**FINAL**

**Salem Parks and Recreation Commission**

**Minutes of Meeting**

**Date and Time: Tuesday, January 19, 2021 at 6:45 P.M.**

**Meeting Location: Via Zoom**

**Members Present: Debbie Amaral, James Shea,**

 **Bob Callahan, Amy Everitt**

**Also Present: Patricia O’Brien**

**Clerk: Kathleen Fitzgerald**

**Meeting Called to Order**

Debbie Amaral called the meeting to order at 6:45 P.M. She welcomed everyone to Zoom and stated that the Board would approve the Minutes from the September 15, 2020 meeting and then the public would have a chance to speak for a maximum of three minutes. The Park & Rec Commission would ask questions first and the public would need to raise their hand and be recognized to speak. Debbie advised that when the Commission votes, there must be a roll call.

Bob Callahan makes a motion to approve the December Minutes. Amy Everitt seconds. Roll call was then taken and the Minutes were unanimously approved.

First on the Agenda:

**Molly Euni Morrow, 338 Rollstone, Fitchburg, MA 01420 – Witchwood Tours**

Seeking approval to continue doing tours and clarification on parking. She had presented a Business Plan and in it highlighted alternative parking. In addition, she asked if she could be on the Events Calendar on the Park & Rec. website.

Trish O’Brien advised that she had just sent the Business Plan to the Board and that they needed time to review it and asked Ms. Morrow to highlight items in the Business Plan.

She advised that these tours would be about the ecosystems and sustainability and there would be no foraging. She stated her ideas were new but appeared very promising in Salem. She said she would point out plants you can find at different times of the year and this would be modified as the seasons change.

Debbie Amaral asked her to explain what she was thinking about regarding parking. Ms. Morrow said she had been having people park at the golf course, Castle Hill and behind the school.

Debbie Amaral said the Board was concerned about people on the tours parking at the golf course on the weekends and during the busy season. She stated she wanted Ms. Morrow to tell tour participants to park somewhere else.

Bob Callahan advised that Ms. Morrow would have to get permission from the School Department to use their lot. He further stated that the Board would not give permission to park there and it was only a suggestion. The Board could give permission for Castle Hill.

James Shea stated that the golf course was the biggest revenue maker and the revenue from the tours would not be substantial. He further stated that if the tours interfered with the golf course he could not vote in favor of it.

Amy Everitt inquired about the four tours per day on weekends. Ms. Morrow said that would be in October. She said the rest of the year it would not be more than two tours a day, but if she hired another guide it would be four tours per day.

Amy Everitt stated that Salem residents have access to this trail, and she wanted them to continue to have access. She asked if the Board should think about a maximum number of tours and a maximum number of people and stated that after Covid there would be the concern about the number of people on tours. Ms. Morrow said she would like the maximum to be twelve after Covid. Amy Everitt stated that that needed to be put in place in the proposal so that everyone was in agreement.

Fee structure was discussed and Trish O’Brien said she would like it to be $40.00 per tour and details could be worked out to pay once a month, but she stated she would like to see a schedule in place so the Board would know exactly when tours were taking place. Ms. Morrow stated she thought a percentage calculation would be better She asked if she was going to rent the trail, would that mean no one else could use it. Debbie Amaral said absolutely not, and Trish O’Brien advised that there was a lot of concerns from the Friends of the Salem Woods because of the increased foot traffic.

Ms. Morrow said she thought the percentage calculation would be better because she was not getting exclusive use. Debbie Amaral stated that when someone rents the Common, they do not get exclusive use.

Bob Callahan stated that Salem Woods is probably one of our most valued passive recreational assets. Recreation for them is not walking the path and running into people on a tour. It is an area that has been open to the public for years and taken advantage of by the public. He said his concern is that we should not commercialize it and further stated his concern that we should not inconvenience the public and residents of our City.

Amy Everitt addressed Ms. Morrow stating that she advised the Board that she only received $16.50 per booking from Trip Advisor. That is about $5.50 per person you are giving back to an entity that we have no control over. She further stated that Ms. Morrow was giving more money to an entity that doesn’t help us financially. Ms. Morrow said she wished she did not have to pay trip Advisor. Amy Everitt went on to say this this is our space and Trip Advisor was making money off of our space and giving us nothing and they should not get more than the City of Salem.

Ms. Morrow said she wasn’t requesting exclusive access to Salem Woods, but more concerned with the fee structure.

James Shea said he was looking at this venture as a business person. He said to Ms. Morrow that she was making money, Trip Advisor was making money and the City was not making money. He advised Ms. Morrow to increase ticket prices. Bob Callahan asked Ms. Morrow what the maximum of tours she told Trip Advisor she would do. Ms. Morrow said 2. Bob Callahan again asked if a maximum of 2 tours was her plan for the next year. Ms. Morrow said 2 tours during the week and up to 4 tours during the busy season. Bob Callahan asked what her busy season was and Ms. Morrow said September. Bob Callahan said that April 1st to November 1st was the busy season.

