

Town of Groton

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Park Commissioners

Gineane Haberlin, Chair
Kenneth Bushnell
Robert Flynn
Matthew Frary

Meeting Minutes

Date: July 13, 2015
Time: 7 p.m.
Location: Legion Hall, 1st Floor Meeting Room, 75 Hollis Street, Groton
Commission attendees: Gineane Haberlin, Robert Flynn, Matthew Frary
Visitors: Rob Pyatt (LDS picnic), Laurie Smigelski (HGAA), Linda McCrossan (HGAA), Deborah Beal Normandin (OBG), Ellen Hargraves (OBG), Ken Lefebvre (OBG), Eleanor Gavazzi, Denise Gamester, James Hamilton, Rena Swezey (GMM), Sue Roberts (GMM)
Handouts: Agenda, June 15, 2015 draft minutes

Gineane Haberlin called the meeting to order at 7:04 pm.

Pending invoices were circulated for commissioners' review and approval. Regarding the Skillings and Sons well repair at Cow Pond playing fields, commissioners observed that some well parts may still be under warranty. Robert Flynn noted that some Franklin well parts have 5 year warranties and the well, which was drilled by Skillings, may be less than five years old. Gineane Haberlin will follow up with Skillings and Sons.

Field Use Permit

Rob Pyatt attended the meeting to answer any questions the Commissioners might have about his church's proposed use of Woitowicz for a picnic on August 22nd (a Saturday from 3 pm until 8 pm). The Park Commissioners in attendance unanimously supported this request. Future applicants for field use permits at Woitowicz field this fall will need to work around this approved use.

OBG flagpole replacement

Gineane Haberlin introduced the subject and noted that the removal without replacement of the flagpole was a plan that was approved by the Old Burying Ground (OBG) Commission, the Historic Districts Commission (HDC) and the Park Commission. Thomas McDowell, whose son refurbished the flagpole in the 1980s as an Eagle Scout project and Thomas McDowell himself maintained the flagpole for many years, initially raised the issue by asking the Town for the current deteriorated flagpole to be removed and a replacement flagpole installed. Denise Gamester was in attendance at the meeting. In conversation, it was stated that her grandfather Joe Gamester built the original pole which was erected on Flag Day in 1979.

Gineane Haberlin suggested that the memorial stone adjacent to the Old Burying Ground flagpole might possibly be moved to the Legion Common flagpole location. Generally speaking, she explained that the Park Commission is inclined to follow the OBG Commission recommendations and the HDC opinions on the appropriateness for the site.

Susan Roberts, speaking for the Groton Minutemen (GMM), asked for time on the agenda to advocate for a replacement flagpole in the Old Burying Ground. She thinks that the traditional honoring of veterans using the flagpole in the Old Burying Ground cemetery has more meaning to it than having the Groton Minuteman make use of the nearby Legion Common flagpole. There was some discussion of whether the current flagpole could be repaired or another one installed without moving or disturbing the foundation. Based on Eleanor Gavazzi's research and knowledge of the OBG, it was noted that while there are only 800 stones marking graves, research up until 1850 shows that there were more there are more than 2,000 recorded deaths and those bodies were presumably buried without markers in the OBG cemetery. This fact makes everyone loathe entertain plans that require digging into the

ground at OBG unless such plans are absolutely necessary. Park Commissioners thanked speakers for their input and referred the proponents of the flagpole to follow up with the OBG Commission.

HGAA dog policy

Hazel Grove Agricultural Association (HGAA) representatives Laurie Smigelski and Linda McCrossan spoke to the Park Commissioners about difficulties with several dog owners walking on track and using the infield while adamantly proclaiming a right to be there. The HGAA board has discussed the dog issue and the safety concerns resulting from the presence of dogs for the drivers of the Standardbred race horses, young horseback riders using the infield, horse handlers at the barn as well as the health of the horses who can be spooked by dogs. The HGAA board voted to prohibit dogs on the track, infield and at the barns. These rules will apply unless there is a specific allowed event that allows broader dog access to Hazel Grove. In general, HGAA representatives explained that due to the nature of horses and the present users of the Hazel Grove facilities, safe equestrian use means that the horses must have the right of way. On the trails leading from HGAA property, dogs are allowed following the leash laws of the Town which are on leash or under control of the owner. HGAA representatives explained to the Commissioners that dog walkers who use the track in early spring can leave the track damaged. Specifically, when horses are driven on the track in the early spring, they are on the track in the early morning while the track is still frozen and the hooves and wheels do not dig into the maintained surface. When dog walkers on the track in early spring walk after the track thaws, their footprints dig into the track surface and then re-freeze the next night, leaving divots.

