

**St. Albans City Parks Commission
Minutes of Meeting
Tuesday, December 29, 2015
Barlow Street Community Center**

A meeting of the St. Albans City Parks Commission was held on Tuesday, December 29, 2015, in the Barlow Community Center at 6:00 pm.

Commission Members Present: Peter Chevalier, Chair; Tom Koldys, Stina Booth, Jeff Young, Barbara Weinstein & Joan McGinn.

Commission Members Absent: Angie Sturm.

Staff Present: Kelly Viens, Director of Recreation.

1. Call to Order, Peter Chevalier, Chair.

Peter Chevalier called the meeting to order at 6:00 pm.

2. Introduction of New Members.

Mr. Chevalier welcomed and introduced new members, Tom Koldys and Stina Booth. Mr. Young asked if the new members could provide a little background about themselves. Ms. Booth stated that she is a lifelong resident of St. Albans and mother of three daughters. She is also a photographer. Mr. Koldys stated that his is a teacher at BFA, also has two daughters and spends his summers working at the City Recreation Department teaching swim lessons and the swim team.

3. Review Parks Commission Charge.

Mr. Chevalier explained that the meetings will be governed by Robert's Rules and would like to allow everyone a chance to speak while avoiding side conversations. He asked that members bring up topics of discussion during Other Business at which time it will be noted for the agenda of the following meeting.

Mr. Chevalier read aloud the following charge for the Parks Commission:

The Parks Commission shall consist of seven members. There shall be three, 3-year terms and four, 2-year terms. Commissioners shall be appointed by the City Council and may be removed upon majority vote of the Council, who shall likewise fill all vacancies. The City Council shall also designate a Chair who may be removed as Chair upon majority vote of the Council.

The Parks Commission may perform the following duties as they pertain to Taylor Park, Houghton Park, and the Barlow Community Center Park:

- Review all parks improvement projects and forward any comments to the City Council for approval
- Prepare planning documents that reflect the community's vision for its parks and forward to City Council for approval
- Facilitate public input on park improvements
- Develop rules and regulations for City Parks and forward to City Council for approval

The Parks Commission shall receive staff support from the City Manager's designee and shall function as a public body under Vermont's Open Meeting Law.

Mr. Chevalier reiterated that gathering public input is an important part of what the Parks Commission does and bring ideas and proposals to council for consideration. He added that the funding for such proposals comes in the form of grants and the City budget.

4. Revisit Original List of Priorities.

Mr. Chevalier explained that the Commission previously met and conducted a SWAT Analysis for developed a list of top priorities for each park. Ms. Viens proposed having the Commission go through the priority list for each park and remove any of the priorities that have already been completed.

Houghton Park:

Ms. Viens noted that repairs will be made in the spring to the tennis and basketball courts which addresses that previously identified priority. In addition, the new playground at Houghton Park will be installed this year. Mr. Young asked what the City's level of participation will be in installing the playground. Ms. Viens responded that Public Works will help with the demo and landscaping. Mr. Chevalier noted that some of the cottonwood trees have been removed which was listed as a weakness on the SWAT Analysis and the rest of them will be removed this year. Mr. Koldys asked if new trees would be planted to replace the trees removed. Mr. Chevalier responded affirmatively. Parking in front of Houghton Park has gotten worse; Mr. Chevalier stated that the INS subcontractors are continuing to park on South Elm Street and the concern can be forwarded to City staff. The dumpster is also now locked at the park. Mr. Chevalier stated that an opportunity identified was to create a skating rink and install a water drinking fountain still remains. Conservation efforts, beautification efforts and a splash pad also remain as an opportunity. Discussion ensued about including weekend supervision or installing additional cameras as a priority at the park. Ms. Weinstein noted that new seating isn't on the list but believes it should be a priority. Mr. Chevalier stated that he was told the horseshoe pits were going to be removed. Mr. Koldys commented that he believes increased awareness and programming is important for all parks. Mr. Young suggested having a block party to unveil the new playground. Ms. Viens responded that the idea has been discussed and RiseVT would like to be a part of that.

Taylor Park:

Strengths previously identified for Taylor Park are as follows: accessibility, size, performance space, the gardens, farmer's market, the fountain, monuments, the proximity to historic buildings, the bandstand, trees and shade, benches, walking paths and sidewalks, security cameras and the horticulture.

