

The Hood Park Steering Committee met on Thursday, January 07, 2021, beginning at 11:00 a.m., in Room 207 of the Derry Municipal Center. All members of the Committee joined via Zoom.

Present: Beverly Donovan (Economic Development Director); George Sioras (Planning Director); Elizabeth Robidoux (Economic Development/Planning); Mark Brassard (Chair); Owen Provencher (DerryCAM); Mike Fowler (Director of Public Works); Karen Munday-Lincoln (Public Arts); Michael Bailey (Waterview Estates); Rick Metts (Rotary/resident); David Caron (Town Administrator); Kim Walsh (Parks and Recreation Director)

Mark Brassard called the meeting to order at 11:10 a.m.

### *Minutes*

Motion by Rick Metts, seconded by Karen Lincoln to approve the minutes of the December 17, 2020, meeting as written. Motion passed.

### *Feasibility Overview*

Mike Fowler advised he and Kim Walsh reviewed the recommendations outlined in the Report. Both he and Kim have been involved in this process since the onset. Their role will be critical moving forward as their Department will be responsible for implementation of the recommendations. It is critical to look at the feasibility of the specific items. Some are easier than others to accomplish. Others may take time to come forward. There are small items that could be placed under Parks and Recreation maintenance such as enhancing the landscaping. That can be accomplished by the installation of landscaped islands, which would cost around \$1,000 and can be installed by staff in the spring. Other items would require Town Council authorization for the budget.

Mike Fowler suggested there are some items that can be placed into a group called Short Term Goals which can be accomplished as maintenance items. Others would be Mid Term Goals which would require funding and design etc. before it could be implemented. The remainder could be considered Long Term Goals for which the group should further discuss the feasibility.

It was also important to discuss the reality of the structure of Parks and Recreation. The Recreation Department has 3 full time employees; Parks has 5 full time labor employees. These employees are tasked with all that occurs in a normal year. One prevalent theme that came up in the recommendation was adding or reinvigorating events. Parks/Rec is willing to look at that. Kim Walsh and Mike Fowler both felt it was important to note there is not an opportunity to have full time personnel at the Park like there used to be. At this point, the Department is not equipped to do that from a staffing point of view. They can hire part time help in the summer. This also speaks to the water quality issue and the programming. There is an opportunity to do a moderate level of programming.

Allowing food trucks on site and improving some of the existing amenities made practical sense. Re-opening the concession stand would be difficult as the town currently supports two stands –

one at Don Ball Park and one at Gallien's Beach. They are staffing those ten hours a day, with two to three employees. To add another stand might not make sense when looking at other needs. Maybe creating a standing or rotating presence of food trucks on site is a possibility, rather than staffing a concession stand.

There is a possibility to upgrade some of the amenities at the park. In particular, there is a broad community desire for pickleball courts. Kim Walsh said she looked at the suggestions for the Park and it is possible to coordinate some other amenities that are geared to young families. They looked at the park as multi-purpose. Teens use the basketball court, and the street hockey rink is utilized by 20-30 year olds. Pickleball is very popular and will draw an older demographic. They can update/upgrade the playground. With regard to refurbishing landscaping, especially at the rear of the park, they can do things like adding lighting to make it safer. They can add an additional pickleball court and a better playground. The front of the Park can be refurbished, and they can recreate the back of the park which will help upgrade the demographic and make it feel safer.

Rick Metts asked what was required for a pickleball court – could two be placed side by side? Kim Walsh explained there is space for one pickleball court adjacent to the street hockey rink. They can upgrade the playground and add a small splash pad for the kids. Rick Metts asked for clarification about the playground. Is Kim referring to expanding or replacing it? Kim Walsh said they may be able to take out parts, expand the area, and replace some equipment. They could keep the slide, but they would like to expand toward the trails with better equipment.

Rick Metts said there is some low hanging fruit items like picnic tables and benches. Those seem like easy items to accomplish. Kim Walsh agreed, adding the Parks Department has a few crew members with the ability to build those, which could be done as a winter/spring project. It was clear from the Report that people want more places to sit with their families and would like to see different sized benches placed throughout the Park. That is an easy fix.

Elizabeth Robidoux suggested adding adult fitness equipment at or adjacent to the playground to encourage multigenerational gathering. Based on the video Owen produced and survey input, there are a lot of seniors who take their grandchildren to the park. Mike Fowler stated one of the ideas from previous reports was to add outdoor fitness stations. It might not work at this particular playground, but an option to add some is a possibility and could be incorporated into future designs.

