



DURHAM PARKS & RECREATION COMMITTEE  
Meeting Minutes  
**Tuesday, November 28, 2023**  
7:00 pm  
Town Council Chambers



**Call to Order:** Rachel Gasowski called the meeting to order at 7:00 pm. In attendance: Joe Friedman, Al Howland, Rachel Gasowski, Tracy Schroeder, Matt Swiesz, and Brian Keegan in person; and Michael Drooker, Erin Goyette, and Genevieve Brown on Zoom. Alternate Matt Swiesz is a voting member this evening.

**Approval of Agenda:** Rachel amended the agenda to remove the last two items until the next meeting so Cathy Leach can address those. Al made a motion to approve the agenda as amended, Tracy seconded. No discussion, approval by roll call vote, 7-0.

**Approval of Minutes:** Sept. 26, 2023. Rachel suggested two minor changes. Al made a motion to approve the minutes as amended from September 26, 2023; Matt seconded. Approval by roll call vote, 6-0 with Brian abstaining as he was not present at the meeting.

**Public Comments:** There were no public comments.

**Roundtable (10 minutes)**

Mike Drooker reported that the Land Stewardship Subcommittee:

- Working group questionnaire on Jackson's Landing has been revised and will be made available to the committee soon.
- Rich Reine, Durham Public Works, gave a presentation of the Mill Pond Dam removal at the most recent meeting. Currently removal is scheduled for the summer/fall of 2024. Lots of permitting and consultations involved. Details are on the Public Works engineering website.
- Portsmouth water project through Wagon Hill farm - cost estimates came out too high, so they are separating the parts of the project. The first will be the installation of valves on the pipes under the bay; the existing valves are inoperative. Replacing the pipes are on hold for the present.
- Work is in progress on the bridges in Wagon Hill, the approaches and railings need to be put up. They are continuing to work on fixing the boardwalks as well.

Brian asked if Rachel still needed volunteers for Frost Fest, he knows of UNH students that would like to help.

**Update from the Parks & Recreation Director & Upcoming Events (10 minutes)**

- Trot in the Trees in mid-October, ~150 runners. It is a trail race done in partnership with ORYA. Able to do substantial trail work the day before and the course was in great shape.

- Downtown Trick or Treat had a huge turnout. Good participation from businesses, lots of help from UNH students. Traffic became an issue so next year Rachel plans to modify where events are held.

-This past weekend, Feather Fest at Wagon Hill Farm in partnership with ORPP. About 40 people in attendance.

-This Saturday the final community event of 2023 is Frost Fest from 6-8 pm.

-Gunstock registration is full with 181 kids registered. 2 lesson block sessions and purchase of passes available.

-After School programs in partnership with Seven Rivers Paddling going strong. Averaging 25 kids per day, K-8. Providing transportation from Mast Way to Moharimet.

-2 teacher workshop day field trips were full. Field trips included Taste Buds kitchen and a farm, bowling and ice skating. Will continue workshop day field trips next year.

-Partnered with Police and Library for the first Lunch and Learn program on scams. About 20 people in attendance; good feedback so plan to continue that partnership with the library.

-Will soon begin to plan for summer programs and winter programs-Sweetheart Skate, Family Sweetheart Dance, Slush Cup Pond Hockey Tournament, Durham Day, Durham Day Dash. Easter is early so the annual egg hunt will be held in March.

-Rachel attended NH Parks and Rec State conference.

-Rachel attended the Town Council budget hearing. She fielded questions about revenue and raising fees. Rachel has looked at other nearby town policies towards residents and nonresidents fees and registrations, as well as looking at what average fitness classes cost. The amounts vary wildly based on different departments. Still need to compare camp costs and after school programs.

-Presented updated 2023 data at the Town's budget hearing as of November 13:

72 adult programs offered; 650 registrations

46 youth programs offered; 858 registrations

12 community events

10 weeks of summer camp; 470 camper registrations

A variety of partnerships which allow the Rec department to do what it does.

4337 Rec desk members: 2060 From Durham, 805 From Lee, 414 From Madbury,

1058 from surrounding communities.

- New in 2023 youth and adult pottery classes offered which were very popular. Reworked the after-school program which has been a big undertaking.
- Offering adult trips with Collette travel to Canyon Country and Ireland. Both have people registered.
- Moved summer program from Mast Way to Middle school.
- New Middle School age program with the Local B which was successful.

### **Business:**

- Community Needs Assessment and Visitor Use Management Study Update: Mike Ferguson & Matt Frye, UNH ARRC, joined the meeting via Zoom to update the committee. Rachel, Mike and Matt met in October and toured Woodridge Park and Jackson's Landing to view the strengths and deficiencies of each. The project is in the study development stage, (September 1-March1) getting the team together, assigning grad students to the project. Matt will lead focus groups, likely in March, 2024. Also will look at a pop-up focus groups at one of the parks, which will take about 2 months. Survey process will begin in June. They are hiring UNH students; 10 good candidates already. They will utilize a 'knock and drop' process where students will go door to door to deliver the survey – this increases responses by putting a face to the request. Matt asked that we define what groups we want for the focus groups. He thinks the non-users are an important group to hear from. They had considered populations of seniors, parents, kids, and sports participants to be represented in the focus groups. Matt asked where they should be held. A good number for a focus group is 6-10. Mike suggested that prizes are a good motivator for people to complete a survey.
- Town Budget update: Joe reported that Rachel and Bill Page, rink manager, both presented to the Town Council. The rink is self-sustaining financially. There is Town subsidy for the Rec program. There was discussion about increasing some of the rates to create more revenue. Durham has less than half of the members, and there was some discussion about Lee and Madbury paying what non ORCSD towns pay. Pickleball sells out quickly, discussion as to whether Durham residents get first chance at popular programs and if Parks and Rec is charging enough. Al thinks that giving Durham residents first chance at programs. Rachel indicated that in doing that Lee could start their own programs, such as pickleball, and then both departments would compete for the very limited space as all communities have equal right to use those facilities. Parks and Rec exceeded revenue goals this year. Rachel looked at other departments and our rates are similar.
- Committee Year End Report: Committee reviewed annual written report sent by Cathy. Rachel thought a few points could be clarified and will communicate to Cathy for revision.
- Initial discussion: Active Transportation - on hold until December meeting
- Initial discussion: 2024 Committee Goals - on hold until December meeting

**Next Meeting:** Tuesday, Dec. 19; 7:00 pm

**Adjourn:** Al made a motion to adjourn; Tracy seconded. The meeting was adjourned by roll call vote, 7-0 at 8:25 pm.