



DURHAM PARKS & RECREATION COMMITTEE
Meeting Minutes
Tuesday, December 19, 2023
7:00 pm
Town Council Chambers



Call to Order: Cathy Leach called the meeting to order at 7:00pm. Committee members in attendance: Al Howland, Matt Swiesz, Cathy Leach, Tracy Schroeder, Genevieve Brown, Myrta Janosz, Brian Keegan, and Michael Drooker on Zoom. Also in attendance: Parks & Rec Director Rachel Gasowski and Town Administrator Todd Selig. Myrta Janosz is a voting member this evening.

Approval of Agenda: Tracy made a motion to approve the agenda. Al seconded. Approval by roll call vote, 7-0.

Approval of Minutes: Nov. 28, 2023. There were a few questions and suggested changes. Tracy made a motion to approve the minutes, as amended, from November 28, 2023, Gen seconded. Approval by roll call vote, 6-0. Cathy abstained as she was not present at the meeting.

Public Comments: There were no comments from the public.

Roundtable: Michael Drooker reported on the Land stewardship subcommittee:

- The new boardwalks at Wagon Hill Farm are nearly complete.
- The Thompson property has been mowed to provide habitat for the endangered eastern cottontail.

Update from the Parks & Recreation Director & Upcoming Events:

- Frost Fest: Well attended and went well. Rachel feels we are at capacity for this event. There was input from Doug & Kim Clark about having a food truck there that served desserts. The Clark's concern was that it may have been a competitor of their restaurants and not a lot of people visited their sites. Todd made the observation that Clark's restaurant looked dark and people didn't think they were open. Al commented that Parks & Rec always encourages businesses to participate in these events. The events bring hundreds of people downtown, and business owners can think about ways to market their business.
- Cathy mentioned that she had reached out to Sarah Liles to possibly attend our January meeting regarding the Durham Business Association.
- Rachel thanked committee members for their support and also thanked the Parks and Rec Staff. Rachel also mentioned that many town departments are huge in helping run our events. All of our partnerships are very important.

- After school fall program is coming to a close with winter program starting up after the new year.
- Working on a new middle school program called Out and About.
- Gunstock family ski program starts on January 3.

Cathy Leach thanked Rachel and her staff on behalf of the committee for all they do for the town.

Business:

DPR Revenue Continued Discussion:

- Cathy welcomed Administrator Todd Selig to the meeting and thanked him for attending. She explained that she asked Todd here to provide more input and context to the Town Council's discussion of DPR revenue during the budget process. Cathy observed that it seems the DPR revenue is more closely scrutinized as with other Town departments and wondered why that is so, how the DPR revenue fits into the overall budget picture, and what the intended outcomes are. Cathy had sent the DCAT recording of the Council meeting discussing DPR to committee members.
- Administrator Selig responded that the Parks and Rec fees are nuanced, determining what is reasonable to charge while DPR is providing an important service to residents. Todd's goal is to make sure that the projected annual DPR revenue is reasonable and achievable. Parks and Rec usually exceeds the estimated revenues. Some Council members looked at the projected increase in DPR expenses, which Todd feels it is a sign of growth and achieving the goals of the department. These Councilors then looked to where there may be a way to increase revenue by increasing fees or charging a surcharge to Lee and Madbury residents.
- There was committee discussion regarding the pros and cons of charging a surcharge to Lee and Madbury and whether it was short sided and would hurt program offerings and attendance.
- Todd feels DPR programming is getting maxed out given limited facilities.
- Al suggested that we consider approaching Lee and Madbury to see if they would be willing to contribute funds to offset our costs. Brian suggested connecting people who have skill sets that would add revenue that don't max out facilities. Genevieve was wondering how we compare to surrounding communities. Gen also suggested we look at other Parks & Rec departments financial performance as it may be helpful to compare DPR to determine what might be considered a reasonable revenue expectation. Rachel said she has looked at surrounding community fees and Durham is similar in what we charge for fees, specifically adult programs.
- Committee members agreed it would be interesting and helpful to see what other community revenues are and what the % offset is. The committee could help Rachel with gathering this data.

- There was continued discussion on additional data to collect and revenue related items to consider in the next year. The outcome may be that the committee and Rachel makes recommended updates.
- Cathy recapped that this topic would be a committee goal for 2024. The committee received assurance from Todd that the outcome is not for any formal presentation to the Council, but for internal educational purposes during the 2025 budget process.

Active Transportation:

- Cathy reported on a conversation with Emily Friedrichs, Town Councilor. Emily indicated that the Town's climate action plan includes encouraging active transportation. Emily intends to suggest during the 2024 Council goals discussion that this become a priority, and that the Council encourage all Town committees to participate in this goal. Emily asked if the P&R committee would consider collaborating with the Energy Committee on an activity such as an active transportation challenge -- walking, biking, etc. with a potential launch on Earth Day. Cathy mentioned that Durham Day in June might be a possible end point.
- Brian said there is an existing program called Commute Smart with a website to log in activity. Brian has experience with active transportation and there are resources in town to facilitate staying close to home to recreate.
- Brian spoke on the goal of promoting the town trail system and how we can utilize it, make people more aware, mapping, and determining who is responsible for maintenance so they are more accessible.
- Cathy asked if the committee was generally supportive of supporting this initiative, and it was agreed to include this in our 2024 goals. Cathy did indicate that she mentioned to Emily that our committee does not typically run events, and we are always aware of adding too much to the DPR staff's plate.
- Rachel responded that her department and the committee could support the Energy Committee in an activity should they take the lead.
- Michael said much of this falls under the purview of the Town's Land Stewardship Coordinator, Sara Callaghan, and that some of the things mentioned have been done in the past.
- Rachel is meeting with Sarah about bringing back trail tours, bird watch walks, etc.
- Cathy thought the first step would be for her to reach out to the Energy Committee chair.

2024 Committee Goals/Speakers:

- Cathy reviewed possible committee goals for 2024:
 - Collaborate with Durham Businesses during Community Events
 - Connect with Lee & Madbury Rec Committees or Staff*
 - Support DPR and UNH ARRC Project
 - Support Director/Rink Manager and remain updated on progress of the Churchill Rink working group for fundraising & rink renovation planning
 - Create Data/Impact Reports & Graphics*
 - Connect with groups such as the Durham Business Association, the Lee Recreation Commission, and the Town's Land Stewardship Coordinator, Energy Committee
 - Provide advisory support to the DPR director in budget & CIP planning
 - Promote town trails awareness and usage*
 - Collaborate with Energy Committee to promote Active transportation*
- *Cathy thought these goals would require more proactive committee involvement
- There was committee discussion of goals and general agreement the list looked good.

2024 Committee Member Participation:

- Subgroups: Cathy suggested committee members form small working groups to assist on moving some of our goals forward. Committee members agreed.
- Events: Cathy asked that each committee member attend at least one Community event per year to assist the DPR staff.
- Vice Chair: Cathy requested that someone volunteer to take on the Vice Chair role. Let her know if you're interested.

Next Meeting: Tuesday, Jan. 23; 7 pm

Adjourn: Al made a motion to adjourn; Tracy seconded. Roll call vote, 7-0. The meeting was adjourned at 8:36 pm.