

Kent Park and Recreation Commission
April 15, 2019 Parks Master Plan Subcommittee Meeting Minutes

Present: Bruce Adams, Blythe Everett, John Grant, Abigail Smith Hanby, Fran Goodsell, Connie Manes

Public & Invited Guests: None

The subcommittee meeting was called to order at 6:37pm.

Acceptance of Agenda: Ms. Smith Hanby requested an addition to the agenda: RFI/getting financial information from the town to support our work (cost to clean the pool, cost of lifeguards, etc.). The committee agreed to this addition. Mr. Grant made a motion to accept the agenda as amended; Mr. Adams seconded the motion.

Acceptance of minutes of April 1, 2019 subcommittee meeting: Mr. Adams made a motion to approve the minutes from the April 1 subcommittee meeting. Ms. Manes seconded the motion.

Ms. Smith Hanby presented a PowerPoint presentation about parks master planning. She emphasized that our work is to create a plan, not a study. She said we need to think about how the various scenarios we come up with will impact park use over the various seasons and throughout the year. The scenarios will be collaborative between us and other people we choose to work with. We will need community input to come up with strategic objectives and a vision statement. The subcommittee members are the “local experts.” This will be a three-phase progress over three months. Ms. Smith Hanby is starting to collect reference materials in the form of other park plans to give us an idea of what we are trying to create.

Ms. Manes suggested adding the State’s environmental and conservation plans that were developed by the town only a few years ago. These plans contained a large section about town recreation. There are a lot of plans floating around in town government—are there others we should be folding into our work and building on? Town plans like the Plan of Conservation and Development (POCD) could provide a decent amount of information to the person we work with on master planning.

Members of the subcommittee then engaged in a Keep/Toss/Create activity. We wrote down our ideas about what we want to keep about our parks, what we want to toss, and what we want to create. It is easiest to refer to the photographs in the subcommittee shared Google Drive folder to see the results of this exercise; Ms. Smith Hanby also kept the hard copies of all of the papers.

Using this initial feedback, the subcommittee began to flesh out various park scenarios, as follows:

Scenario 1: Maximize utilization of Kent Common and make it a focus. Provide intentionally distinct offerings from what is available at Emery Park. Draw people in via signage, entry sequence, and walkability from town.

Scenario 2: Devote Emery Park to nature/wildlife. There is a lot more land at Emery than is being used. It abuts some land trust easements. The only access to the peak is a very steep trail with a great payoff in terms of view. Maybe improve the one current trail to include switchbacks? Add a “destination” at the end of the trail? There are 21 publically accessible trails in Kent alone--are there enough trails in Kent already? The

piece of land is very valuable conservation-wise. There is lots of wildlife and Cobble Brook's water is of high quality for macroinvertebrates. Leave Emery to conservation and/or nature education?

Scenario 3: Make park planning/activities/use collaborative with things that are already happening around town: Eagle scouts? An internship program? Something at the farm? Something having to do with stewardship? Drop programs in on the trails without having to create static signage or installations. Use both parks to tie into the Land Trust/other partners. What partnerships can the parks create?

Scenario 4: Access to water/cooling. This may be a scenario we need to look at sooner than others. It has been 20 years since the last pool plan. If we eliminate the Emery pool, does the town need different access to water? Does a town need/want/require a public water access area? Swimming vs. recreating in water. Swimming laps vs. cooling off vs. boating. Are there other options for access to water which would not involve water installations at either town park? Share the Warren town beach? Work with the State Park system to do something at the small piece of Lake Waramaug that is in Kent? Or, eliminate the Emery pool and consider a water feature at Kent Commons – a lightweight water feature? A splash pad? A chlorinated pool? (The pool in Falls Village is a huge success despite its small K-8 school and being the smallest town in northwestern Connecticut.)

Other ideas voiced in discussion but not included in any scenarios included bike paths, access to the Housatonic River for boating, and a dog park.

The members of the subcommittee agreed with Ms. Manes' comment that we need to make a persuasive case to guide the vision of the townspeople. We want to present our plan in terms of "this is how we want to move forward." For example, people may be sad about losing the Emery pool but not when they see the math. Other positives to the argument of making Kent Commons a focus are that current amenities are too spread out and we need to consolidate them, Kent Commons offers better parking and is safely accessible by foot from town, and that expansion of that park would essentially expand the town center, bringing more life and people to the town amid the trend of store closings, etc.

The members agreed that we will share tonight's work with the full Commission on April 22, and then move on to put together a draft of the brief.

Ms. Smith Hanby's PowerPoint presentation on master planning and pictures of the 'visual notes' accompanying these scenarios have been uploaded to the subcommittee's shared Google Drive folder.

The next meeting of the Parks Master Plan Subcommittee is May 13, 2019 at 6:30pm. Our agenda is not yet formed as it will depend at least partly on review of current planning by the full Park and Recreation Commission at the next regularly-scheduled meeting.

Mr. Grant made a motion to adjourn the meeting at 8:01pm.

Blythe Everett
Subcommittee Secretary

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