

MINUTES OF THE SEPTEMBER 26, 2018 BOARD OF SELECTMEN AND PARK ASSOCIATION SPECIAL MEETING

MEMBERS PRESENT: Board Members Joe Lovejoy, Mike Houghton

At 7:03 pm Mr. Houghton opened the public meeting of the Board of Selectmen. He stated the purpose of the meeting is to review and discuss the current activities taking place in Stratham Hill Park relative to the ballfield and its impact on the skating rink.

Dan Crow, secretary of the Park Association, explained that at the May Park Association meeting, Colin remained as President, Dave Short became Vice President. They don't have a Treasurer. At that meeting they discussed the Tyler Blood project, tower repairs, Stratham Magazine and creation of a mission statement that details their purpose and goals. He detailed how over the past 100 years the Park Association has assisted the Town in maintaining and developing Stratham Hill Park. They've spearheaded races, maintain equipment and support the Parks & Recreation Dept. They have funds that are used solely for the park and its activities. The reason they are before the Selectmen tonight is their concern that the ice rink may be filled in.

Parks & Recreation Director Seth Hickey explained that during the ballfield reconstruction, they had the opportunity to elevate the area where the ice rink had been in the past. This would alleviate wetlands there in the warmer months and would make it easier to mow. In the past, Bell & Flynn increased the grade 2% but this did not resolve the water problem. If the area is filled in, it will not function as an ice rink. Mr. Crow said that it is a natural rink, some years it's good, other years it's not. Greg Blood has his own ice rink and admitted that it was a lot of work to maintain. He believes the Nice Rink (the kit that was purchased by the Park Association) is harder to maintain than the natural rink. John Sapienza emphasized that volunteers have invested considerable time to improve the natural ice rink. Mr. Blood believes the volunteers have been pushed out.

Mr. Houghton expressed appreciation for the volunteers and Town Staff for their hard work. He believes failure to communicate is the reason we are in this situation now. The ballpark reconstruction project has been openly discussed for a long time. He stated that the Park Association should've been included in the discussions. Mr. Houghton was troubled by Mr. Blood's statement that the volunteers feel pushed out. Mr. Blood and Mr. Sapienza described past activities that led to this feeling. The Park Association urged the Selectmen to put the ice rink back to the way it was. Mr. Hickey said that with his staff, he can't maintain the natural rink and would need volunteers to help clear the ice. The Nice Rink was easier to maintain. Mr. Hickey said there must be a balance between public perception and expectations. He described past difficulties with the natural rink. The Park Association members said people must recognize and accept that the natural rink is dependent on weather conditions.

Public Works Director Colin Laverty said the reconstruction changes the slope. The ballfield will have the same footprint. Mr. Blood said mowing the slope hasn't been a problem in the past and suggested a site walk. Mr. Hickey said there have been conversations going back to 2013 to elevate the grade so it doesn't retain water. As of this past July it was still retaining water. Mr.

Blood didn't see why it is a problem. Mr. Houghton summarized that there is a perceived diminished usage of the old skating rink over recent years and a lack of volunteers to maintain it. Again he mentioned the donated equipment and the work the volunteers had done. Mr. Lovejoy asked why nothing was said at the time. They replied that it was a lot of little things done over time.

Mr. Houghton asked what the Park Association's purpose was. They responded that it is to advise on uses of the park, to shepherd, to use volunteers, ideas. Allison Knab advocated for the Park Association noting that there is tremendous usage and pressure on the park; it is great to have an Advisory Committee looking at it from a holistic perspective. Mr. Hickey expressed willingness to meet with the Park Association for further discussions. Mr. Houghton acknowledged the park is a complex place with a lot of demands on it so higher level of communication is needed. Mr. Lovejoy suggested the Park Association communicate with the Parks & Recreation Commission. He supported the ballfield reconstruction because the sinkholes were dangerous. Mr. Lovejoy recalled that the natural ice rink was unreliable much of the time and that is what drove looking for a new location. He was surprised that it meant so much to so many people. Mr. Houghton suggested giving the Association keys to the hydrant and putting up a sign saying "This skating rink is provided through the generosity and maintained by the Stratham Hill Park Association". He emphasized that they must maintain it; not Mr. Hickey or his department. They agreed to walk the site and decide on a plan together.

Mr. Houghton advised them that the budget process is beginning and there should be a lot of discussions taking place regarding future use of the park. They discussed the Park Association, the Parks & Recreation Commission and the Parks & Recreation Department and the need for them all to work together or perhaps be combined. The importance of working closely with the Conservation Commission was also discussed.

Mr. Crow wanted to talk about other Park Association business, namely, the ATV vehicle that will be housed at the park. EMS Captain Peggy Crosby explained that the increase in park activities has escalated the need for the vehicle. She told of several incidents and explained that the KABOTA isn't a rescue vehicle and doesn't serve their needs. They've already raised money towards its purchase. She continued to describe the importance and urgency of the vehicle. She asked the Park Association to be a sponsor. Mr. Crow made a motion to fund \$2,500 towards the purchase of the ATV. Mr. Blood seconded the motion which passed unanimously. Mr. Hickey said that he has money in a Recreation Revolving account and will also contribute funds. Ms. Crosby would like to add an optional safety lighting package and is in the process of getting price estimates.

Mr. Crow asked if anyone would like to fill the position of Treasurer. Mr. Greg Blood was nominated. Mr. Sapienza seconded the motion which passed unanimously.

Mr. Sapienza made a motion to adjourn. Mr. Crow seconded the motion which passed unanimously.

Respectfully submitted,
Karen Richard, Recording Secretary