



Parks & Recreation Commission Athletic Field Planning Subcommittee Meeting Minutes for June 6, 2019 @ 7:30 PM Town Hall Meeting Room

MINUTES

Members in attendance: Stu Sklar, Select Board representative; Joe Reynolds, Parks & Recreation Commission representative; Ed Frackiewicz, Harvard Athletic Association board representative; Dan Daly, At-Large resident representative. Others in attendance (signed-in): Sharlene Cronin; Gloria Pierce; Amy Bassage; Abby Besse; John Osborn; Jennifer Finch; Stephen Mararchi; Keith Bilafer; Doug Thornton; Don Phillips; Susan Voute.

Parks & Recreation commissioner Joe Reynolds called the meeting to order at 7:37. Subcommittee members introduced themselves, as did several others in attendance from the general public.

Reynolds presented a document entitled "Athletic Field Planning Subcommittee - Organization and Process"¹, which set forth the subcommittee's positional roles and responsibilities; general roles and definitions of members and participants; obligations; and code of conduct. Dan Daly reviewed the subcommittee's charges² to clarify the scope of its work and what it aims to accomplish.

Reynolds delivered the first section of a presentation ("Field Usage Analysis: Methodology, Definitions, and Expectations"³) that consisted of the shared premises of the subcommittee's approach to its work, how its beneficiaries and impacts will be determined, and an overview of the elements that will make up the field inventory (i.e., fields, activities, costs, maintenance, engagement, available alternatives). Reynolds then delivered the next sections of the presentation ("Crunch the Numbers") which consisted of the predicate assumptions, including who will be served by the subcommittee's work; costs and cost alternatives; and the rationale for why various data and information is required.

Reynolds cited studies from Oregon State University⁴ and "Parks and Rec Business"⁵, which estimated the average cost of a new synthetic turf field at \$1,149,750 requiring an average 20-year budget of \$3,744,147. This was compared to the average cost of a natural turf field, which on average costs \$464,000 to install with an average 20-year budget of \$2,120,622. While the initial and 20-year costs for the synthetic turf field were higher in the study, the "per player-use hour" for synthetic fields ran as low as \$7.76 versus \$52.92 for natural turf fields in the study. He emphasized the need for detailed sport-by-sport usage data and the component details that will be required (i.e., fields, athletic leagues, teams, maintenance schedules, and maintenance activities).

Public communication occurred throughout the meeting. Amy Bassage asked whether Reynold's Parks & Rec role was volunteer or paid (it is a volunteer position). In other towns like Littleton, she noted, the role is executed by the Department of Public Works or Highway Department. Sharlene Cronin asked whether other costs, such as personal injuries to players or the costs of property damage to conservation areas were considered. Reynolds responded that some may and some may not, depending on the availability of data; generally, the inclusion of these issues is yet to be determined. Sue Voute expressed concerns about inhalation of artificial turf components; such issues will be identified but not necessarily covered and assessed in the final report. An audience member requested access to the resources being cited; these will be cited in the meetings minutes and the intent is to have them made available via the subcommittee's web page.

Ed Frackiewicz inquired of Select Board member Stu Sklar what comparable towns or data sets the Board uses when assessing actions that the Town of Harvard might take. Sklar referred to Cohasset as an example of a comparably sized town with similar socioeconomic characteristics, but that it depends on the actions the town is trying to take – employee contract negotiations, for example. Audience member Linda Dwight referred to school enrollment statistics as the basis for comparable municipalities. Daly said that ideally a series of different benchmarks would provide for a better analysis.

Daly said a lot of data collection had been going on since last October, especially with regard to Reynolds' pursuit of capacity planning and usage information from town sports leagues. Reynolds explained that he was also in possession of information like field dimensions from already-available sources. Daly expressed an interest in gathering participant, demographic, financial, and jurisdictional data, and suggested the subcommittee consider what the end result/report should be, and work backwards from that to assign tasks, workgroups and next steps.

