

Town of Groton

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Park Commissioners

Evan Boucher, Chair
Timothy Siok, Vice Chair
Kenneth Bushnell
Robert Flynn
James Gaffney

Meeting Minutes

Date: May 2, 2017
Time: 7 pm
Location: Legion Hall, 75 Hollis St., Groton, MA
Commissioners present: Robert Flynn, Evan Boucher, James Gaffney, Timothy Siok, Kenneth Bushnell
Others: Russ Harris, Jack Petropoulos, Anna Eliot, Owen Shuman, Stuart Shuman, Steve Boczenowski, Gerard Stelzer, Peter Davies, Tom Callahan, Andrew Peterson, Susan Shea, Kalpesh Bodalwala, Saif Batham
Handout: Agenda, draft minutes

Evan Boucher called the meeting to order at 7 pm.

Pending Field Use Permits

Evan Boucher moved that the Park Commission approve the Boston Warriors Cricket Club field use permit request dated April 24, 2017 for the use of Cutler Field on Sundays from 11:30 am to 6:30 pm on the following ten dates of May 14, 2017, June 11, 2017, June 25, 2017, July 9, 2017, July 16, 2017, July 23, 2017, August 6, 2017, August 20, 2017 and August 27, 2017 with such permit being conditioned on the receipt of a valid certificate of insurance listing the Town of Groton as additional insured. Kenneth Bushnell seconded.

Evan Boucher invited everyone to discuss this motion.

Russ Harris asked about the background for the issuing of the permit. Evan Boucher explained that initially, the Boston Warriors Cricket Club had a field use permit granted, then it was rescinded and now it is being considered again.

Russ Harris asked for more details. Evan Boucher provided background of how Park Commission received a request possibly 5 months back. Commissioners granted other permits to soccer, lacrosse, baseball and other spring sports. Then, field use of Cow Pond was ruled out. Cricket received a field use permit for Cutler Field after taking a field walk with Commissioner Timothy Siok. In the vote, 3 in favor, 1 abstained and 1 absent in favor of issuing 2 field use permits – one to Boston Warriors Cricket Club and one to another group called TechProCC. In the following meeting, there were mixed emotions about what had happened among the Commissioners. An April 13, 2017 meeting was held and Commissioners as well as residents shared their opinions about use of the field. The issued permits for cricket at Cutler Field were rescinded and Boston Warriors Cricket Club was invited to re-apply with their more narrow requested dates and times of use.

Steve Boczenowski asked why there is an issue here when there is no other requested use for the fields. He also noted that he was sensing that there is a lot of resistance here and he doesn't understand what the issue is. Robert Flynn said that he would respond as he is opposed to this permit request. This is an outside group. We don't charge for our fields and he as a Groton resident would have to pay to play in other towns. An out of town group using the fields, Robert Flynn said that doesn't want Groton Park Commission to be known for issuing free fields. Also, even if a field is not reserved, it is still used by Groton residents. He said that he is comfortable with limited generosity, but not to this extent.

Evan Boucher read Town counsel's opinion on whether granting this permit request would bind the Park Commission in the future. Specifically, "Unless there is a provision in the policies that issuance of a permit in one instance or on one application requires, or creates a preference for, future permits, it is my view that issuance of the permit in question does not commit the Park Commission to the issuance of permits for future applications."

Individual commissioners then disagreed on whether reference to residents of Groton in the first line of the field use permit form ["The field area, equipment or facilities listed will be used to provide safe, healthy recreation for the residents of the Town of Groton."] limits use of the ball fields solely to residents.

Owen Shuman commented as a resident stating that she would like for her tax money to go for cricket to be played by Boston Warriors Cricket Club. She said that she would support this permit and later the Park Commission can look at its policies and formulate whether fees are charged and other particulars.

Anna Eliot asked whether the Park Commission has a written policy on contributions toward maintenance for use groups. The answer given was no. Anna Eliot then stated that this group is helping the Park Commission to establish its policies. The Groton Fairgrounds went through this process five years ago and it is not exclusive Groton resident use and many out of towners help support the facilities there. A comment was made that approving this permit would enable diversity of opportunity for the people of Groton

Evan Boucher said that he has driven by Cutler Field every Sunday since the Park Commission started discussing issuance of this use permit and there are some residents often there in the morning but very few people using Cutler Field in the afternoons.

Tom Callahan from West Groton commented that he thinks it would be good to bring cricket to Town. He encouraged the Park Commission to write some policy in the future. But right now the Park Commission has an opportunity to allow the Boston Warriors Cricket Club.

Gerard Stelzer said that youth soccer is looking at Cutler field to relieve overuse of Cow Pond fields. While he could not speak directly to the youth soccer request specifics, it was noted that the written request is for Monday through Saturday. The Boston Warriors Cricket Club request is for Sunday use only (11:30 am to 6:30 pm). Kenneth Bushnell said that Cutler is often used for passive recreation for residents of West Groton who often have smaller sized yards in that area of Town.

Susan Shea from West Groton spoke in favor of the Boston Warriors Cricket Group request noting that there are no competing requests for field use on Sunday afternoons. Robert Flynn said that the common theme he is hearing is that Cutler Field is not being used but he pointed out that a new field use request for use of that space could come in any day.