Debbie Amaral suggested tabling this.

James Shea makes a motion to table this, Amy Everitt seconds, roll call is taken and it passes unanimously.

Ms. Morrow asked what was needed from her before the next tour. Debbie Amaral suggested she speak with Trish O/Brien about this.

Next:

**Tom Devine (Planning Department), Todd Kirton (site professional) and Iris Lin (landscape architect) -- Mansell Open Space Soil Remediation Concept Plan** –

Todd Kirton stated they came before the Board to talk about the area of the park that was open space with the basketball court that had contaminated soil.

Tom Devine said that there are drainage issues at the basketball field, and they were directing the contractor to make changes to address the drainage issues. He said that in 2018 they did soil testing and found high levels of arsenic and that Mass DEP considered it an imminent hazard. He further advised that contaminated soil was removed from three residences and the schedule for the project depended on funding because soil remediation was expensive, and funding had not yet been secured.

Mr. Kirton presented slides and advised that arsenic was their primary concern. He said while doing soil remediation they wanted to improve the parking area and the park. He said one option of the site plan was to make the central area more level for multiple uses. They were proposing to repair the parking area and adding one handicap parking space. He stated they wanted to keep as many existing trees as possible.

There was a discussion about the cost per cubic foot for remediation. James Shea asked if we were getting any State or Federal grants. Tom Devine advised State and Federal could not fully help but another option is competitive EPA clean-up grants and they were looking at every other option with perhaps some City sharing.

Debbie Amaral asked if there were any questions:

**Councilwoman Flynn** – She said she wanted to thank everyone working on this. She advised people have been in contact with her and they want to get this remedied as soon as possible.

Bob Callahan asked if I was possible to cap the parking without carting away land fill. Todd Kirton advised that would be very difficult. You would have to make the argument to Mass DEP so it may be a hard argument to make that you weren’t cleaning it up but just putting a cap over everything.

**Alison Harrison, 63 Proctor Street** – She advised she lived on the corner of Pope and Proctor. She said she and her husband are both disabled. She said the site is very hazardous and dangerous. She said the average person with good mobility would have trouble walking. She asked who was responsible for the overall current state of the site.

Debbie Amaral asked Tom Devine to answer. Mr. Devine said the City is responsible. He asked Ms. Harrison if her concern related specifically to that portion of the site which is blocked. Ms. Harrison the entire length is an obstacle. She said there were sandbags, cones knocked over, and lot of debris, etc.

Tom Devine said he had received images yesterday and reached out to Salem Department of Public Services and the obstacles would be removed.

Ms. Harrison said that was good news but asked if after all of this work was competed would there still be a ton of arsenic. Debbie Amaral deferred this question to Tom Devine who said this was a challenging issue and asked Todd Kirton to answer. Mr. Kirton said you could clean up a site and as long as not accessible there are no worries. He stated that when you have a 3’ barrier there is no exposure. It would only be harmful if ingested. Ms. Harrison asked if that message could be communicated to a multiple of audiences.

**Councilwoman Morsillo**; She asked if Mr. Kirton could talk a bit about the timeline and how long until completion. Mr. Kirton said once funding was in place it would be approximately 3-6 months and he said they would probably want to time it during non-Winter months. He said the project would probably take a total of 6 months.

Bob Callahan said it looked like it would be more than one year before completed and asked if it was possible for the next 1 or 2 years to make a more permanent fence and to keep the grass cut. He said people do not want to ride by and see what looks like a dump. Tom Devine said he thought it was important to consider having temporary fencing.

Debbie Amaral said she would like to see this project expedited as it is a great park for the neighborhood

Tom Devine asked if the Board had any questions about the design. He said if the Board stood behind the design, they could pitch it regarding funding.

Trish O’Brien stated that they had spoken about having an accessible path to the basketball court and Iris Lin said yes. Bob Callahan asked if there was any danger in using the basketball court where it is non-porous and could it be fenced off and still useable.

Mr. Kirton said if you fenced that off you have the contamination going toward Longdon Street It remains a hazardous condition so no way to access it to allow any portion of the site to get to that area.

Debbie Amaral said this Plan doesn’t seem to have any major changes. Trish O’Brien stated that the path is now coming off the existing wall and he basketball court would have its own separate entrance. The other design showed it coming off the main parking lot.

Trish O’Brien asked the Board if they had a preference. Debbie Amaral asked why there could not be 2 paths. Trish O’Brien said they would like the open grass area to be as large as possible to provide options for other programming. Iris Lin said Option 1 has a longer and larger area. Amy Everitt said she would lean towards a bigger field. Bob Callahan said bigger field also.

Amy Everitt makes a motion accept Option 1, Bob Callahan seconds 3 Board members affirmatively voted to accept Option 1. Roll call is taken and passes unanimously.

