

**Town of New Hartford
Recreation Commission
Minutes
August 17, 2021**

Present: Chairman Joe Petrarca; Members Ed McCann, Arnie Helt, Jeremy Schaller, Greg O'Brien; First Selectman Dan Jerram; Members of the Public John and Deb Pierce, John Baio; Administrative Assistant Christine Hayward.

Chairman Petrarca called the meeting to order at 6:35 PM. He welcomed members of the public to the meeting and thanked them for being present.

Operations Updates:

Recreation Commission member Ed McCann updated the Commission on operations at the Beach and the Camp. He informed them that a total of 715 beach passes had been sold this season, with senior passes making up the majority of the sales. 15 Veteran passes were sold. There was an increase in the number of out of town passes sold; with the towns of Avon and Farmington taking the lead.

McCann noted that Camp Brodie operated for eight weeks with an average of 64 children each week. Total attendance was 518 for the season. Mr. McCann stated that Camp Director Shannon Guiheen had done a great job with keeping everything running smoothly at camp. Member O'Brien stated that was 'awesome' and thanked Mr. McCann for once again serving in the role of recreation director/waterfront director for the summer.

It was noted that the MDC did not open their recreation area at Lake McDonough this year, which may have been one reason for an increase in passes sold at Brodie this season. Mr. McCann mentioned that there is a specific lakefront certification required for lifeguards who work at lakes as opposed to swimming pools. He stated that the Town had paid for this extra training for the guards this year to insure that they were all properly certified to work at Brodie. He suggested that this practice be repeated again next year. He added that perhaps there be an understanding that there be a full season commitment to working at Brodie if the town continues to pick up this expense. He stated that there was a total of 14 guards with 2 substitutes employed by New Hartford this year. The majority of the staff employed this year (counselors and guards) were returnees from prior years. No problems occurred during the season. It was a good season. Member Jeremy Schaller complimented Mr. McCann on a job well done. Member O'Brien stated that he was a frequent visitor to Brodie Beach and commented that it was great to see such good attendance at the beach this year; adding that he saw no problems when he was at the beach.

Members of the public John and Deb Pierce echoed Mr. O'Brien; they were at the beach frequently and had good experiences at each visit.

First Selectman Jerram stated that there were a couple of instances where vehicles had been locked in the parking lot at the close of the beach day. He stated that he had addressed the reasoning for locking the gates in a written statement posted on the town website. The rationale for locking the gates at 8:00 PM is for liability purposes.

Mr. McCann informed all that the beach operating hours have been adjusted this week due to lack of personnel to cover all of the current shifts. The beach will be open at 12:00 noon and will close at 7:30 PM. School begins soon and additional changes will be made to the beach schedule at that time. Once

school opens, the beach will not open until at least 3:00 PM, if at all. There may be an occasional day when it could open earlier, but it will all depend on the availability of the Lifeguards.

Discussion of Pickle ball:

Mr. McCann informed the Commission that when the tennis courts at Brodie were prepped for the season back in May, a decision was made to alter one court so that it could be used as a pickle ball court. First Selectman Jerram chimed in, stating that Putnam Tennis Courts charges about \$4,000 per year to get the courts ready for the season. This year, the town asked them to alter one of the courts so that it could be used for pickle ball; having received commentary that pickle ball was a sport that was generating interest in the community. Only one tennis court is usually used, while the other one remains unused for most of the time. Ed explained that Putnam had advised that the tennis nets remain rather than replace with true pickle ball nets, which are shorter, in order to avoid having to dig up the current posts. Therefore, the nets are longer than what is traditionally used for pickle ball. Also, since the surface is still clay, the balls that are used for pickle ball do not bounce as they should. Resident Jim Baio, a pickle ball enthusiast, spoke to the Commission. He said that when he heard that pickle ball was an option at Brodie, he sent out a notification using Social Media to folks to see if there was an interest in meeting to play pickle ball. He did hear from several people who were interested in learning the game. Baio stated that when he actually went to use the court, it was disappointing. The court was covered with grass and loaded with ant hills and lots of loose clay. There was at lease an inch of “silt” that covered the surface; making it too soft to get a good bounce. Baio stated that if there was a way to sweep off the clay, it might provide a harder surface to play on. Ed explained that when it is dry, it gets powdery. Maintenance did burn off some of the grass; but it does grow back. Ed said that it is the best that can be done for now. He stated that he had received some quotes for resurfacing for pickle ball and having the fence removed; the quote came in at \$150,000. He added that there had been some discussion about placing a pickle ball court at Browns Corner – but they went with Brodie at the time because it was deemed to be the best spot/surface available at the time.