Timothy Siok said they offered the Park Commission money and we can't take it. They offered to put on camps or clinics for Groton residents. They are a good group of guys and they deserve a chance. Owen Shuman said to let it go this year and arrange to charge fees in future years. Andrew Peterson stated that as a resident he hopes that the Commission votes in favor of this permit.

James Gaffney commented that if someone is using the fields with a permit then they can ask people to leave. James Gaffney said that residents of West Groton that he has spoken to have told him that they do not want the use permit granted. Timothy Siok stated that he lives in West Groton and he has spoken to nearby residents and they are not concerned. He then stated that he is interested in bringing his children down to see cricket played at Cutler Field.

Anna Eliot stated that part of your responsibility as Park Commissioners is to educate the public about what is proper use of your fields. This building's floor (Legion Hall) collapsed when horseback riders came en masse and asked the Park Commission to allow diversity of sports – in that case horseback riding and the driving of harness racers -- at Hazel Grove.

Anna Eliot said that the Park Commissioners have no written policy. Robert Flynn said that we get about 10 requests a year and "what is the affiliation" is what he asks when he reviews a field use permit. A comment was made that the children of Groton don't play cricket because they have not been exposed to it. Kenneth Bushnell said this is not about cricket.

Kenneth Bushnell asked are we comfortable that this is a true Groton group. Evan Boucher said that if you are a resident, then you are a resident whether you are here 3 years or 3 months.

Group discussion ensued. Evan Boucher reminded the group that with respect to this request the Park Commissioners that are not bound to grant any particular field use permit in the future based on Town Counsel's advice. Evan Boucher said that he doesn't see any problem with granting this permit, and welcoming these gentlemen into our fields, reviewing our policies and then seeing the next year what permits to grant.

Evan Boucher recognized Jack Petropoulos to speak noting that Selectman Petropoulos' warrant article to place "all are welcome" markers at the entrances to Town was approved by Town Meeting voters last night. Jack Petropoulos commented that whether a group pays or not is irrelevant in his view. Instead, non-resident use seems to be the issue. The risk of precedent is not there per Town Counsel and you have a decision. Will this preclude Groton residents from using the fields? Use by Groton people is impossible to measure. This is gamble. Does the benefit of trying something new outweigh the risk of precluded use. As a West Groton resident, Jack Petropoulos stated that he is in favor of it. You will have a chance to see how it goes. He doesn't see a permanent harm to this and he added that he does see a possibility of a permanent good.

Kenneth Bushnell asked if the requested use for Boston Warriors Cricket Club can be cut in half. Fran Stanley replied that the permit request is already much reduced with fewer days, fewer hours and these dates are needed for them to host games this season for their club. Kenneth Bushnell said we really need to get working on the policy.

Evan Boucher called for a vote and the motion failed on a 2:3 vote (Evan Boucher in favor, Timothy Siok in favor, James Gaffney against, Robert Flynn against, Kenneth Bushnell against).

Evan Boucher asked Girard Stelzer and Andrew Davies to tell the Park Commissioners about the Groton Dunstable Youth Soccer joint effort. Girard Stelzer stated that the youth soccer recreation program is losing players to regional clubs. So, Groton Dunstable Youth Soccer (recreation program) is planning to collaborate with World Cup of Greater Nashua and New England Football Club (New England Football Club World Cup Soccer) so club soccer can be played locally. Andrew Davies said that our interests align with this club because they are also nonprofit whereas other clubs are raising money through club activities. The goal of the alliance is to allow Groton players to play recreation program soccer on Saturdays and club soccer on Sundays. Girard Stelzer said that 10 years ago they had an enrollment of 1,100 players and now they are down to 600 players. Tuition is not known yet. It somewhat depends on whether this group could use Groton fields free of charge. If not, youth soccer would raise charges \$200 or more.

Youth soccer representatives said that their recreation program fees are in line with other towns. Kenneth Bushnell clarified that the youth soccer recreation program is not passing on the discount that it receives from Groton of receiving free fields whereas other compared towns commonly charge for field use. The youth soccer recreation program did raise fees somewhat when they moved to obtaining more professional coaches.

Robert Flynn asked for the territory of the club and it is the Groton to Nashua area. Groton recreation program participants will be able to try out for the club teams, but the club rosters will probably have fewer Groton residents playing than is the case with the recreational program.

Robert Flynn moved to approve the Cutler Field pending field use request from Groton Dunstable Youth Soccer as written for use of Cutler Field for several months with Monday through Saturday 8 am to 8 pm times of use. Evan Boucher seconded and the motion carried 5:0.

