasks and social distancing. No group activities, including pickup sport games, were permitted.

As the state moved through phases II and III of re-opening, organized youth and adult sport groups were permitted to operate at various levels depending on the nature of their sport. The Recreation Department and the Town's newly formed Emergency Management Team worked to develop safety protocols for field users and traditional Recreation programs and services. Over time, Recreation and EMT formed a strong partnership for developing safety protocols and offering recreational opportunities for residents.

The September 11 Memorial Flag event took place in-person with strict safety protocols, and new single-day intergenerational events were developed in partnership with the COA, including an outdoor Tai Chi class and a trail walk. Most other community-wide programs and events were cancelled, including the Summer Concert Series, Ice Cream Social, and the Spring Egg Hunt.

By the end of 2020, much more was known about COVID-19 and some vaccines had received emergency approval, providing hope of a return to normalcy. The protocols have become routine, and the variety of

activities is slowly growing. But, with widespread distribution expected to take months, we anticipate continuing to offer a reduced level of services and accommodating strict safety protocols through much of 2021.

Programming

Adult

In January, residents were excited about a new class to help perfect their golf swing and a fly-fishing casting class which was being planned for the spring. Adult exercise programs continued to serve the Weston residents as they have for many years. During the shut-down, we began offering virtual group exercise classes at no cost to participants. These continued from March through the end of June and maintained a healthy participation level, with Yoga class even doubling its participation. In July, the adult exercise classes continued online with a participation fee. We also celebrated the 39th year of Kathy Langenberg's class, composed mostly of the same people for the entire time.

When regulations allowed, a Pickleball program was developed with beginner and advanced lessons. The faithful group of players met weekly until late fall. This program proved to be extremely popular and there are plans to expand it in the coming years.

Events

Many fun virtual activities were organized through the Weston Recreation Facebook page, including a Snowman building contest, a scavenger hunt, Nature Bingo, celebrating Star Wars Day on May the 4th, organizing a Bear Hunt by encouraging residents to place teddy bears in their windows, hosting baking classes, and organizing a Halloween costume contest for pets.

Some creative planning was needed for the September 11 Flag memorial event. Community participants registered in advance and were assigned to one of 4 timeslots for their participation. Groups were limited to 25 people and individuals were assigned rows on a grid that would ensure proper social distancing for placing their flags. Many Town employees from almost all departments volunteered to help with the event. By its completion, almost 100 people were able to safely erect 3,000 flags on the Weston Town Green. Most other September 11 Memorial events were conducted virtually, including ones hosted in Boston and the State House, making Weston's one of the few to take place in person this year.

Youth

Youth programming was off to a great start in January 2020. Winter program numbers were near capacity and required two school buses to transport everyone to the Community Center, and Spring registration showed as much promise with enthusiastic registration. After the shut-down, single-day workshops for Karate, Super Sports, and STEAM programs were among the first to be offered again in-person. It was a slow start but with time and trust from our participants, we were able to put forth a more robust Fall session that complied with safety regulations. A new procedure was established for instructors and parent drop off/pick up. Over time, it became the normal and parents expressed their sincere gratitude for all our efforts. In the fall, popular activities such as Super Sports, Gymnastics and Karate returned. The much-loved cooking programs were transformed into science and Lego programs with the same instructor. A rotation of times entering and exiting the building for programs became the norm and no one missed a beat. It was a great way to see the resiliency of the Department in action.

Summer Camps

Guideline restrictions and lack of access to appropriate facilities prevented us from having a traditional summer camp. After attending many workshops and learning sessions, we put together a shortened five-week program at Burchard Park called "Alternative Summer Programming." Our dedicated camp directors transformed Burchard Park into a camp-like space with cleaning supplies and individual boxes

for each participant put together. A new routine was established for everything from drop off to pick up, all while wearing masks with smiles for days under them.

We enrolled participants (245) from kindergarten through fifth grade in programs related to arts and crafts, sports and outdoor adventure. Through creative and determined staff, many participants tried something new and found some “normalcy” in a very strange summer. We had zero Covid-19 infections, exposures or closures, which was to be commended. With the help of Chief David Soar and the Weston Fire Department, we had enough Personal Protective Equipment to get through the summer when supplies were limited.