Mr. Baio commented that pickle ball is a growing sport and it would be nice to have a place to play. Resident Deb Pierce stated that she does enjoy pickle ball and would love to have a place to play, but doesn’t think the tennis courts should be converted to allow for this use. She asked if there was another spot at Brodie or in town that could be dedicated for pickle ball. The Commission discussed the option of using the basketball court at Browns Corner and Mr. Baio suggested the paved area near Berkshire Hall (handicapped parking area?). John Pierce asked if the Field House could be considered for indoor use. Commission member Helt replied that the cheerleaders currently use one side of it for Cheerleading practice and the other side is used to store town equipment. Mr. Helt felt that the Basketball Court at Browns is the best option, noting that it doesn’t even have a proper backboard and is mainly used by children who shoot around on it while their siblings are on one of the fields for an organized sports activity. He suggested that the cracks be fixed, pave it and use it for pickle ball. Jerram said that the pickle ball court is usually 20’ x 44’ and it might be possible to get 2 courts at Browns. He would like to see a backboard and hoop remain in place for the occasional shoot around. Ed suggested that the area be staked out and measured and also check to see how the sun shines on the area to see what interference it may cause. Mr. Jerram replied that he would have it measured.

It was noted that when the basketball courts were installed at Brodie, there had been some resistance

to this; however, it has proven to be a good investment as it has provided good return. Pickle ball might see the same results.

Disc Golf:

Commission member Jeremy Schaller asked the Commission to consider using Brodie Park South for a disc golf course. He stated that he took up the sport last fall and has been having “a blast” playing it. He currently goes to Alvord Park in Torrington and plays there. He feels that Brodie South would be a perfect place to have a course. He has spoken with a designer of disc golf courses who has stated he would design it for no fee. Elaine Murphy of Brodie Park Inc. has verbally pledged financial support. Jeremy would like to see a minimum of a 9 hole course on the site. Member Helt voiced his concern that the area is used often by dog walkers who do not pick up after their dogs. Mr. Helt addressed the bobolink concern that he knows will be brought up once people find out that there is talk of a disc golf area at the park. Mr. Helt commented that he is at the park frequently and has never seen a bobolink come out of the preserved area. Discussion ensued among the members regarding this disc golf course request and they came to an agreement that they would be willing to have 3 holes laid out to see what the community response would be. Schaller stated that it would be great if the actual approved course would go into the woods and provide for obstacles and corners; things that make the course more challenging. Schaller stated that he would be happy to assist with fundraising efforts to make this course a reality. Jerram replied that his fundraising efforts are noble, but wants to hold off and get community feedback before going to the next level.

MOTION: by Schaller to use \$3,000 in budgeted recreation funds to purchase baskets and equipment needed to get a course going, seconded by O’Brien.

Unanimous.

At this point in the meeting, Recreation Director McCann asked if the discussion could move back to discussion of the budget as this was overlooked on the agenda. The Commission agreed without objection.

Discussion of 21-22 projects and use of budget funds:

Mr. McCann informed the Commission that he would like approval to purchase a 4-seater golf cart to be used at the Beach and at the Camp. He stated that there is currently a 2-seater, but it is not sufficient. He explained that the card is used to drive patrons down to the beach from the overflow parking area and is also used during camp to transport campers/counselors if they need to catch up with a group or go from one area of the park to another. Jerram added that he has seen the 2-seater used in unsafe manner when they need to transport more than one person – he has observed passengers standing on the back and this is unsafe. A 4-seater would be a safe alternative to what is sometimes practiced now. Ed stated that a 4-seater runs about \$4500 and he has no preference of electric versus gas.

MOTION: by McCann to allocate up to \$5,000 for purchase of a 4-seater golf cart; seconded by O’Brien.

Unanimous.

The second request Ed brought before the Commission was a request for an outbuilding to be used as shelter for the ticket table (sticker sales) at Brodie. He explained that a “pop-up” canopy has been used for the past couple of seasons and it is his opinion that there needs to be something sturdier. He informed the Commission that the canopy is difficult to put up and take down and does not provide a safe shelter during a sudden storm. He suggested that a wooden structure (Kloter Farms shed, for example) be looked into. He stated that he is not looking for a permanent structure; but rather one that could be moved from the area and stored away at the end of the season.

MOTION: by McCann to look into the purchase of small shed up to \$5000, seconded by Helt.

