



TOWN OF GROTON
Park Commission
Town Hall
2nd Floor Meeting Room

PARK COMMISSION
Brian Edmonds, Vice Chair
Anna Eliot, CPC Rep
Mary Jennings, Member
Jeffrey Ohringer, Member
Vacancy

Date: Tuesday December 10, 2024
Time: 3:00 PM
Location: 2nd Floor Meeting Room
Members Present: Anna Eliot, Jeffrey Ohringer, Brian Edmonds, Mary Jennings
Members Not Present:
Others Present: Katie Berry, Jon Strauss, Dawn Dunbar, Bruce Eason, Megan Buczynski, Patrick McAdams, Olivia Messenger, Judy Anderson, Mark Haddad, Kara Cruikshank, Brian Callahan, Tom Delaney, Rob Foley, Perry Sisombath

Brian Edmonds, Vice Chair, called the meeting to order at 3:00 p.m.

Discussion with Town Clerk on Open Meeting Law- Dawn Dunbar, Town Clerk, addressed the Park Commission to review the Open Meeting Law and advise the Commissioners, as they have had multiple violations within the past few months, particularly over email, and through and serial communication. Ms. Dunbar provided an overview presentation of the Open Meeting Law to the room, also requesting any Commissioners who have not completed their Conflict-of-Interest Training, to do so.

Public Comment Period - Rob Foley was present as a member of the Groton Dunstable Youth Baseball League; he noted that, at the Fall Town Meeting, the 2024-04 Town Field CPA project, was amended to become a design of the area. Mr. Foley said he was not aware that this was proposed and was not told that this amendment would mean that the Town Field diamonds would not be renovated, and instead a design study would be completed, he said he and his board are very upset about this change. Town Manager, Mark Haddad, also serving as Project Manager, spoke to share that he is surprised by Mr. Foley's comment, as he has been included in design meetings throughout the process, and the amendment was a public Town Meeting. After discussion, Mr. Haddad shared that he will be revisiting the project, after being informed that the Community Preservation Committee was not in favor of borrowing funds for the project, looking at revisiting the original scope. Rob Foley spoke again to share that he was invited to the Town Field design meetings, but was not aware that the funds were being used in a different manner, and stated that he was told the funds were still available.

Cow Pond Field Project Meeting with Town Manager and Design Team- Megan Buczynski and Olivia Messenger, of Activitas, were present to share a presentation of the 2025-02 Cow Pond Brook Fields design. Ms. Buczynski started by making introductions and then continued on, providing an overview of the existing conditions at the Cow Pond Brook Fields, with Article 97 protections, and conservation resource areas within the parcels. Ms. Buczynski presented 3 design options. The preferred design shows 300+ parking spots, no parking on the opposite side of the road, 1 basketball court, relocated little league fields, ADA compliant paths, sidewalks, a playground, a lighted soccer field, shade structure, paved walking path around the perimeter, storage building with concession stand, and gathering area. The preferred design would eliminate the existing driveway to the baseball fields, which is a very sensitive conservation area, to a more suitable area. The cost proposal included a list of preliminary requests for a total of \$4,811,944.00 with an add items list that could increase the total project to \$6,809,751. Ms. Buczynski shared information

regarding parcel 39, under Article 97-Conservation, sharing that due to both cost and time factors did not make sense to pursue, with a potential additional cost of \$300,000-\$400,000 in order to utilize the hill in the design. The Commission discussed with Ms. Buczynski the baseball fields at Cow Pond, and the potential to add an additional Little League Field. Mr. Ohringer clarified that the ground work would be on one particular soccer field, but not all, as some fields are in better shape than others. Mary Jennings confirmed with Ms. Buczynski, looking at the parcels, the areas that are protected for turtle conservation. The Commission discussed the potential for breaking out certain design items, in order to manage costs, with Mr. Haddad clarifying that the parking area, in order to qualify for CPA funding, needs to be tied to another project item. Jeff Ohringer motioned to allow public comment, Anna Eliot seconded, and the motion carried unanimously. Rob Foley asked questions about the parking design beside the baseball fields, and other design elements in the baseball field areas, noting that timing will be of the essence as 3 baseball fields will be disturbed during renovation. Pat McAdams requested to make sure that lacrosse is considered for the Field 3 area. Jon Strauss asked about the connection between the 2 parking areas, which was identified on the design plan.