Opportunities previously identified are as follows: seating, the need for ongoing security which has been addressed, condition and diversity of trees, lighting, garbage cans, volunteers, more events, designated smoking area, better signage and increased safety measures for the pool in the fountain

Mr. Chevalier stated that although improvements have been made, opportunity still exists for creating diversity of trees and additional lighting. He noted that he was not sure what the status of the garbage cans was. Ms. Viens stated that she believes they have been ordered. Mr. Chevalier also noted that the concept of creating a designated smoking area has since been removed. Better signage for the fountain has been addressed, however, Mr. Young stated that safety measures for the fountain pool were not addressed. Ms. Viens stated that she believes it was addressed and the recommendation was that there would be zero tolerance for people going into the fountain pool. Mr. Young wondered how it would be enforced.

Mr. Chevalier suggested removing electrical work which was previously identified as a weakness. Ms. McGinn stated that she spoke with Mr. Manahan who indicated that some of the power supply boxes near the fountain could be dropped down to be flush to ground level. Access to water for watering the gardens remains an opportunity. Mr. Young stated that Mr. Robtoy of Public Works indicated that he had plans to increase access to water would address the issue as soon as he could. Mr. Koldys asked if

compaction of soil around the trees remained a problem. Mr. Young responded that it does create run-off and has been a problem in the park but overall, the trees seem to do very well. Mr. Chevalier stated that maintenance to the gardens could remain on the list as there is always more than can be done. He noted that he would like to see something different around the bandstand other than the existing shrubs because it's easy to throw garbage behind them and they have not been maintained. Discussion ensued about improvements that could be made to the overall size and condition of the bandstand. Mr. Chevalier noted that a budget and expertise in the park was also identified as a weakness.

Other threats identified included illegal activity and overuse of the park. Mr. Young noted that the Commission made a recommendation to the City to repair the Civil War memorial which has yet to be addressed. Mr. Chevalier acknowledged the work that has begun for Arts in the Park.

Barlow Park:

Strengths previously identified were activities, presence, accessibility, tennis/basketball courts, separation of playgrounds for age levels, building onsite, income from preschool rentals, fields in good shape that get lots of use, security cameras, bathroom, storage and signage.

Opportunities previously identified were to make better use of property, create border along street, expand playground and repair, use of rubber chips, increased police presence, beautify and add plantings and an art display.

Ms. Viens stated that the border along the street has been accomplished and two playground features have been replaced. Ms. Weinstein noted that the rubber chips were removed as it turns out they are bad for children. Mr. Chevalier asked Ms. Viens if an increased police presence is still needed. Ms. Viens responded that the cameras have played an important part and there is typically always someone in the building so the lights are on which would deter vandalism. Ms. Viens also stated that some plantings were done and a new sign will be installed in the spring with additional planting.

Weaknesses previously identified were parking, lack of larger play equipment for older children, limited space to grow, close proximity to neighbors, constant maintenance on the playgrounds and bathroom often locked and if unlocked, damage occurs.

Mr. Young noted the rear entrance to the park from Quintin Court which is unlit and on private property and wondered if it presented a liability issue. He proposed either sealing up the opening or speaking with the homeowner to see if they will give the City a 3-foot right-of-way and let the City add lighting. Ms. Booth asked if the homeowner currently has an issue. Mr. Young responded that he wasn't aware of the homeowner having an issue but thought he could potentially if he knew he was liable for someone getting hurt on his property.

5. Set Day/Times of Regular Meetings.

Meeting dates were set for the first Tuesday of every month at 6:00 pm.

6. Other Business.

Mr. Young stated that the issue of the bio-pits on the west side of Taylor Park are on the upcoming Downtown Board agenda. They met with the architects and engineers in charge of the Streetscape Project who are doing a complete redesign of the bio-pits so they are more aesthetically pleasing and functional. They will also come up with a better shrub plan.

Mr. Young highly recommended a book written by Doug Tallamy who writes about how plants are connected to the environment.

Ms. Weinstein wondered if it would make sense for the Commission to update the ordinances that related to the parks. Mr. Chevalier stated that he will find out if that falls within the Commission's charge.

Mr. Young asked Mr. Chevalier if he or Ms. Viens could get an idea of what is budgeted for the parks in the upcoming budget. Mr. Chevalier responded affirmatively.

7. Adjourn.

A motion was made by Jeff Young, seconded by Joan McGinn to adjourn the meeting at 7:25 pm. Vote was unanimous, 6-0.

Respectfully Submitted,

Kristen Smith
Community Relations Coordinator

Approved