Unanimous

While on the topic of purchasing miscellaneous items, Mr. McCann stated that in previous meetings of the Recreation Commission there has been some initial discussion of constructing something like a Pavilion or a bandshell. It has been suggested that it might be nice at Brodie for a permanent structure for a band to use for set up. It was noted that the electrical supply has been upgraded. Ed stated that he has researched portable band shells, which might be nice option, but he has learned that they can cost about \$125,000. Member O’Brien explained that they are really nice structures; they look like a big trailer and the sides unfold to create a stage and they have lighting. There was no further discussion of this.

Jerram mentioned to the Commission that there may be a need for additional parking at beach area; Ed has stated that 40 – 45 cars fit in the parking lot. The overflow lot is regularly used. Jerram says he sees a need for growth in the beach area in a few years if the beach continues to be used as it has been. If the beach area grows, there may be a need to add parking. Before having a discussion as to whether or not the beach or parking should increase, it will be necessary to see if it is even feasible to do so. There needs to be identification of the Wetlands areas. Need to do some homework before any discussion of this matter can begin. Some of the Commission members expressed concern about adding to the beach area but agreed that it is important to see what the limitations are before even thinking about the possibility of expansion.

MOTION; by McCann to flag the wetlands at a cost of up to \$2000; NO SECOND was heard. motion fails.

Commission member Helt asked that the discussion of this flagging be tabled – he had other more immediate requests for funding that he would like to propose before voting on something he felt was not an immediate need. Member Helt turned the discussion to maintenance of the cabin known as the Nurse’s cabin. He stated that it has a leaky roof and he wanted to see what the members thought about the future of the building. Should it remain or should it be taken down. He wanted to know if this building is needed for anything. He wasn’t sure that money should be spent on it if it isn’t going to be used for anything. He would rather see it torn down. He stated that he was very pleased with how the preservation of the Field House came out. It was a great job that was done on that building. It has a purpose. He isn’t sure that the Nurse’s Cabin has a purpose. First Selectman Jerram replied that he thought it might be worthwhile to combine the nurse’s cabin with the cabin next to it – make a larger facility; one similar to Berkshire Hall and rent it out for private use. He noted how successful Berkshire Hall is – it makes

money for the Commission. Jerram stated that it could be used by those who are looking for a smaller venue to rent. He added that there would be need for removal of a wall and a need for tying into a septic system. Mr. McCann added that "if you tear it down, you'll never get it back." Mr. McCann suggested that the commission members tour the two cabins and get an idea of what might need to be done.

Administrative Assistant Hayward cautioned that the Recreation Commission needs to keep in mind that adding facilities without adding staff can create problems. She explained that rentals at the hall are not without problems. Finding help to be able to keep the facilities clean is a challenge. These part time occasional positions are not easy to fill. It is hard to find people who are only needed a few hours a week. Cleaning the facilities is not part of the job for public works. Be careful about adding on use of buildings without thinking about the regular/routine maintenance.

Mr. Helt turned the discussion to the Field House. Again, he complimented the commission for agreeing to fund the painting and repairs that were completed on the building. It has made a difference in how it looks. Arnie would like large garage door installed on one side of Field House; he requested a door with a 10 – 12 foot opening that would allow for the tractor and roadside mower to be able to enter and be stored safely. Mr. Helt will get the measurements of what is needed to allow for proper clearance.

Jerram suggested that Mr. Rick Berneike be contacted to provide a quote for installation of the door.

Jerram expressed concerns regarding installing a large door and the structural integrity of the building. He suggested that an engineer be consulted before proceeding. He agreed that equipment needs to be protected, but he want to be sure that the structure can handle it.

Mr. Helt expressed his thanks and gave kudos to Highway Superintendent Dave and town crew member Zach for the excellent maintenance they have provided at Brodie over the summer. He stated that they have kept everything looking great.

Recreation Director added his thanks, but did request that consideration be given to having a full time summer staff person on site at Brodie Monday through Friday during Camp season. He stated that there is enough to keep this person occupied.

The Commission discussed their meeting schedule, noting that they have not been meeting regularly. They did not file an annual schedule of 2021 meetings with the Town Clerk, therefore all meetings held are posted as Special Meetings. Filing this will allow for regular meetings to be held.

MOTION: by McCann to have the Recreation Commission meet on the 3rd Wednesday of each month at 6:30; seconded by Helt.

It was noted that the next meeting will be September 15, but this will be a special meeting due to the fact that the schedule of meetings need to be filed with the Town Clerk 30 days in advance of the first meeting.

Unanimous.

MOTION: by Helt to adjourn at 7:58 PM; seconded by O'Brien.

Unanimous.

Respectfully Submitted,

Christine Hayward, Administrative Assistant