Robert Flynn questioned how these dog policies can be compared to the other Park Commission properties. Matthew Frary said that he doesn't mind having rules that just apply to HGAA when other Park Commission properties are not regulated in that way due to the particular needs of an facility that includes horses. Robert Flynn asked about what happens on the track when no horses are on there. Commissioners discussed whether there was a need for a dedicated dog park. As conversation flowed, Commissioners decided to follow the HGAA dog rules so that the HGAA and the Town can end up with a Park Commission promulgated rule that can be enforced.

Any policies are going to be reviewed first at a public hearing. Post with the Town Clerk, and have a public hearing. HGAA needs Park Commission to approve its dog policies in order for the rules promulgated to have recourse. The recourse is to have the dog rules 'on file' with the Town and the Police Department so that the rules will be enforceable. Commissioners directed the HGAA representatives to post a map at the Hazel Grove kiosk that denotes dog free zones and the permissible dog zones of the property.

Gineane Haberlin moved to approve the request to make a dog policy written by HGAA to exclude dogs from the infield, barn and track to be submitted to the Town Clerk as part of the Public Hearing on dog policies at Park Commission properties and to post a map in the HGAA kiosk. Matthew Frary seconded and motion carried 3:0 (Kenneth Bushnell absent).

Rules on other Park properties

Matthew Frary said that he is of two minds about dog policies on Park Commission properties outside of scheduled events. While some people do not pick up after their dogs and he does not want dog waste left on the ball fields, it also true that many people use the fields responsibly. He noted that Ninety percent of the time, the fields are empty and we want to encourage use of our fields. The idea was raised to prohibit dogs on fields during scheduled events. The ensuing discussion of this idea did not have unanimity of opinion.

Matthew Frary is inclined to allow dogs on the fields. Robert Flynn suggested that perhaps leashed dogs on fields would be a good way forward. In conclusion, the Commissioners decided to continue with HGAA policies and rules promulgation about dogs on that site, but there is no agreement on the other fields and dog access there.

Commissioners briefly discussed issue of smoking on Park properties. In conclusion, the commissioners strongly supported no smoking rules at its properties.

Matthew Frary moved to have the Park Commission initiate steps necessary to prohibit smoking at playing fields, basketball courts, and playgrounds. Robert Flynn seconded and the motion carried 3:0 (Kenneth Bushnell absent)

Meeting minutes

Gineane Haberlin moved to approve meeting minutes for June 15, 2015 as written. Robert Flynn seconded and motion carried 2:0 (Matthew Frary abstained, Kenneth Bushnell absent).

Project list

- Status on Cow Pond post removal. This post needs to be fully removed as it is actually a larger obstruction since it is the bottom rail of a length of chain length fence.
- Based on July 13 accessibility walk through, the Town now knows enough to craft RFPs for playground work and basketball court work.
- Weed killing on baseball fields will be done.
- Waiting on Town Shed garage door repair estimates.
- Waiting on more quotes for fencing and refined quotes (broken down by area).
- Unclear when tree work will be done on Minuteman Common.
- Kenneth Bushnell is repairing the bouncy seahorse.
- Permission given to remove broken bench behind Town Field baseball diamond.

July 13 walk through -- accessibility review of properties

Gineane Haberlin accompanied accessibility contractor on the review of the Park Commission properties where it intends to make immediate improvements. Matthew Frary joined in for a part of this tour. In that tour, the group:

- looked at the looked at the gazebo approach;
- heard a recommendation for two handicapped parking spaces at Hanson playground;
- heard way of configuring current playground to improve wheelchair access;
- heard recommendations for improving access to the Town Field basketball court; and
- heard recommendations for handicapped access to the rear of the Cutler basketball court.

Also, all signage should be placed so that it will clear average snow depths. This means that affixing signage to existing chain-link fencing may not always work.

Next meeting: Monday, August 3rd at 7 pm.

Fran Stanley directed to email use groups to invite them to put in the field use permit requests in time for an August 3rd review.

No candidates so far for the Commissioner vacancy.

Matthew Frary moved to adjourn the meeting at 8:46 pm. Gineane Haberlin seconded and motion carried 3:0 (Kenneth Bushnell absent).

Notes by Fran Stanley.