Park & Recreation Commissioner’s Report  
Fall Town Meeting, 2018

The West Newbury Park & Recreation Board is composed of three Commissioners voted in by Town residents: Tom Flaherty, Jack Foley, and myself – Bill Bachrach. The P&R responsibilities to the Town are to administer the public playgrounds and recreational sites and to identify and provide potential active and passive recreational solutions.

P&R held a Public Forum to discuss Article #5 on October 9th. Some of the questions brought to Park and Rec attention at that meeting are answered here.

Dunn Property Purchase

On November 13, 2000 the Town voted to bond $5 million paid by your Property Taxes to purchase land for a variety of different uses. The Bond as well as $307k in Free Cash purchased the following land for Municipal Use – 229 Acres (Dunn, Mullens, Craven, and Andreas), for Open Space- 306 Acres (Cherry Hill, River Bend, Berkenbush, and Pipestave), and for Water - 11.9 Acres (Cherry Hill). The information of the purchase of the land and acreage can be found on the Open Space and Recreation Plan dated 2009. Park & Rec is very appreciative that Open Space is working diligently to get this plan updated, so both Open Space and Park and Rec can apply for grants from the State of Massachusetts. On April 29, 2002, the Town voted to use $3.5 million of that bond to purchase the Dunn Property 71.5 acres. The property was deeded to the town in 2003. Later West Newbury received a grant from the state for $1.75 million. The last payment on the general obligation of the $5 million bond is for $95,000 due on June 30, 2020.

Potential Acquisition using CPA Funds of the Daley Property to Expand Active and Passive Recreation

In 2010, the Park and Recreation Commissioners distributed a questionnaire to West Newbury residents, whereby approximately 30% of the recipients responded. Unfortunately, the raw data of the questionnaire has been lost over the past years. However, the feedback received by the P&R Commissioners at that time was the foundation for developing a Master Plan for an active and passive recreation area as part of the proposed acquisition of the Daley Property. In August 2010, Cammett Engineering in Amesbury MA prepared a Master Plan of active and passive recreational activities that could be phased in over a number of years for the Daley property. The initial prioritization included an outdoor basketball court, a baseball field, multi-purpose athletic field, toilet building with storage space, two tennis courts, two paddle tennis courts, walking or hiking trails, health wellness center or recreation building containing a minimum, storage space, an indoor basketball court, swimming pool, and office space. On October 24, 2011 at the Fall Town Meeting, the Town voted not to approve Article 16 which was to acquire the Daley Property for $1,100,000 using CPA funds. The property was subsequently sold to a developer and it is now the site of Drake’s Landing. The P&R Commissioners used the active recreation activities identified in the Master Plan for the Daley property as well as a retreat dog park identified by the residents in the questionnaire and by residents at a Board of Selectmen Fall, 2017 meeting as a starting point to identify possible active and passive recreational activities and locations.

Pipestave Multi-Purpose Athletic Fields are at Capacity and Over-Used

In the summer of 2017, Park & Rec collected data regarding the number of youth participants in the various West Newbury Youth League, Pentucket Youth League, and Pentucket High School sports programs. Other than baseball and softball, the other sports (soccer, lacrosse, rugby, and flag football) at Pipestave use multi-purpose athletic fields. For example, in the Fall, 2018 both soccer and flag football play on the same Pipestave athletic field with two different line colors (white and blue). There are four athletic fields at Pipestave, in the fall, three fields are used, and the fourth field is rested due to overuse and in the Spring, all four fields are used. For 2018, the total number of hours of athletic field use
for all sports activities at Pipestave is approximately 104.5 hours in the Fall and in the Spring, the field use is approximately 133 hours. For the Spring and Fall, 2018, the overall field use at Pipestave is greater than 80% and if High School Sports are removed, the use is 100% on weekdays. Park & Rec also looked at “utilization” which is defined here as the number of play hours the fields are used versus the weekly suggested minimum play hours per the Natural Turf Growers Association. The 2018 utilization data for both Fall and Spring shows the need for at least one more field to accommodate the current use and possibly two, if youth programs are expanded.

The Pipestave field use also reflects the fact that other in-town and out-of-town locations have absorbed demand as well

i. WNYL Fall soccer for tots up to U8 is held in the baseball diamond outfields at Bachelor Street fields.

ii. Pentucket Youth Soccer Association (PYSA) relies on Groveland and Merrimac for the majority of their field requirements

iii. Pentucket Youth Lacrosse (PYL) relies, in part, on Pentucket Regional School District fields in the Spring, due to a lack of sufficient athletic field space in all three towns.

iv. Pentucket Youth Football (PYF) had inquired with Park & Rec about Fall 2018 space at Pipestave. Unfortunately, there was no available space; PYF relies on field space in Groveland.

Both Merrimac and Groveland do not have a Park & Rec Department. Their fields are managed by their Board of Selectmen and they have reported that their athletic fields are at 100% capacity during the weekday and weekend hours. Groveland is expanding its fields at the Pines, while Merrimac has no current plans to expand.