Even with the fewer hours and days offered, programs had waitlists for sessions and parents reported success all around and were very appreciative that the Recreation Department was able to provide safe, fun summer programs in a time of uncertainty.

Swimming and Ice Skating

In the fall, Weston Red Waves was brought back in a limited capacity and planned to compete in virtual swim meets. Swim lessons and lap swimming also returned under strict protocols. Ice Skating, including Men’s Hockey, Skate Lessons, and Family Skate, returned after an earlier temporary closure of all rinks in the state.

Theater – Weston Junior Broadway

The Weston Junior Broadway program went through its second transition in two years. The Weston Friendly Society, a community theater group that has been in existence for over 100 years, proposed operating the program under its guidance. The Recreation Department provided access to spaces in the Community Center for rehearsals and performance trainings. Friendly Society brought an extra level of enthusiasm and expertise, and the program went remarkably well except that the performances were among the first events cancelled due to the shutdown. We look forward to continuing to work with Weston Friendly Society moving forward.

Governance

This year was one of the more challenging ones from a Governance perspective. Due to the sudden closure of all buildings, the Recreation Commission had to cancel its March meeting. In April, they started meeting virtually along with every other government group in town, thanks to an emergency order from the Governor allowing for meetings to take place electronically.

Three positions on the Recreation Commission were up for re-election. After eighteen-years of service, Elly Draper Pendergast chose not to seek re-election. She was deservedly recognized at Town Meeting for her long-tenured service and many contributions to the Town. Xinsheng Zhu also chose not to seek re-election, completing five-years of service which was also greatly appreciated. Eric Rosenthal, occupying the third position, ran for re-election

At Town Caucus, Eric was nominated as expected and newcomer Maija Cirulis-Gooch spontaneously nominated herself for one of the other two openings. Later, Xinsheng resigned after learning that the May elections would be postponed, and Maija was appointed to complete the remainder of his term. In September, Eric and Maija were both elected to full 3-year terms, and newcomer Adam King was elected to the third position after running a contested write-in campaign.

Recreation Commissioners also continued to fill positions on the Rail Trail Advisory Committee (Eric Rosenthal), Recreation Master Plan Steering Committee (Melissa Crocker), and Community Preservation Committee (Marcy Dorna).

Memorial Pool renovation

The Recreation Commission continued to pursue a renovation project at Memorial Pool to replace the aging filters, expand concessions, improve accessibility and add recreational amenities. The Community Preservation Committee supported their request for \$250,000 to be used toward design of this project. Unfortunately, Special Town Meeting was cancelled due to COVID, so at the end of the year this request was still waiting on a Town Meeting vote.

Consequently, a Citizens' Committee has been formed to assist the Recreation Commission in garnering support for this project.

Regular business

The Recreation Department staff consists of seven full-time employees who are assisted by many dedicated part-time and seasonal staff. Regular trainings are conducted with all staff members in accordance with the laws and codes for their jobs and also to ensure a positive environment for all Recreation Department participants.

The operational budget for fiscal year 2020 was \$1,463,289 and was offset by \$474,361 in revenue. An additional \$575,727 came from the tax levy and revenues in the Town's general funds, and \$30,000 was transferred from the Council on Aging to contribute to Weston Community Center building expenses. The difference of \$383,201 came from a combination of the retained earnings account and transfer from the Town's emergency fund.

2020 Recreation Commission Members

<i>Elected by the voters</i>	<i>Term expires</i>
Eric Rosenthal, Chair	2023
Melissa Crocker	2021
Marcy Dorna	2021
Julie Johnstone	2022
Trevor MacDonald	2022
Maija Cirulis Gooch	2023
Adam King	2023

Recreation Commissioners whose service ended in 2020

<i>Commissioner</i>	<i>Years of Service</i>
Elly Draper Pendergast	18
Xinsheng Zhu	5

