

The Hood Park Steering Committee met on Thursday, December 17, 2020, 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); Casey Porter (UNH Cooperative Ext); Stephen Meno (UNH Cooperative Ext); Elizabeth Robidoux (Economic Development/Planning); Mark Brassard (Chair); Jay Tombari (Co-Chair); Owen Provencher (DerryCAM); Mike Fowler (Director of Public Works); Karen Munday-Lincoln (Public Arts); Barbara Bailey (Waterview Estates); Michael Bailey (Waterview Estates); Paul Lindemann (Heritage Commission); Rick Metts (Rotary/resident); Richard Scheib (Waterview Estates); David Caron (Town Administrator); Kim Walsh (Parks and Recreation Director)

Mark Brassard called the meeting to order at 11:01 a.m.

Minutes

Motion by Kim Walsh, seconded by Beverly Donovan to approve the minutes of the November 19, 2020, meeting as written. Motion passed.

Presentation of Key Findings: Community Engagement Report

Casey Porter advised the group has been meeting and working since July and she thanked all of the committee members for their work and effort on the outreach and engagement.

The committee members will continue the engagement and outreach efforts which was important to the success of the project. The group was charged with obtaining input about Hood Park from the community to help decide how to best revitalize the Park. She and Stephen Meno have drafted a report of Key Findings for this meeting. A full report was sent to the committee earlier today to review and comment.

Key Findings

The Committee utilized four engagement tools:

Posters	19 responses
Postcards	17 responses
Survey	99 responses
Key informant interviews	34 responses
Youth focus groups	16 responses
Direct correspondence (email, Facebook posts, letters)	45 responses

The group used thick and thin engagement tools. Thin engagement is quick and easy, like the survey. Thick engagement is more in depth, such as a key informant interview. Engagement efforts were conducted between October 06 and November 11.

The Committee put forth a good effort to reach the public. DerryCAM produced a video which was shared via many social media platforms. She and Stephen were pleased with the responses, given the effort was conducted in the midst of a pandemic. The demographic data provided shows that the group heard from a mix of ages, from residents and visitors, and from people who have never visited the park, are rare visitors, or are frequent visitors to the park.

Casey and Stephen performed a qualitative analysis where they organized the comments by theme. They then looked at each method of engagement separately and organized the comments into categories. The report is arranged by:

- Method
- Question asked
- Themes in order of significance
- How frequently the comment was made

All ideas are represented. They also performed a conditional cross analysis of the comments together to create the key findings. Those include:

- How people use the park
- What people like about the park
- What people don't like about the park
- Ideas for the future (tallied)

SUMMARY OF THE FINDINGS

Why do you visit Hood Park?

The most common reason people visit the park include: walking, biking, the rail trail, a variety of purposes such as picnics, lunch breaks, enjoyment of the scenic view, bringing children to the playground, and sports.

The pond and park are clearly loved by the community. That message was very strong. Many expressed fond memories of the pond and park when they were growing up. They went to the park for swimming lessons and recreational activities. Some no longer visit the park because of the deteriorated water quality and the lack of swimming and other activities.

What do you like about Hood Park?

Most found the park to be a major asset for the town. It was conveniently and centrally located, has a natural look and feel, and there is something for everyone to do. The Pond is still enjoyed for its beauty and scenic views, and for fishing. People can walk to the park from their home or work, and the park is located close to the downtown. Even though the park is close to the downtown, there are natural resource benefits. There are passive and active recreational activities that serve a variety of interests and ages.

What don't you like about the Park?

People reported they did not like the fact people cannot swim in the pond, the condition of the park, the negative reputation, lack of vibrancy and disinvestment. People expressed they wanted to see more improved recreational activities. The *perception* is that the park is unsafe or bad acts are happening there. *The majority of those comments came from people who do not go to the park.* People seemed disappointed the park is not as vibrant as it once was. Common themes were that people wanted an updated playground structure, amenities for younger children, and improved basketball courts.

Ideas for the future

Fifty ideas bubbled up from the input. The top seventeen ideas are represented below, along with the number of people expressing the idea.

What should be done	# of people who presented the idea
Improve the water quality	45
Improve the walking trail; make more of them	35
Add seating	26
Programs and activities	22
Landscape and maintenance	19
Make food available	19
Community gathering space	19
Gardens	18
Improve the playground	15
Rent boating equipment (kayak, paddleboard)	15
Improve the existing courts	14
Incorporate art	12
Skate park	12
Add performance space	12
Winter recreation (ice skating)	11
Add retail space	11
Fishing amenities/a dock	10

Other suggestions included incorporating a small café and community center in the existing building which would be a place for all ages. Incorporating gardens was a common idea.