CPA Project Updates & Discussion with Town Manager

2024-05 Cutler Field- Mark Haddad shared that there were issues with procurement on this project, and as such, the previous Park Commission Chair, Brenden Mahoney, asked the Town Manager, to step in, as Chief Procurement Officer. With that, the Cutler Field skins were completed within the budget set by procurement guidelines, while leaving a balance of \$42,000.00. For Cutler Field, there was a request to install fencing and backstops with dugouts for the new softball skin area, which the Community Preservation Committee approved utilizing the remaining \$42,000 in the project funds to accomplish, but requested Mr. Haddad come before the Park Commission for approval and discussion first. Mr. Haddad noted that current pricing for this work has been coming in at \$20,000 to replace the backstops, and \$19,500 to fence around benches, and there is not enough funding available to build outfield fences. Mr. Haddad clarified that he is not trying to take over projects from the Park Commission, but was asked to assist due to procurement needs. The Commission discussed the failing condition of the backstops at Cutler Field. Mary Jennings commented that she appreciates Mr. Haddad taking over the procurement on these projects, though some confusion arose in the process, with her noting that the request to utilize the \$42,000 for Cutler, went to the CPC prior to the Park Commission, which she thought should have come to the Park Commissioners first, though it was noted that Brenden Mahoney, former Park Commission Chair, had authorized Mr. Haddad to do so. Ms. Jennings also had the same concern regarding the Town Field project, which she had hoped would come to a Park Commission first, before design, Ms. Jennings shared that she thinks the Park Commission was left out sequentially, though they could have been very helpful. Mark Haddad shared that the Park Commission engaged and approved the Cow Pond project RFP, and for the other projects he had been requested to take actions by the former Chair. Anna Eliot echoed Mary Jennings comments, and thought a Park Commissioner should be on the design Working Groups for Cow Pond and Town Field, to which Mr. Haddad shared Brenden Mahoney, was, for both. Ms. Eliot requested to have 2 Commissioners on design teams, and stated that while the previous Chair worked unilaterally with the Town Manager, she felt that the other 4 members were clueless. Mr. Haddad shared that he understood Commissioner's thoughts on the Town Field project, as it moved quickly, though the Cow Pond and Cutler project were fully engaged by the direction of the Park Commission, and he was unclear why there was a communication issue with the Commission. Anna Eliot discussed with the Town Manager and Town Clerk, the subcommittee process, with the Town Clerk clarifying that 2 members would constitute as a subcommittee and require posting under the Open Meeting Law. Tom Delaney, DPW Director, shared that the original concepts for these CPC projects, were submitted by the Park Commission and the Chair prior to Brenden Mahoney, adding that often Committees and Commissions have great ideas and are unable to execute the projects so they eventually get dropped onto Town employees regardless. Brian Edmonds shared that there were a lot of things that were done unilaterally in the past, and he is working toward addressing concerns, and meeting more regularly to alleviate issues. The Commission discussed process and issues arising from former leadership, and shared their appreciation for the work the Town Manager has done. Brian Edmonds brought to the table, the decision on the 2024-05 Cutler Field addition work, Anna Eliot suggested putting the Cutler Field scope of services discussion to an upcoming agenda. Jeff Ohringer asked clarifying questions about the Cutler Field project, Mr. Haddad gave background

information, with Mr. Ohringer asking if Mr. Haddad would be rescinding his withdrawal of the 2026-04 Cutler project, with Mark Haddad making very clear that he will not be rescinding his withdrawal, if the 2024 funds are not to be used, he will not be pursuing the changes. Anna Eliot shared her opinion that if there are \$42,000 in funds available, they should be used to benefit users of the field. The Commission discussed including this on a future agenda. John Strauss, a public member, asked clarifying questions about the 2026 application, and who can reengage the project. Katie Berry, Administrator, shared that the 2026 application shows that the application was submitted by the Town Manager/Parks Commission and signed only by the Town Manager, Mark Haddad. Bruce Eason, CPC member, in the audience noted that only the applicant can withdraw the application, and that there is a CPC checklist for all submissions, giving an overview of the process, adding that the Park Commission could make a submission if they chose to. This project will be on a future agenda for discussion. Later in the meeting, the Park Commission revisited this topic. Jeff Ohringer moved to make the improvements required to make the Cutler Fields playable for softball games, replacing or repairing backstops and installing dugouts with protective fencing to be located around dugouts only using the 2024-05 Cutler Field funds, Mary Jennings seconded, and the motion carried unanimously. Brian Edmonds will work with Mark Haddad to take care of the RFP process, if needed.