The West Newbury Youth League is composed of youths from grades K to 6 (except for Flag Football – Grade 7) in the following youth sports: Soccer (Fall/Spring), Flag Football (Fall), Lacrosse (Fall/Spring), Baseball (Spring), Rugby (Spring), and Basketball (Winter). On average, the WNYL has 700 or more youth participants per year. From 2016 to 2018 less Winter Basketball in 2018 because it is still open for registration, the WNYL has had over 2,119 registrations with West Newbury youth participation being 89% of the total participants or 1,881 registrations. Merrimac and Groveland have 206 participants or approximately 10% of the total participants.

Park and Rec did reach out to Essex County Greenbelt Association who manage the Pipestave and Mill Pond Conservation Restriction Agreement regarding questions asked at the Public Forum. Essex County Greenbelt Association opinion on converting a natural turf playing field at Pipestave to an artificial turf playing field would not be consistent with the purposes of the conservation restriction and would not something Greenbelt could support. The field conditions vary depending on the field use, sod durability, weather conditions, and drainage. DPW maintains the fields by aerating them several times/year and they have an on-going turf management consultant for inspection and the development of an annual care plan. Essex County Greenbelt Association has come back with an opinion that installing subsurface drainage to improve the natural turf conditions for playing fields would be allowable. However, the more the fields are used, the more the soil is compacted, and inability for water to drain into the soil becomes more challenging. Because our multi-purpose athletic fields are flat or have a slight crown, a subsurface drainage system may not help in drying our multi-purpose athletic fields. The New England Patriots spent a lot of money to make grass work at Gillette Stadium. The grass at Gillette’s predecessor, Foxboro Stadium suffered from drainage issues, often resulting in water logged games. To combat this problem at Gillette Stadium, the team invested in a then-modern drainage system and an underground heating system. Unfortunately, no amount of technology could overcome the difficulty of trying to grow a playable surface in a multipurpose stadium in the Northeast. Today, Gillette Stadium abandoned a grass field for an artificial turf field.
**Funding**

Since 2006, every tax payer in West Newbury pays a 3% surcharge (less the first $100,000 of assessed value) on each property tax bill. This surcharge is separate from the property taxes paid and the revenue collected. The revenue from the CPA funds can be used for Community Housing, Historic Preservation, Open Space, and Park & Rec projects. The tax payer surcharge has accumulated $4.6 million dollars of which $2.3 Million has been spent and $2.3 million dollars is available to spend on these project categories. The five-year average of annual revenues from Fiscal Years 2013-2017 for West Newbury is $455,098. Of the tax payer money spent $1.5M has gone to the Page School, $55k for Open Space and $50k for Park & Rec. The majority of future project funding for the Pipestave expansion would be from CPA funds and these funds are separate and have no impact on the Pentucket Middle and High School building project. CPA Funds can be used to fund all the active recreational activities including access roads, parking and a multi-purpose grass field except for a multi-purpose artificial turf field.

**Engineering Study**

Tonight, the Park & Recreation Commissioners has submitted a proposal for $51,500 funded by CPA Funds to perform an Engineering Study to determine potential active and passive recreational layouts for the Dunn Field which includes some of the activities identified for the Daley Property potential acquisition in 2010 as a starting point. The Engineering Study will result in a short- and long-term vision of how the Dunn Municipal Owned Land could be used for active and passive recreation. The study is separated into four areas: Wetlands and Endangered Species Habitat Area Delineation having an estimated cost of $5,250.00, Traffic Impact Assessment Study having an Engineering Study estimated cost of $7,500.00, Public Meetings and Administration having an estimated Engineering study cost of $6,000.00, and Master Footprint Plan of the possible locations of the different active and passive recreational areas including development and maintenance costs having an estimated cost of $32,500.00. The $32,500 Master Footprint Plan estimated in the Engineering Study has been compared to other estimated Master Plan project costs: Governors Academy Phase 1 to Phase 4 was $40,000.00, Amesbury Woodson Farm Recreation was $39,000.00, Amesbury Sports Park was $28,000.00, and Haverhill High School Field Expansion, Rehab, and Reuse for $20,000.00.

If the Engineering Study is approved, public meetings throughout the process will be held for residents to attend and provide feedback on different layout options for the area; this is the same process used for the public discussion on the Middle and High School building project. The end result is to decide on a broadly supported plan with a short-term and long-term vision including funding, implementation and maintenance costs.

From the feedback at different public meetings and the Board of Selectmen’s meeting on September 4th, the Study’s short-term priority will focus on an entrance/exit from Main Street through the Municipal Owned Pipestave Land to the Upper Field of the Dunn Property for a parking lot and at least one multi-purpose grass field to alleviate the capacity and over-use problems for our youth sports programs. The parking lot and multi-use purpose field would take-up no more than 6 acres of the 71.5 acre property, leaving 91% of the Dunn Property untouched. The West Newbury Riding and Driving Club has been asking for a parking solution for years and their representative was in favor of a CPC funding project for a parking lot on the Dunn Property Upper Field.

Finally, Park & Recreation would like to thank all the residents who have participated in providing feedback over the past 12 months. We believe this has been a very healthy and helpful process. Thank you.