

**PARK COMMISSION**

Brian Edmonds, Chair

Anna Eliot, CPC Representative

Mary Jennings, Member

Jeffrey Ohringer, Member

Rob Foley, Member

**TOWN OF GROTON**

Park Commission

Town Hall

1st Floor Meeting Room

Date: Monday May 05, 2025

Time: 5:00 PM

Location: 1st Floor Meeting Room

Members Present: Brian Edmonds, Rob Foley, Anna Eliot, Jeffrey Ohringer, Mary Jennings,

Members Not Present:

Others Present: Laura Fisher, Mark Haddad, Kara Cruikshank, Brian Callahan, Sten Peeters, Don Barry, Brenden Mahoney, Mike Johnson

**Call to Order: 5:02 p.m.**

Chair Brian Edmonds called the meeting.

**Public Comments –**

Sten Peeters from the GD Youth Soccer League would like to address the availability for user groups to have more power over certain fields.

**Park Commissioner Coordination with the DPW –**

Chair Edmonds started the discussion on key topics about how the Park Commission operates various properties and the need to effectively work to coordinate with the DPW. Also, what individual commissioners are permitted to do and how the Commission makes decisions being an elected board that can only act by a majority vote. DPW director Tom Delaney wrote a letter on behalf of his absence for this meeting, read into the minutes by Chair Brian Edmonds as follows:

*Good morning*

*I am sorry I will not be able to attend the meeting Monday as I have had 16th birthday plans with my daughter and family for a while but I wanted to pass along items I can discuss at a later date.*

*There is a lot of frustration lately, when it comes to some aspects, of the large, vast and very important public resource, which are our parks. My frustration from field use came to a head Thursday, and if I was a little harsh with anyone I apologize, but it started at town meeting when we were criticized for maintaining,  trash and netting left in woods around fields, non-accessibility for public, listing to my assistant have to negotiate with clubs if it is ok for people to use fields, no one from user groups, who filed CPC applications to speak at town meeting and a general entitlement of some who think the fields belong to them.*

*The DPW has worked long and hard to keep these areas to the highest standard we can, with the time and resources available to us, so they are enjoyable for the general public and I've always been a high priority for me.  At town meeting it was portrayed we are only there for the user groups and why spend money there, for groups that pay no fees. This sentiment needs to change as it is going to come up again in these tight times. User fees aside, the accessibility issue needs to be addressed so needs of all are accommodated.  The assumption of groups having control has to change. The unilateral decision of volunteers making decisions without consulting their respective boards or Town Personnel responsible for Maintenance needs to be changed. Blocking of fields all day during seasons should be addressed.*

*I understand and appreciate the work the user groups do on the fields and without them a lot of the improvements would not be done. They are an essential resource and necessity to keep the improvements, as well as their programs active. The volunteers we have are invaluable and they do a tremendous service for the town, and for that I thank them, but they need to exercise control when it comes to conflict of interest.*

*The park department is a very important board which has great responsibility and as always has my thanks and support. The hours put in are a lot and underappreciated but I believe right now, their efforts are being clouded and will continue to be with the fallout from town meeting. We are going to continue to have funding controversy without some policy changes. For all my years with the town, and all the town meetings, this is the most indecision and lack of support I have ever seen when it comes to funding for our parks.  Parks is expansive, and does not exist in one place or field, and this something that can be addressed through policy.  I believe this will help with the public perception and will help, our support, moving forward. You noticed I said “our support” as this is a two-way street. Most of the projects that have been done in the past could not have been done without combined support. Without communication on capital, minor projects, maintenance and, planning on both parts I don’t believe public opinion will improve.*

*Again, I am sorry for not being in attendance but will make myself available in the future.*

*Tom Delaney*

DPW director Brian Callahan added to what director Delaney had written stating that the DPW department would like to be heavily involved in projects between Parks and user groups since when problems arise the Parks department looks to DPW for assistance and to do the repairs. Communication is a must. Commissioner Ohringer mentioned it needs to be a 2-way street and DPW also needs to communicate if things are being done on Parks properties. Commissioner Jennings suggests that creating some mechanisms would help projects go more smoothly. Whether they are policies, practices or forms of communication that have been agreed upon. Chair Edmonds brings up that working as a commission they are constricted to needing a 48-hour meeting notice in regards to open meeting law to get a decision made unless it is a public emergency before an action can be done. Edmonds states that most towns have in addition to a park’s administrator, an authorized employee to act on behalf of the parks department. Edmonds entertains a motion that suggests appointing DPW directors Tom Delaney and Brian Callahan to act as the Parks agent with regard to basic management and maintenance functions of their properties that would allow them to go out on emergency basis, to do things like changing locks, have the authority to decide if a field is closed or open due to weather etc. That having an employee within the town who is responsible for the general operation and maintenance of the parks to make those kinds of immediate management decisions, so that the Park Commission can then be doing what it is supposed to be doing, which is setting policy for field use, authorizing large user group permits and focusing on large capital major improvements, that way really functioning like a board. Commissioner Eliot would like to ensure there is complete communication. Commissioner Foley is hesitant to agree, wanting to make sure the Parks Commission does not fall out of the loop if DPW starts to make decisions alongside user groups on fields.