Councilwoman Morsillo asked if there would be new benches along Mansell Parkway. Iris Lin said they were only proposing benches along the basketball court. Trish O’Brien said there would be granite rocks that people could sit on. Councilwoman Morsillo asked how accessible they would be. Trish O’Brien said there would be sone on the skate park side and some on the basketball side. Councilwoman Morsillo thanked Trish O’Brien for the information.

Debbie Amaral asked if there were any further question and no response.

Next:

Willows Phase I Update -- Dave Kurcharsky, City of Salem Parking Director – He came before the Board to discuss some ideas to get some feedback. He presented a slide show. He stated his department was asked to look at utilization and also to take a look at the City’s traffic ordinance to see how regulations compared to signage on streets. He stated metered spaces were not utilized during the week, but there was high utilization on the weekends. He advised that Restaurant Row was utilized the most and Fort Avenue utilized the least. Memorial Drive also had low utilization. He said there was no signage on part of Restaurant Row and no signage on the park side of Fort Avenue. He advised that they were looking to designate a lot for two hour metered parking. He said the meters are currently $.50 per hour and looking to raise it to $1.00 per hour. They would like to identify loading zone for businesses on Restaurant Row and recommended a combination of drop off and pick-up area with the remaining spaces having meters with a two-hour limit at the rate of $1.00 per hour. He stated that they needed clarification for the motorcycle area.

Debbie Amaral thanked Mr. Kurcharsky for taking the time to look into the ordinances and doing this. She stated that enforcement was only good if there was enforcement and asked if there were any assurances that there would be enforcement. Mr. Kurcharsky stated that they wanted to set expectations to when people should be paying in these areas. He advised that they offered the ability to pay via an app. He said the Police Department does not have access to that only staff does. He advised that in the winter the meters were removed. Debbie Amaral said she appreciate that in the off season.

Bob Callahan asked if there was a designated parking area where residents could park for free. Mr. Kurcharsky said they do not have the means to determine if they are residents or not. It was suggested that a parking sticker may be the way to go. Bob Callahan said he firmly believed that Salem residents should have the option to park there for free.

There was a further discussion of stickers and kiosks and the cost and maintenance of the kiosks.

**Councilman Robert McCarthy** – Thanked Dave for all his research. He said he wanted to dive into what is park area and what is not. In the past it included every paved area and classified it as a street. He said when this proposal came out, he made sure the Legal Department was looped in. The designation along Fort Avenue was resident sticker parking but it needs to be enforced. He said when you looked at the cut through at Memorial Drive it is not wide enough for 2 lanes of parking. He said it was safer when not parking on both sides of the street. He stated that if you start eliminating parking there would be a marshmallow effect. He said he liked the idea of kiosks and stated they do have some expense to them but having them would mean not having poles. He stated that kiosks were easier and a neater way to get people to pay. He questioned how to create a price index to allow people from Salem to enjoy the parks and stated he was interested in the kiosk prospect.

Bob Callahan advised that this past summer the Willows had one of the busiest springs and summers, but if you look at the revenue from the parking meters, less money was made. He noted that people park for free because there is no enforcement.

Trish O’Brien asked Dave about the cost of kiosks and how many signs were needed so people knew they must pay. She asked if there was a difference in a kiosk and the number of signs needed or if you just use your smart phone. Dave advised there would be kiosks at the entrance and exits which would have signage saying pay here. Dave further stated that a lot of kiosks were not needed because you pay by plate and it does help with enforcement.

Debbie Amaral advised that in Medford they had physical vehicles checking. Dave said they were looking into that technology too.

Debbie Amaral thanked Dave for doing this work and asked if there was anything the Board needed to do. She asked if it was just reporting today and then coming back when a vote was needed. Mr. Kurcharsky said he would be giving the same presentation to the Traffic commission. Debbie Amaral asked Mr. Kurcharsky to mention that the Board would like a higher meter rate and enforcement. Dave confirmed that it would be $1.00 per hour in the current metered lot and $.50 per hour in the new lot to be constructed. Debbie Amaral also stated the Restaurant Row would have 15 minutes of free parking.

**New Business**:

Trish O’Brien stated that the Board still needed to discuss further the narrowness of the cut through. Bob Callahan said the cut through should be one way from Dead Horse Beach to Fort Avenue which would keep people from going through the neighborhood and if it was made one-way and no parking that would solve the problem.

Debbie Amaral asked if there was anything else. Trish O’Brien advised the Board needed to vote on her appointment letter. Debbie Amaral stated that since they did not have the letter they could give Trish a temporary extension for a month.

Amy Everitt makes a motion for a one month extension with a vote next month. Bob Callahan seconds. Roll call was taken and it passes unanimously.

A motion to adjourn is made by Amy Everitt seconded by Bob Callahan. Roll call was then taken, and unanimously passes.

The meeting ended at 9:31 P.M.

Next meeting – Tuesday February 16, 2021 via Zoom.

Respectfully Submitted,

Kathleen Fitzgerald, Clerk