

Recreation Commission Regular Meeting  
Wednesday, February 3, 2021  
DRAFT

- 2 The regular Recreation Commission meeting was held Wednesday, February 3, 2021 via Zoom starting at 5:02 P.M.
- 3 Members present: Lynn Altadonna, Adam Rice, Ed Sthal, Ryan Thibault, Art Shinnars, Brett Loomis, Matt Frazee. In audience: Harry Shepard, Neil Handwerger, Kevin Lipple, Cassie , Kelli Millick
- 4 **5:02pm called to order. Agenda Approved.**
- 5 **1.6 minutes approved.**
- 6 **Gables Bridge Underpass/Crossing Relocation**
- 7 Matt started the discussion by reminding us that the underpass has been set as a top priority by the recreation commission and other community members in the past. Through initial assessments it has been determined to be a \$1-2 million with a lot of challenges so the question posed, and continued discussion is whether the Rec Commission wants to make a recommendation to shift the focus away from the underpass and into a crossing/relocation of the path away from Cape Cod Road. Matt gathered past accident history from the Stowe Police Department. Chief Hull indicated that over the past 5 years there have been 5 accidents at the Cape Cod/Mountain Road intersection but to his knowledge, none of those involved pedestrians. The estimated cost of relocating the crosswalk is \$100,000 +/- compared to the \$1-2 million for the underpass. Lynn summarized the three options: #1. Leave the Rec Path crossing as is, crossing Mountain Road and Cape Cod Road. #2. Move the crossing about 100 yards toward the village which would result in a single crossing across Mountain Road #3. Creating a box culvert underpass under Mountain Road near the Gables Bridge. Matt said that for the sake of tonight's meeting the Rec Commission has two initial options; taking no action on the subject tonight and recommend the Town should continue to pursue the project of the Gables Bridge Underpass or shift the focus to explore relocation of the crosswalks.
- 8 Ed asked that if we moved the crosswalk would it be close to the Pinnacle Sports entrance. Lynn said it would be halfway between Pinnacle Sports and Cape Cod. Ed also asked if we had any data on how much vehicle traffic on Mountain Road and pedestrian traffic on the Rec Path will increase in future years. Currently, we do not have any statistics or projections. Harry mentioned that as part of the master plan, he recalls single digit percentage growth over the next few years for vehicle traffic on Mountain Road. If it is helpful Harry said he could gather that data for the Rec Commission.
- 9 Lynn pointed out that the double crossing is what creates a longer wait time for vehicles. Harry said that it was common that double crossings are common, but the conflict would be reduced with relocating the crosswalk to the south of Cape Cod and is more ideal from a traffic conflict prospective, but it did not happen due to drainage outlet requiring a culvert extension and retaining wall. At the time of the sidewalk extension the Town was not able to do this project due to financial pressures and permits required from the State. The Town would have to reengage the State regarding the need to extend the culvert and construct the retaining wall, go through both AOT and DEC processes. It will take some permitting and some time, but Harry said the relocation is achievable. Lynn asked if this project creates any issues with the other current projects with State runoff requirements. Harry said it would not inflict any conflicts with stormwater runoff requirements, but since Mountain Road is a state road there is historical challenges with the AOT allowing pedestrian infrastructure. Art asked if the State would be more inclined to work with the Town for the underpass in order to get bike traffic away from the road. Harry said AOT would like to eliminate the crosswalk but there are environmental permitting challenges

for an underpass.