Sklar noted that if the report is not completed until December, then it would become a 2-year process in terms of the town's fiscal planning and budgeting. To have its impact considered in the next fiscal year, the report would need to be completed by the end of

October or mid-November, at the latest. With the exception of the three baseball facilities – which are at least in part maintained using private funds --- the fields are in disrepair. We should urgently consider capacity, Sklar said, because there are far more Harvard residents now attending the town’s schools than in the 90’s, when upwards of 18% of the schools’ population consisted of non-resident kids who school-choiced in to Harvard. Therefore, the carrying capacity of the fields would be important to tell the town – i.e., why more fields are needed, because the town’s field capacity has not kept up with increased usage.

Requesting more gender equity, audience member Gloria Pierce questioned the use of the Ryan Lands exclusively for baseball, the emphasis on baseball by HYBSA, as well as how funds are used. Daly explained that private funding via booster clubs facilitated the maintenance of some town fields, including the former HES softball field, and that town and school leaders were becoming more aware of the issues. Frackiewicz explained more detail on how perceived inequities occur and that actions are being taken to address them. Sklar explained that public procurement can be a mess sometimes, and that it’s easier to do things with private funds, citing the speed with which the Ryan Lands and HES fields were tended to leveraging private funds. Daly said that figuring out the balance of the public and the private funding – and for what purposes --- is why the usage and capacity data is so important in order to make recommendations to the Town.

Sklar said the current situation has been in place for many years, and that a focus on capacity needs to be established in order to move the process forward – whether that results in a land purchase, a land swap, or leveraging other playing field resources like Devens. Sklar said he’d like to see a full-time Parks & Rec employee lead many of the operations under discussion.

In setting priorities, the group emphasized the need for the Subcommittee to become fully staffed with voting members, and reviewed the nomination and appointment processes, as well as the 3 open positions. Reynolds emphasized the need for members who seek to do a thorough job, who have relevant experience and who can get things done. Nominating new voting members begins with submission of a Volunteer Form on the Town web site, after which the Parks & Recreation Commission will vote to appoint new Voting Members. A discussion of the popularity of various non-field sports ensued (e.g., skateboarding).

Action items were discussed, assigned and set as follows:

- 1.) Participant/demographic data – Frackiewicz, Daly
 - Review available MIAA data on Bromfield participation and identify gaps
 - Assess available and needed U6-U18 data from HAA and its members boards
 - Refine the scope of useful and relevant data and overlaps with Field Usage Data
- 2.) Student Input/Survey – Reynolds, Linda Dwight
 - Assess existing data, identify gaps
 - Formulate a process for additional relevant information gathering on student preferences
- 3.) Final Report Overview – Sklar, Daly
 - Outline compelling information needs for decision making and resident buy-in; keep it simple & brief
 - Begin vision or narrative for summary, bullet-fashion key findings & recommendations

A motion was made to pursue these 3 action items for the next meeting. The vote was 4-0 in favor of the motion.

A discussion of various booster clubs, fundraising arms, and 501(c)3 organizations ensued, including their impact, governance, and oversight. It is a growing concern for school officials, athletic association leadership and those concerned with equitable outcomes. The dearth of usable fields was discussed, including the Mass. Av. Bromfield Library field and the limitations of its usage. Insufficient maintenance is a key issue, as well as the inability to rest any fields -- which does further long-term damage to them.

The meeting was adjourned at 9:45 pm.

Documents referenced:

- 1.) Athletic Field Planning Subcommittee – “Organization and Process”; J. Reynolds
- 2.) Town of Harvard, Parks & Recreation Commission; Athletic Field Planning Subcommittee charges, May 20, 2019
- 3.) Athletic Field Planning Subcommittee – “Field Usage Analysis: Methodology, Definitions, and Expectations”; J. Reynolds
- 4.) Cook, Tom; Assoc. Professor, Dept. of Horticulture, Oregon State University; “Maintenance Standards For Soil Base Soccer Fields”; Puyallup Research and Extension Center, Washington State University (<https://puyallup.wsu.edu/turf/soil-fields/>); 2013
- 5.) “Making Smart Plays”; *Parks and Rec Business*; (<https://www.parksandrecbusiness.com/articles/2016/7/making-smart-plays>); July 26, 2016

NEXT MEETING: JUNE 19,2019