Kalpesh Bodawalwa spoke up on behalf of his field use permit request for cricket. Saif Batham, speaking for the Blue Bees, said we engage in casual play without a hard ball. They play on Saturdays and Sundays. We tried pick up at Town Field on April 15, 2017 (Sunday) and were asked whether we had a use permit. Fran Stanley said that in the fall, I understood that the Park Commissioners asked this cricket group to move from pick up to permitted use of the fields so that is why I encouraged Kalpesh Bodawalwa to submit a field use permit request if they want to use the fields. Kalpesh Bodawalwa was asked how many residents are on the team and the answer was that we have a few Groton residents. If anyone shows up, then they can play. Commissioners decided that this group should be classified as a pick up use and so they will not need a permit to play on Groton fields. Should they want to put on a tournament as was originally planned last fall, then a permit would be needed.

Regarding the pending field use permit for Woitowicz field by Renegades Lacrosse in July, the youth lacrosse season is over by then. However, the Commissioners were unclear about the requested dates – appeared to be June 28th to June 30th and so they did not vote on it. Fran Stanley will invite him to resubmit and attend the June meeting.

GDHS Ultimate Frisbee wants to add practices in addition to the previously granted game times as the Park Commission's fields are more level and therefore safer than the School District's fields. They requested expanded use through emails rather than the usual online form or PDF form.

Evan Boucher moved to approve the Groton Dunstable Regional High School expanded schedule as described provided that it does not conflict with youth lacrosse's already permitted uses. Robert Flynn seconded and the motion carried 5:0.

Minutes

Evan Boucher moved to approve draft minutes from March 7, 2017, March 20, 2017, April 4, 2017 and April 13, 2017 as written. Kenneth Bushnell seconded and the motion carried 4:0 (Robert Flynn abstained).

Groton School Volunteer Day on Saturday May 20, 2017

Commissioners discussed projects that students could help with. Evan Boucher said that there are about 30 students expected to participate. 20 yards of playground chips or even a full tri-axle could be distributed across the Christine Hanson Memorial Playground. The students can paint rails, rake the baseball infields and weed out bittersweet from the scrubby underbrush on the other side of playground road. The Moison's Hardware account can be used to purchase any necessary supplies that the Groton School does not supply. Fran Stanley will ask Groton School to bring available wheelbarrows, gloves and remind the students to wear clothes that they are comfortable with getting dirty. Tim Siok has some availability that day to help oversee the effort.

Update on Capital Improvements Projects

Park Commissioners directed Fran Stanley to write a thank you letter on behalf of the Park Commission to Carl Cerullo from Townsend who made an in kind donation to the Town worth many thousands of dollars when he volunteered to demolish the Exhibition Hall at the Groton Fairgrounds.

Kenneth Bushnell will ask Jimmy Cronin to look at the Cutler and Waitowicz sheds and provide written scope of work and a cost estimate. Town Field dugout roofs should be completed soon. Youth baseball found a contractor to prep the 6 baseball infields this year. This contractor conducted the work in a manner that disrupted use of the infields so in future years the Park Commission might locate a contractor early in the season and contract for the work to be performed in a more organized manner that minimizes disruptions.

Commissioners discussed request to add padding to the poles to protect players who sometime run or stumble into the goal posts. Four pads will be needed. Commissioners discussed how to make this permanent and is there a locking system. Timothy Siok will look into it and report back.

Commissioners discussed the Groton Public Library request from users that they be allowed to adjust the height of the basketball hoops Town Field. The regulation height is 10 feet. Commissioners want the hoops to remain at that height. When hoops are lowered, then it increases the chance that users will damage the goals by hanging from the hoops. Fran Stanley will pass on the answer to the Groton Public Library. The Groton Public Library checks out basketballs for patrons' use at the court and so Library staff often receive questions about use of the court.

Evan Boucher noted that the Town Field basketball court fencing is detaching from the support posts. It needs additional clips or more substantial attachment via wires. As it is less than a year old, it should be under warranty. Fran Stanley directed send email to installer Vermont Tennis Court with an under warranty maintenance request.

AED Defibrillators

Evan Boucher reported that Fire Department Captain Susan Daley recommends AED defibrillators to be placed at each of the ball fields. The units cost \$1,700 each for the weatherproof, alarmed units. Cow Pond Field in particular has a long emergency response time due to the distance between the fields and usual dispatch location at the Center Fire Station on Farmers Row. So, Susan Daley recommends one at every field and two for Cutler but at least one at Cow Pond. A total of five units would be best. Some annual maintenance is required of approximately \$200 per unit per year. The Fire Department would manage maintenance and then bill the Park Commission for those incurred costs to keep the units operational.

Perhaps buy one and then ask use groups to consider purchasing units as a donation. Robert Flynn said that grant programs exist that will help with discounts or other ways to defray costs. He will look into it and the Park Commission can consider their options at their June meeting.

Kenneth Bushnell moved to have the Park Commission purchase one AED Defibrillator as described for a cost of around \$1,700. Evan Boucher seconded and the motion carried 5:0.

Purchase will be delayed a month while Robert Flynn looks into options for expanded defibrillator coverage across all ball fields.

Review of field use permit policies. Commissioners deferred this discussion to a subsequent meeting.

Reorganization of the board. Robert Flynn proposed reorganization of the board. Commissioners also deferred discussion of this item to a subsequent meeting.

Meeting adjourned at 9:53 pm.

Next regular meeting: Tuesday, June 6, 2017 at 7 pm.

Notes by Fran Stanley