- 10 Our consultants who looked at the underpass are under the assumption that it cannot be permitted. The flood plain management team and the Army Corps of Engineers say the crossing under the Gables Bridge would not be permitted, but it has never been tested with an application.
- 11 Art asked if the concrete culvert would be as challenging. Harry stated that if it were a culvert under the road and not in the flood way, we would not have the same environmental permitting challenges, but it does create challenges with the existing water and sewer systems. For this location, the water system could be relocated but the sewer system would likely require a pump station.
- 12 Harry also pointed out that there are overhead utility issues for the underpass option including structures such as retaining walls to deal with grade issues along the front of Sun and Ski which would have an impact on the Sun and Ski's property and usage. Ed asked if the exhibiting rec path would be eliminated if the underpass was completed. Harry said he thinks the Town would keep it as a sidewalk extension. Ed said conceivably some rec path users would continue up to Cape Cod to a crosswalk.
- 13 Adam asked if an overpass would be considered and if so, what would the height clearance be. Harry said an overpass has not been looked at for this location. He believes the State design standard is 14' 6" minimum to the underside of the structure.
- 14 Harry offered more context for the underpass. The notion of possibly trying to put it under the bridge was never fully vetted, when the State approached the Town with plans to replace the bridge, they had proposed to have pile supported structure with a pile cap that was relatively high. Harry and Tom Jackman suggested that if they lowered the pile cap an underpass might physically be possible. AOT complied but it has never been applied for or permitted. Harry added that when we really start to investigate the underpass option it will be a permitting challenge and very likely not permissible.
- 15 Lynn asked if the culvert for the crosswalk relocation would be feasible and permitted. Harry said he thinks it is both feasible and permissible, if we are not introducing structure up against the edge of the river the permitting is a lot simpler. Harry thinks it could be done. He also added that if we decide the best choice right now would be to try to relocate the crosswalk, the underpass would be an option in the future.
- 16 Ed asked if the \$1-2 million quote would be required from the Town or if there were any opportunity for State money. Harry said he thinks there is opportunity for pedestrian/bike friendly projects and the State might look favorably on a project due to the obvious improvement to the State Highway function. Harry added that typically those monies do not get into seven figures, but they can. Lynn suggested the potential for available federal money in the state budget. Lynn would like to see a proposed letter to the State to ask the state to consider funding the underpass with federal money.
- 17 Art asked if, at this point, we could increase the signage where the Rec Path is now, so people are more aware of the crossway and the biking. Harry stated that signage is regulated by the MUDTC, the manual traffic control devices. There are crosswalk and advanced warning signs for the existing crosswalks, there has been some talk of adding press bottom flashing lights that the pedestrian user can signal. Harry recalls that the Selectboard forewent the blinking crosswalk signs for the village crosswalks, but it could be considered at this Mountain Road location.
- 18 To look for a way forward tonight, Lynn asked if the Rec Commission had any other position that anyone would like to make a motion that they take or do they allow this to go forward and be part of the Recreation Plan, the fact that we have these different options at the price points. Adam said he thinks we should let it proceed at this point and does not see a need to make a motion on any specific alternative at this point. Harry added that he believes that any kind of a structural crossing is at best a very long-term goal and it is a good thing to always be trying to see if there is funding or the possibility that something might be possible. If there is ever a development proposal that comes along it might be nice to know about a plan to relocate the rec path or make this possible someday. Harry would encourage support for the notion of relocating the crosswalk sooner rather than later because it is practically doable, and it is an improvement. Harry does not think that doing anything to relocate the crosswalk will compromise the planning goal to create separation at this crossing.