Next Steps

Comments and edits on the report should be forwarded to Casey and Stephen no later than January 04, 2021. The intent is for the Committee to present the findings to Town Council in January. Casey noted the Committee would be sent an evaluation of the process by UNH Cooperative Extension. Completing the evaluation is important because it helps let the

Extension know how they did, what can be improved, and helps to decide what might be offered in the future.

Elizabeth Robidoux asked Dave Caron if there was a particular date in January that would be best to schedule with Town Council, so that the group could work its schedule backward from that date. Dave Caron indicated he had tentatively scheduled a presentation for January 19th. Information, such as a copy of a PowerPoint or other presentation should be provided to his office no later than the Friday before so that the Councilors have an opportunity to review the material and become familiar with it before the meeting. It would be helpful to add recommendations as to what the committee feels the investments should be.

Mark Brassard stated he felt the committee should not be held to any particular date and should take the data and create a vision for the park and the pond. Dave Caron noted since the information is being presented in a report, perhaps it would be helpful when the committee is marking its recommendation to include as part of the process assignation of costs so that the Town Council can see the impacts the scope of the recommendations may have on the Recreation Bond.

Rick Metts suggested taking the top 17 items and prioritizing them by how much they will cost. For example, as with cleaning up the water quality, the residents may want to do something, but the town can't do it because it can't afford to do it. The Committee should be looking at what will have the best impact, but not cost a lot of money. Anything that involves a concession stand will have unintended costs because it would involve labor, which would be an additional town expense and impact the budget. Those types of things should be considered as the committee is looking at its priorities and recommendations.

Beverly Donovan reminded the committee the original charge was not to design a park, but rather to gather information and present the ideas that people wanted to see.

Karen Lincoln thought the group was meant to gather the information and come up with ideas for the design. If this group is not designing the park, who does that and where does this process go from here? Is there a budget for the park, or are any funds earmarked for it? If funds are to be raised, is this an opportunity for the town to look for grants? Once the report is presented to the town, should/does this committee try to find ballpark figures to rehabilitate the courts, and dredge the pond? What does the committee do about all of that before it speaks to Town Council?

Paul Lindemann felt the information presented by Casey and Stephen was nice feedback but in looking at the statistics of the number of responses, it is not all that impressive. Is that an issue as the committee carries forth the data to Town Council? Casey explained if one looks at this as a statistically relevant study, it is not relevant. However, she looked at this as a need based assessment and is pleased with the work and reach of the project. Yes, it would have been nice to have more responses. But the data has a saturation of responses. There are common themes that rose to the top. There are demographics that show all ages and walks of life are represented. Paul asked how this particular study compares with other studies. Casey stated a variety of tools were utilized for this project; many communities opt to use only one or two tools. The

Committee should keep in mind this effort was conducted during a pandemic. Normally there would have been more foot traffic and a community forum to gather more data, but the committee made up for that by utilizing more engagement tools. Stephen Meno added the engagement effort was also conducted during a year where there was a federal election, which took the focus off what the town was doing. He also felt this was a good effort. Paul suggested that when the committee meets with Town Council, all of those positives need to be conveyed so that the Councilors understand the value of what is being presented. He was not sure a cost based recommendation was realistic in a one month time frame but agreed a summary of the findings needs to be presented.

Beverly Donovan explained the reason this process started was because there were multiple groups with competing interests for what should be done with the park. The groups were all very interested in having their ideas implemented. All of those ideas and groups were brought together to form this committee so that the town could move forward. She sees this as one more piece in the process. There is this committee's report, the Town Master Plan, the Recreational Needs Assessment, and the information from the First Impressions effort. All of this information will be given to Mike Fowler in Public Works and Kim Walsh in Parks/Recreation so that they can figure out what this will look like. We are giving the information to the town to help clarify and add to the various visions. Other suggestions from other groups have been the addition of an art walk, trails, and an arboretum. The public has provided information through this effort on what they want to see, and this group will bring that information forward to Town Council.

Mark Brassard agreed this effort will provide guidance for the Recreation Department, but this is also an opportunity to be an economic engine. This is an opportunity to enhance the quality of life for residents and to attract future businesses. This can be accomplished by using the data and by sketching a vision. For the information that was presented today, is there data that can be formulated into a pie chart or other graphic? Stephen explained because they performed a qualitative analysis, they did not graph the data. Once they got beyond the ten person common response, it went down to one or two common responses. It is possible they could create a graphic for the seventeen top ideas as a graph or pie chart. Casey added because they did not ask yes or no questions, she is not sure a pie chart would represent the data well. They might be able to create a bar chart. Mark said he was just trying to determine the best way to present the data. With regard to demographics, for example the 45 people who thought the water quality should be improved, are all of those respondents residents who live around the pond or are they local? Casey said she did not look at the cross tab. The number of people who wanted the water quality improved was 45 and that is greater than the number of people who were interviewed as key informants. It was apparent the negative comments came from people who do not visit the park – that was readily apparent. It was not as clear who wanted the water quality improved.

