



Walpole Recreation Committee
Meeting Held on Wednesday, November 10th, 2021
via Zoom conference call - 6:00 p.m.

Recreation Committee Present

Regular Members

Present

- Joseph Grant, *Chair*
- Richard McCarthy, *Vice-Chair**
- Michael McGrath

Not Present

Annelise Fair

Associate Members

Present

- Jeff Hutnick
- Doug Shea

Not Present

Lorraine Dundon
Brad Hickey

Staff Present

- Brendan Croak, *Recreation Director*

Call to Order

Chairperson Grant called the meeting to order at 6:00 p.m.

Old Business

Athletic Field Fee Review

Some discussion took place at the September Recreation Committee meeting about changing the terminology to better categorize groups when field permit requests are received. Revised wording would seek to update the categories to the following: "Volunteer-based Walpole Organizations / Non-Profit" and "Other". The change in wording allows the Department to better categorize and charge appropriately.

Greg Campbell of Patriot Flag Football was in attendance to give a brief introduction of his organization for those Committee members who are unaware of their organization, and to give the Committee a glance of where the organization is headed in the future.

- On a motion made by Mr. McGrath, seconded by Vice-Chair McCarthy, the Committee voted 2-0-1 to change the language on the *Field Permit Application* to “Volunteer-based Walpole Organizations / Non-Profit” and “Other”, effective Spring 2022.

New Business

- Chair Grant notified the Committee that William Buckley has resigned from the Recreation Committee after 5½ years of service.
- Mr. McGrath noted that he is the Recreation Committee member of the Master Plan Steering Committee. He will provide an update for the Recreation Committee at each future meeting.
- Chairperson Grant noted that he was recently in the building and noticed that it was pretty dirty. He questioned if there was a lack in staffing or if there was any specific reason as to why? Director Croak stated that he will approach the appropriate departments, as needed, if improvements are not seen.

Director's Report

Harvest Fest

- Director Croak noted that *Harvest Fest* took place last month, and was a huge success. The weather was absolutely gorgeous and attendance was high. The ability to spread out the vendors in the parking lot, similar to Walpole Day, made for such a great event. Director Croak noted that he hopes to continue the Department's annual fall event at this location in the future.

Recreation Programming

- Saturday Soccer wrapped up last weekend. Director Croak wanted to recognize the hard work and effort that was put forth by Recreation Coordinator, Rich Lamoury. The Department will continue to utilize volunteers and a weekly curriculum for the coaches for each seasonal Saturday sports program.
- Director Croak noted that the Department had relatively good registration numbers for fall programming. Winter programming runs December 20 - March 27 for about 14 weeks. Registration for winter programs opens up in a couple weeks on November 22.

Athletic Field Update

Field Permits

Director Croak noted that there are a couple more weeks left of the fall field permit season, which ends on November 30. Some private rentals will continue to utilize the new field complex as long as they can, weather permitting. Director Croak noted that

these rentals should really help to bring in additional revenue, in an otherwise dormant season, which can be towards turf replacement and capital projects for the fields.

Spring Field Permit Applications will be accepted starting on January 10, and permits will be issued in mid-March. Director Croak anticipates that there will be additional difficulty to manage scheduling, and staggering start times, with the addition of the natural grass fields at the complex. He states that he will have to continue to monitor traffic and parking to make sure issues don't come up at the complex.

- Field Improvements

Improvements began in September on *Morgan Field* to improve drainage issues that have hampered that location for quite some time. During some of the recent rain storms, drainage appeared to improve significantly. Director Croak stated that this is promising for the spring season, which will mitigate field closures, thus resulting in more field usage.

- Additional field improvements were done at *Carty Field*, which is located adjacent to East Street behind Bird Middle School. Director Croak was recently approached by the Parks Department with a "radical" plan to improve field conditions and playability at that field. He was told that they would like to try the installation of grass on the first and third base lines, which would allow for the water to *gradually* drain, rather than puddle and create channels which run towards the home plate area, rendering the field unplayable. There are some colleges and high schools in the area that had a similar layout for their baseball fields, and they've had considerable success. Director Croak drove over to Needham to take a look at their field to see how it turned out, and he stated that the field looks great. If successful, there will be consideration to do the same to the basepaths at *Eldracher Field*. Both Recreation and Parks Departments will continue to assess fields and identify areas where improvements can be made. Until more information is known about the potential construction on the Bird Middle School campus, large-scale field renovations are highly unlikely at this time.

Department Budget

- Capital Budget

Capital budget improvements were approved at Town Meeting a few weeks ago. Noteworthy Recreation Department items are heating and air conditioning improvements in the Main Hall of *Blackburn Hall*. Director Croak stated that this is a long-overdue improvement for this building. He also noted that a few months ago, the fans, which have not worked in quite some time, were fixed in the Main Hall. Along with the fans, the HVAC improvements will be a huge upgrade to the building. Director Croak stated that during the winter, the Hall gets extremely cold, and during the summer months, the room is borderline unusable because of how hot the room is. During heatwaves, oftentimes it is actually cooler outside for the kids in our summer program. This will allow more programs and comfort for our participants in the future. At some

point, Director Croak would like to explore replacement of the windows to continue to overhaul and improve the energy efficiency of the Main Hall.

Director Croak mentioned that the three pool chlorinators were approved, as well. This will continue the process to overhaul the chemical equipment delivery system at the pools. Once these chlorinators are installed, the hope is that the Department will be able to cut down considerably on chemical usage and maintenance.

The playground at Center Pool will also be completely redone. While this was not a Recreation-specific request, the new playground will greatly enhance that area, and will be a nice destination for the community.

The Recreation Department pick-up truck is scheduled to be replaced, which should help with Pool Maintenance staff and the delivery of Sand & Salt during the winter months. This vehicle will be shared with other Departments, as needed.

Director Croak noted that \$50,000 was approved for a Recreation Strategic Plan, which has never been done before. The Department will work with a consulting firm to take a look at everything Recreation-related to provide a roadmap of how to enhance and improve all aspects of the Recreation Department. Director Croak anticipates this to be a somewhat long-term study, with improvements continuing in the future, as needed.

- FY '23 Operating Budget

Department budget requests are due at the end of this month. Director Croak has since submitted the Department's request to Town Administration for review. Budget is similar with minor increases and decreases, based on historical usage and budget projections. Director Croak noted that Department finances are tracked on a weekly and monthly-basis, so Department needs are accurately addressed.

Minutes

- On a motion made by Vice-Chair McCarthy, seconded by Mr. McGrath, the Committee voted 3-0-0 to approve the September 8th, 2021 meeting minutes.

Public Comment

- N/A

Adjournment

- On a motion made by Mr. McGrath, seconded by Vice-Chair McCarthy, the Committee voted 3-0-0 to adjourn at 7:12 p.m.