## 19 Stowe Arena Spring Season

- 20 On Monday, February 8<sup>th</sup> Matt will be attending the Selectboard meeting for them to decide on what type of season, if any we are going to have this spring. On a typical year we have ice until the 3<sup>rd</sup> Saturday of March, and we are open for a Turf season by the 4<sup>th</sup> Saturday in March. This year, due to COVID, the High School's winter sports season have been extended by a couple of weeks, so this pushes back our ice season which then pushes back Turf. This year we are looking to have ice in to accommodate the hockey season until March 25<sup>th</sup> so we are looking at, if we are to have turf, the earliest we could be opened by is April 3<sup>rd</sup>. This does affect some turf users more than others; this does not negatively affect the high school athletic teams as they are anticipated to start on or after April 5<sup>th</sup>. This is the current information, there is no solid information but everyone Matt has talked to is anticipating spring sports to start on April 5<sup>th</sup>. Many of our other users will be affected and would have shorter season or no season at all. This would include Capitol Soccer. A lot of what Capitol Soccer provides at our facility is adult sports and whether it is ice or turf adult sports are not currently allowed. Matt estimates that 25% of our turf revenue is brought in by Capitol Soccer. At this point they would lose out on the adult seasons and the youth seasons would be reduced from a 6-week season to a 2–3-week season, so Capitol Soccer is not sure whether it will make sense for them to operate or not. Matt also had a conversation with Stowe Youth Soccer, they do not intend to begin their season until May. Stowe Youth Lacrosse, Stowe Youth Baseball, and the High School Baseball team has expressed interested in using the Turf. There is interest in having it, but it would be at a reduced capacity from what we typically see. The first decision to make would be group interest and if, despite the limitations- reduced usage and shortened season, is there still a desire to offer a turf season. The second question is, if not, then is there a desire and demand for the ice or shut the building down similar to last year during COVID.
- 21 Kevin Lipple, the AD at Stowe Middle and High School, shares that the turf season is critical for the school's lacrosse season. The high school lacrosse team has grown to 70-80 high school athletes a season. Due to the weather and the school's gym restrictions the lacrosse team would face challenges to have an adequate practice. Other indoor facilities are very limited. Kevin said he is advocating for his youth athletes and it would be unfortunate for them to miss out on two straight seasons.
- 22 Neil Handweger shared his experience as a member of Stowe Youth Lacrosse, the head coach of Stowe High School Lacrosse, and involvement in the Stowe community. He has had several conversations with directors at other turf facilities regarding COVID restrictions and he is here tonight as an advocate for the kids and the program. He has seen it blossom into a popular, fun program that does generate wins and championships, but the turf is essential for the community and the kids now more than ever due to the pandemic.
- 23 Cassie introduced herself as a board member of Stowe Youth Lacrosse. She is agreed with what Kevin and Neil have said. She added that the season is already short as it is, and the fields are not always in the best shape after the winter conditions so having turf is essential for Stowe Youth Lacrosse to begin practicing as soon as they can. SYL had a lot of new players at the beginning of last season and if the season is short those players may not have enough time to even learn what the sport is about. Cassie asked what goes into the Arena after the 6-week turf season. Matt responded that ice goes back into the Arena for summer ice. Cassie asked if the main reason for not putting the turf down would be financial. Matt did provide some financial information in the meeting packet which essentially says it has very little impact into the decision to have turf when you look at ice costs vs turf and rental revenue.
- 24 Matt touched on Kevin's comment about waiting until March 1<sup>st</sup> for the official decision. The risk of having turf is, worst case scenario is we turn away ice renters and the State comes out and says there is a delay. At that point we have committed in that direction and there is essentially nothing that is permitted to be in the facility. The bottom line is that we are at a point where a decision must be made in order to commit use from organizations. Lynn asked what is in the Arena when there is no Turf or Ice. Matt responded that it is concrete. There was discussion about what the timeline is between the change over from ice and turf.
- 25 Ed shared his view that the kids have had their lives disrupted enough that we should lay turf. Adam

motioned to put down turf from the first week in April to the first week in May. Ed second. All approved. Matt added that this motion will go to the Selectboard on Monday February 8<sup>th</sup> and encouraged all to attend that.

- 26 Brett added that in the past we have discussed the missed opportunity to sell ice during the turf season and he was curious to know if we have found the demand for ice during what would be the turf season is higher than in the past. Matt said no, he would say it is less than historically because the demand we have missed out on in the past has primarily been tournaments which are not allowed during this time. There are certainly groups that are interested but we are also missing out on adult groups and tournaments. It is hard to get a true sense of demand, but we are minus those tournaments.
- 27 Lynn brought up that he asked Matt, and Abby provided, the length of terms for the Recreation Commission members. There are four members whose term expires this April so Lynn asked them to consider whether they would like to serve another term. Others expire in a year or two. Another important mention is that in May we elect new officers of the board.
- 28 Adam had a question for Matt about Live Barn being installed at the Arena. Matt said it is in the works, but we are on a list of about 300 facilities that are waiting. Matt believes that we are scheduled for February 10<sup>th</sup> for Live Barn to be installed.

**6:31 Lynn adjourned meeting.**

Respectfully Submitted

Kelli Millick