Mike Fowler commented there had been a lot of discussion early on about the state of the water quality of the Pond. The town has been plagued by the inability to keep the beach open. He looked at data going back to 1992 and there have been seventeen beach advisories between 1992 and 2017. It seems like this has been an ongoing issue. Mike Fowler has been coordinating with Craig Durrett, the Environmental Coordinator. There are several contributing factors. The first is the high fecal count which is likely from the geese. They need to determine a method to manage the geese population. It is possible the water quality issue can be handled in interim steps. Perhaps technology can be used to aerate the water to help with the biology. Maybe the town could add a fountain to help aerate the water and then data sampling can take place before the community commits to a larger ticket item. Dredging the pond may not get the desired

outcome. Maybe the fecal count can be lowered with low cost technology before the town invests in a multimillion dollar solution. He is not ruling it out, but the first step might be to invest in a \$5,000 to 10,000 fountain and then monitor the data to make sure fecal counts are decreasing. The town needs to find a way to manage the geese population.

Mike Fowler felt there was also a need to discuss the woods that are beyond the bridge. Work should be done and the area should be redeveloped. There is an impromptu trail system that should be improved and the woods can be thinned out. It will cost around \$50,000 to cut the dead wood down and thin the area, retaining the natural look and feel. The trails can be widened and made more accessible. That would go a long way to improve the park. Mike Fowler advised he and Kim wanted to look at this comprehensively.

In summary, there are about \$500,000 in improvements that could be done at the Park. This does not include improvements to the water quality. Mike Fowler and Kim Walsh have prepared a draft memo for the Town Administrator. Some of the improvements can be done short term; others may take longer into 2022. There are a lot of good recommendations and Mike Fowler and Kim Walsh spent a good amount of time looking at it. They are motivated to move improvements forward.

Mark Brassard stated he heard Mike Fowler say that the recommended improvements need to be prioritized by near term, more involved (3 year), and long term. He felt it might be wise to create a spreadsheet. Mike Fowler thought that might be a good strategy. Mark Brassard noted Alexander Carr has four tennis courts. How much use have those gotten and is there more demand for pickleball? Kim Walsh explained both the pickleball and tennis courts get a lot of use. The multiuse court across from Hood Park also receives a lot of use – that is a combination tennis and pickleball court. Mark Brassard confirmed the need for an additional pickleball court at Hood Park. He also discussed potential upgrades to the woods beyond the pavilion at the Park. He had approached Pinkerton Academy Forestry Department to see if they would like to take on a project, such as identification of invasive species, or sketching out trails utilizing CAD. Pinkerton embraced the idea. Mark Brassard thought it was a good idea to involve Pinkerton for civic involvement of the students and to make use of their knowledge and minimize budget impact. Kim Walsh said she would support that partnership.

Mark Brassard asked if there had been any determination as to what would happen with the Holland Dam. Will that be kept or removed? Mike Fowler recalled early in the process, there had been discussions about keeping or removing the dam. He did not see a lot of feedback from the community that indicated the town should drain the pond. The sentiment seems strong that the pond should be kept as is and the appurtenances on the Rail Trail should remain in place. The outcome seemed to be to keep the Rail Trail, dam and spillway which would keep the water elevation in place. If the dam were removed, some of the regulatory headaches would go away, but the community has expressed there is value in retaining the pond. The Department of Public Works is invested in maintaining the causeway. The contractor will finish the Rail Trail work by May. From the town's perspective at this point, there is no push to remove the dam and lower the water level.

George Sioras noted there is potential to fund the extension of the bike trail to the Londonderry

town line through grants from NH DOT Technical Assistance Program. Town staff will work with regional partners to submit an application for funding.

Michael Bailey suggested there might be a simple solution to the geese issue by introducing an artificial predator in the area to scare them away naturally. Additionally, there is a small spit of land opposite the gas business. He would encourage cleaning up of this area and perhaps the placement of steps into the steep slope to encourage more people to fish and hang out here. People use the area, but because the slope is so steep it is hard to access.