Mark Brassard said he wanted to make sure the data is not skewed and that there are no challenges to the data. Casey said they can look at that closer, but they did not ask that question in the key informant interview; residency came from the survey data.

George Sioras said when the input from the Master Plan was received, the top three to four recommendations were listed as priorities and identified as the items that should be

accomplished. It might be helpful to obtain costs of some of the items, such as the cost of benches. That is good information for Town Council to have as they enter the budget process.

Karen Lincoln noted she has been listening to what is being said about what people want and suggested categorizing those ideas into categories like the addition of benches, cleanup of the park, the pond, infrastructure improvements/repairs, and ideas having to do with the existing building. It seems that the items that will cost the most money are the things that draw people to the park and keep people coming back. She can see distinct tiers as to what people want. Extra benches might not be expensive, but that is not what is going to revitalize the park. It would be easy and obtainable but may be too light an investment. With regard to the competing interests – what were those ideas? Beverly said there were suggestions to incorporate historical vignettes about the Hood Creamery that could be used in an art walk, kiosks, playgrounds, an arboretum, expansion of the rail trail to include a bridge. Those are just some of the ideas. It was thought that it would be a good idea to get more specific ideas. Information from the First Impressions program, Recreational Need Assessment, and Master Plan were also considered. There was a need to look at the broad view. All of these ideas are great, but in the long run, is it worth doing? What is the payback? The town should not be improving a park without being aware of secondary consequences that would fall under DPW and the Parks/Rec Department. Beverly suggested compiling the recommendations of the various reports to see what bubbles up. Those ideas could then be discussed with Mike Fowler and Kim Walsh to see what it would mean in terms of design and budgets.

Dave Caron said however this is presented to the Town Council, if the committee needs more time, that is okay. From a monetary perspective, they wanted this before Town Council before February. In looking at past recommendations, what sticks out are the items that are unobtainable because of lack of financing. This would include improving the water quality. Based on past experience, that is a multi-million dollar project. The committee should let him know if it needs more time to prepare a presentation.

Mark Brassard felt more time was needed. It seems the group was charged to work with UNH Cooperative Extension, engage with the community to see if there were ideas that had not yet been presented so that the community could be part of the process and all could know they had been asked for their opinion. He feels UNH has done its job. He would like to see the graphic data and suggests the committee convene again in two weeks to give the members more time to understand the data and come up with an idea of what should be done, and how to present it to Town Council. The committee can also decide on the future role of the committee. He wants to be able to say they took the data and input and came up with a vision for the town and present it to Town Council. He feels the Committee is further charged with reaching out to Town departments to see what is possible or attainable given budget considerations.

Elizabeth Robidoux suggested presenting to Council sooner rather than later as the town departments may need to include project items in the Capital Improvement Plan which is due in February. She suggested taking the priorities offered by the residents and ranking the list of 17 items by what it might cost.

Barbara Bailey said she was interested in the pond. It might be expensive to mitigate the water quality but there are other things that could be done, such as getting the pond dredge ready and there might be grants available for that type of work so that the town can move forward. Michael Bailey felt it was important to have baseline information available about the water quality. Barbara Bailey suggested trying to get rid of the geese. The rail trail has eroded into the pond, and she felt the town should find ways to slowly improve the water quality.

Jay Tombari suggested forming a smaller group to work with Parks/Recreation to prioritize the ideas into ten projects based on the feasibility. There may be costs involved this group does not have. This would be a good start to the next steps.

Beverly Donovan stressed this was to be an ad hoc committee, charged with gathering information. Staff would take the information and go from there. Staff had been approved to do as Jay has suggested.

Mark Brassard outlined the next steps as follows and requested a motion to that effect.

Motion by Owen Provencher that the committee will accept the data presented in the report from UNH Cooperative and meet again in two weeks on January 07, seconded by Rick Metts. The motion passed in favor, with Elizabeth abstaining from the vote.

Beverly thanked everyone for their participation. This effort has been helpful, and she likes that information was gathered from varied sources. This was a great effort, even during COVID, and she felt this has been a valuable effort.

The next meeting will be **January 07, 2021 at 11 a.m.**

Motion by Beverly Donovan, seconded by Rick Metts to adjourn. Motion passes and meeting stood adjourned at 12:05 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Elizabeth Robidoux