2025-02 & 2026-05 Cow Pond Play Fields – To speak to the Town Manager’s involvement in the Cow Pond project, Mr. Haddad shared that Park Commissioner Anna Eliot requested drafting of the RFP for the project, which he did, and that former Park Commission Chair, Brenden Mahoney, asked the Town Manager, to take over as Project Manager, and kick start the project. The RFP process yielded (4) bidders, with Activitas being the chosen design firm by the Park Commission. The Commissioners discussed the presentation made earlier in the meeting for the renovation of Cow Pond Fields. Mark Haddad asked the Park Commission how they would like to proceed, considering the CPC’s lack of appetite to bond projects at this time. Mary Jennings requested the Cow Pond project be discussed at an upcoming meeting. Katie Berry clarified for the room that the Complete Draft Proposal, as the next step for the 2026-05 Cow Pond project is due to the CPC by January 16th, 2025. Anna Eliot stated that she would prefer to have more conversations with the user groups. Mark Haddad made clear that if the parking area should be pursued, it cannot be a standalone project in order to qualify for CPA funds. Brian Edmonds suggested, in order to engage the public effectively, that it may be advisable to push the project out farther, with the January 16th, 2025 Complete Draft Proposal date being so close. The Commission agreed that the Cow Pond project should be reviewed further at an upcoming meeting, and discussed with the public and users.

2024-04 & 2026-14 Town Field- To address the Town Managers involvement in this project, Mr. Haddad made clear that there were also procurement issues for the Town Field project, with the \$80,000 request not being enough to complete the diamond renovations, as the project bids came in over \$50,000.00 and plans and specs were not in place, there were also additional needs for the area. The former Park Commission Chair, Brenden Mahoney also asked for help with this project. The amendment to the Town Field project, in order to complete a design and assessment of the Town Field, was approved at Fall Town Meeting. Mr. Haddad added that with the design work completed, there is potential to get the baseball diamond only completed, for an approximate starting cost of \$220,000, where a complete redesign of the entire Town Field area would come in at 2.5 million dollars, which the Community Preservation Committee is not inclined to bond, until other debts are settled. Mr. Haddad stated that the Park Commission will need to share their preference for the Town Field project, in terms of which option to pursue. The Commission discussed scaling back the 2026-14 Town Field CPA application to look at revamping the two fields only. The Town Manager stated that in order to renovate both the larger baseball diamond and the small Alvin Sawyer field, which both very much need renovation, the expense would be between \$300,000-400,000 dollars, confirming with CPC Treasurer, Bruce Eason, that that would not be an unrealistic ask at this point. Mary Jennings suggested inviting the baseball user group to come to a future meeting to discuss, and to pursue the January 16th, 2025 Complete Draft Proposal for the scaled down project. Jon Strauss commended Mark Haddad’s time and work on these projects, and suggested liaisons for Parks projects. Brian Edmonds moved to have an assigned Commissioner work as liaison with Town Manager on the different CPC applications, Mary Jennings for the Town Field project, Jeff Ohringer for the Cow Pond Fields project, and Brian Edmonds for the Cutler Field project, Jeff Ohringer will also work with Groton Dunstable Youth

Baseball League on their application, and to receive updates from the Town Manager to be discussed by the Park Commission.

2026-11 GDYBL Batting Cages Remodel, Backstop Netting, 2026-12 GDYBL Cow Pond Dugouts, & 2026-13 Cow Pond Field 4 Drainage and Mounds Rebuild Discussion with Rob Foley of GDYBL- Brian Edmonds shared that Rob Foley, of GDYBL had been at the meeting prior to ask for support of his applications, though had to step out of the meeting, and the Park Commission still needs to discuss these projects, as well as the larger 2026-05 Cow Pond project. Brian Edmonds clarified that the requests made by Rob Foley and the GDYBL for their projects, have been included in the larger 2026-05 project design by Activitas, however, Mr. Foley has indicated to his preference to have his projects remain separate, and standalone. Anna Eliot stated that she would like a scope of services from Mr. Foley. Jon Strauss clarified that it is up to the Park Commission to grant permission and support for CPA projects in their jurisdiction. Brian Edmonds shared his concern regarding the optics of having 2 separate CPA projects for the same parcel and his inclination to exercise caution in supporting a project that could jeopardize the larger project, as the presentation by Activitas was very impressive, Mary Jennings agreed with Mr. Edmonds concerns, Mr. Easom noted that that a CPA project would not be brought forward to the floor of Town Meeting without the property owner's approval. The room discussed the process for project management, with Tom Delaney providing an example of the DPW needing to take over the basketball court at Town Field, suggesting that the Park Commission decide the best way to manage projects. Mary Jennings noted that the Park Commission may wish to hire a Project Manager. Jon Strauss echoed support for Tom Delaney's comments, as he has had experience with a larger CPA project, and he was assisted by Town employee Tom Orcutt, as it was very involved. The Commission agreed that they will be discussing this with Rob Foley at a future meeting.