Karen Lincoln said short term changes to the playground and providing for intergenerational amenities is important and should be kept in mind. She thought it might be helpful to look at playground equipment to see if it can be used intergenerationally. There are things like a two person swing that could be utilized by families, or a permanent ping pong table which would encourage that intergenerational use. The town does not have an intergenerational park and this could be one given its location in town. She agrees with the proposed landscaping updates to the back of the Park. That was a hot topic of discussion. Making people feel safe and comfortable is important. The overgrowth can make people feel uncomfortable. She likes the idea of partnering with Pinkerton and the committee should continue its efforts to foster public and private partnerships through things like flower planting. What are the plans or considerations for the existing buildings? Mike Fowler said the building was used to store items for the lifeguards and for equipment. It can be used for program space such as arts and crafts, or kid's programs. There is an opportunity to rent the space to community groups or clubs. The building holds between 20 and 25 people. The town wants to make sure it maintains the building.

Owen Provencher said he liked hearing about the phasing of the projects. It feels like the community is hitting all the notes for "my community park". There is proximity to the rail trail and an opportunity to consider this park a destination. There is visibility from the rail trail that can be captured and capitalized on. There is a good opportunity to add public art, such as a sculpture. The fountain in the pond is a good idea and if it were lighted, it could be classified as art, and it would create a visual draw. For the building, there might be an opportunity to muralize the walls with themes that incorporate the history of industry and innovation, the natural features, the community, and neighborhood. He suggested a permanent corn hole feature in an area that might be otherwise underutilized.

Dave Caron said the pond won't be able to be utilized for swimming based on the fecal levels but wondered if other water activities such as kayaking might be possible. It might not be feasible from an operational standpoint. There have been some great ideas. He is concerned the town might be a victim of its own success. Is there enough parking? Would McAllister Court be utilized to park and walk, or is that too far?

Mark Brassard asked if the water quality was compromised just from the geese or is the runoff from Hood Commons a contributing factor. Mike Fowler said there is a direct relationship between the geese and the fecal counts. The other contaminants cited are listed as secondary contaminants which means they are not harmful to human health (for example phosphorus). Derry has urbanized runoff and the town will look at upstream locations to see what contributes.

The fecal counts are the most important when looking at human interaction and what prevents the use of the pond.

Mark Brassard said in formulating ideas and using what UNH gave the committee, and then visualizing what the area can become, he felt the committee needed to understand the boundary of the park. He wondered if there could be a map at the next meeting so that everyone can visualize where improvements can be placed such as pickleball, the playground and parking.

Mike Fowler said at the next meeting, he could provide a draft spreadsheet with the ideas and costs. He can also take a GIS map and locate potential projects so that the committee can see the proposed improvements. This will allow the group to provide some feedback.

Mark Brassard felt it would be prudent to reach out to other stakeholders and get more input. Should they call people or organizations before the committee to advise the committee so that it can create an overall vision? Should they reach out to Pinkerton or the Rail Trail Alliance and obtain more detail from them? Elizabeth Robidoux felt that would be a next step; the spreadsheet should be prioritized first.

Beverly Donovan noted the Town Council would decide if this is a standing committee or not; right now it is an ad hoc committee. Once the report is done, staff would reach out to people or organizations for the next steps. Is this committee going to go forward to design and implement or does this effort end with the ad hoc committee? That is a question for Town Council. Mark Brassard said the scope of the committee was an agenda item today, but time will not allow that discussion. He suggested focusing on the creation of the spreadsheet and GIS map for the next meeting and the committee can also discuss the scope of the committee. Beverly Donovan stated it might be up to the Town Council to decide if this committee will continue. Mark Brassard explained he felt a steering committee gathered input and then helped steer the work forward.

Dave Caron said the goal is to continue the disciplinary work and present to the Town Council the information and recommendations. Town Council will make determinations based on consultation with staff and then potentially create an implementation committee to go on from there. It is important the recommendations of this committee be presented to Town Council on February 16, so that Town Council can decide the best direction and implementation model.

Owen Provencher noted the importance of public relations in any public endeavor. An 8 minute video has been created in cooperation with DerryCAM and Mike Fowler. He felt it would be a good idea for this committee to see it. It will be placed on the agenda for the next meeting.

The next meeting will be **January 21, 2021 at 11 a.m.**

Motion by Rick Metts, seconded by Owen Provencher to adjourn. Motion passes and meeting stood adjourned at 12:06 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,  
Elizabeth Robidoux