 Town Manager Mark Haddad proposes that the DPW would handle issues for the Parks department during the day and then provide a weekly/monthly update at parks meetings. Becoming a potential liaison and being generally responsible for leading the effort of repair in emergency situations that can then be taken back to the Parks commission to make sure everything is copacetic. TM Haddad also gave an update to the commissioners that the Town Meeting approved the project at Town Field and that he would need to be working with the Baseball league for scheduling and share the timeline with the commissioners once established. Cow Pond Project also passed with $100,000 to start the project. TM Haddad states setting up a meeting with Activitas to start the planning process and include who Parks would like to be involved. An agreement was made between Parks and TM to meet with Activitas on June 2nd at 5pm. Parks is to oversee the design and planning of the Cow Pond Project and Mark Haddad will be take care of the procurement once the construction is ready to begin.

**Upon motion by Chair Edmonds, seconded by commissioner Foley, to authorize Mark Haddad to work with Baseball, to coordinate the project getting completed. The motion was unanimously passed in a 5:0 roll call:**

**Ohringer Aye**

**Eliot Aye**

**Jennings Aye**

**Foley Aye**

**Edmonds Aye**

**Upon motion by Chair Edmonds, seconded by commissioner Ohringer, 2-month period the Park Commission authorizes the DPW. To act as liaison for basic operations and maintenance of the parks, fields, and commons. This authority includes unilateral decision making for things such as mowing, irrigation, fertilization, and opening and closing the fields. The Commission will remain responsible for setting policy, authorizing field use, applications, selection of vendors, and all decisions for major upgrades.**

 **The motion was unanimously passed in a 3:1 roll call:**

**Ohringer Aye**

**Eliot Abstain**

**Jennings Aye**

**Foley No**

**Edmonds Aye**

**Authority of Individual Park Commissioners –**

Chair Edmonds reminded Commissioners that they cannot work unilaterally and that all decisions are to be done as a group.

**GDYBL Updates & Requests –**

Baseball would like to request putting up tarps temporarily to cover and protect mounds when it rains and to not allow dogs on the sports fields. Further discussion on Town policy is needed to make a decision on allowing the dogs on fields.

**Upon motion by Chair Edmonds, seconded by commissioner Foley, to authorize baseball to Purchase tarps for the mounds, and to place them during the rain and remove them when it’s done raining. The motion was unanimously passed in a 5:0 roll call:**

**Ohringer Aye**

**Eliot Aye**

**Jennings Aye**

**Foley Aye**

**Edmonds Aye**

**Cutler Field Shed –**

The construction on the shed will not be on the Nashoba Tech agenda till the fall and the price will also be increased.

Don Barry from the Softball League would like a storage shed for year-round use.

**Upon motion by Commissioner Foley, seconded by Chair Edmonds, to authorize Softball to keep Conex shed for use until two weeks after the new shed has been built. The motion was unanimously passed in a 5:0 roll call:**

**Ohringer Aye**

**Eliot Aye**

**Jennings Aye**

**Foley Aye**

**Edmonds Aye**

**Discussion re Re-Organization & Election of Officers –**

Anna, Mary and Rob are interested in CPC. Edmonds nominated Jennings for Chair, to which Jennings also expressed interest.

**Old/New Business: \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_**

**Sign permits/ invoices**-

**Upon motion by Chair Edmonds, seconded by Commissioner Foley, that the Parks commission approve the remaining permit requests if there are no conflicts. The motion was unanimously passed in a 5:0 roll call:**

**Ohringer Aye**

**Eliot Aye**

**Jennings Aye**

**Foley Aye**

**Edmonds Aye**

Schedule Next Meeting and Adjourn- Monday, May 12th 2025 5:00pm

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**Brian Edmonds moved to adjourn at 6:30 pm, Rob Foley seconded, and the motion carried unanimously**

Minutes by Laura Fisher, Administrative Assistant.

**APPROVED:** **June 16, 2025**