Discussion with Town Manager on Charter Review Suggestions- Mark Haddad shared that the Department of Public Works manages the care of fields and commons, where it makes a lot of sense to have the Park Commission work with the Department of Public Works, in order to make things more efficient, and apologized for not coming to the Park Commission to discuss the suggestion first, though that would have been difficult to do prior due to Open Meeting Law. Mark Haddad stated that he is going to withdraw his suggestion of changing the PC from elected to appointed, to focus on more important Charter initiatives, adding that with Park Commission upgrading policies and procedures, the Park Commission is in a good place to move forward, especially with the Cow Pond project, which was so well designed by Activitas. Mr. Haddad suggested the Park Commission bring forward the Cow Pond project to the CPC, even though it will be high cost. Anna Eliot shared her appreciation, looking forward to working with the DPW, as did other Commissioners.

Interview Candidates for Park Commissioner Vacant Seat- This topic will be continued to a future meeting. There was one applicant, which came in after the advertisement due date, though the application will be accepted. Anna Eliot suggested recommending the applicant, Rob Foley, to be appointed by the Select Board, and after discussion, the Commission discussed meeting with Mr. Foley first, and allow for other applicants to come forward. Mary Jennings moved to repost the vacancy, Jeff Ohringer seconded, and the motion carried unanimously.

Park Commission Properties- Assigned Commissioner updates and estimates- Jeff Ohringer shared that he has contacted a handyman to complete the repairs needed for the memorial bench located at Legion Common, at approximately \$400.00. The Commission discussed the families wishes, with Jeff Ohringer suggesting cedar wood. Brian Edmonds moved to approve Jeff Ohringer's request and complete the bench repairs with cedar, using \$400.00 of Capital funds, Anna Eliot seconded, and the motion carried unanimously. The Commission discussed the need to remove porta-potties and trash bins at Park Commission parcels. Tom Delaney shared his opinion to remove bins permanently and adopt a carry-in and carry-out policy. The GW Shaw dumpster will remain for the winter, on suspended service. Mary Jennings moved to have all porta-potties and trash bins removed from parcels, Anna Eliot seconded, and the motion carried unanimously.

Policies and Procedures Manual- Brian Edmonds discussed, any red line edits, that were requested on the proposed draft policies and procedures. The Commission discussed project management for Park Commission CPA projects, and language to be used in the draft policy, and after discussion, the paragraph will be stricken from the policy. Mary Jennings requested discussion on property liaisons. Brian Edmonds shared that the General Operations Policy is drafted using the Select Board's as a guide. The Commission discussed dissenting opinions and adherence to votes. Dawn Dunbar, Town Clerk, clarified her interpretation of adherence to votes. The room discussed the interpretation of adherence to votes. Brian Edmonds moved to submit the proposed policies and procedures manual to Town Counsel with the changes agreed upon, Mary Jennings seconded, and the motion carried unanimously.

FY26 Operational/Capital Budget Discussion- Brian Edmonds shared that the FY26 Budget presentation will occur on December 11th, and both he and Katie Berry will make this presentation. Asking for an increase in the Operational Expense Budget, as Katie Berry had tracked a full year cycle, and analysis of cost per field. The Commission discussed the administrative position, as a new administrator will be taking over in January 2025, this administrator will assist both the Park Commission and DPW. Mary Jennings noted that in her research, other towns, have Parks and Recreation groups, under and working in conjunction with the DPW, and shared her opinion that the Parks Commission needs more administrative assistance.

FY25 Capital Improvement Budget Planning Discussion- This topic was continued to future meeting.

Old/New Business:

Sign permits/ invoices- Park Commissioners signed FY25 Operational Expense and FY25 Capital Expense invoices to be processed.

Approve 2025 Field Use Permit Forms- Brian Edmonds shared 2025 Seasonal Field Use Permit forms, as past practice. Brian Edmonds moved to approve the 2025 Field Use Forms, Anna Eliot seconded, and the motion carried unanimously.

Approve 10/21/24, 11/12/24, & 11/18/24 Minutes – Mary Jennings moved to accept the meeting minutes of October 21, 2024, November 12, 2024, and November 18, 2024, as submitted, Anna Eliot seconded, and the motion carried unanimously.

Discuss Role of the Chair and Consider Appointment of Same- Anna Eliot moved to appoint Brian Edmonds as Chair, Mary Jennings seconded, and the motion carried unanimously.

Schedule Next Meeting – The Commission discussed recurring meeting options, selecting a time of 5:30pm on Mondays, twice per month. The next meeting will be held Monday December 30th, 2024 at 5:30pm.

Jeff Ohringer moved to adjourn at 6:20pm, Anna Eliot seconded, and the motion carried unanimously.

Minutes by Katie Berry, Interdepartmental Administrative Assistant.

APPROVED: 12/30/24
