

Recreation Commission Special Meeting

Memorial Park Master Plan Update

Thursday July 13, 2023

The Special Meeting of the Recreation Commission was held on Wednesday July 13, 2023 at the Akeley Memorial Building starting at 5:00pm.

Members present: Ryan Thibault, Brett Loomis, Jared Anello, Dave Rogers, Lynn Altadonna, Forrest Shinnars

Staff Present: Matt Frazee, Parks and Recreation Director; Harry Shepard, Public Works Director
The Meeting was called to order at 5:00pm.

On a motion by LA, seconded by DR, the minutes were approved as presented.

Jim Drummond and Tom Hand of Black River presented their progress to date regarding the Memorial Park Master Plan study. They noted that major elements of the study included the replacement of the Gale Center, as the existing building is no longer meeting the space needs of the program and the building is near the end of its anticipated life. They also focused on where to best locate recreational elements on the footprint available in Memorial Park. Another focus was on the circulation of vehicular traffic through the site, and how best to improve flow without segmenting the area. They also included a 50' buffer for wetlands in the area. They presented a number of conceptual ideas, including keeping many of the elements essentially in the same locations, with two ball fields, a secondary playground for younger children, with the pickleball and tennis courts, basketball courts and rec center adjacent to the playground area with an access road along the outside edge. This plan also included expansion of the Arena parking lot and consolidation of parks & recreation storage near the existing Parks Garage. HS noted these do not include requisite stormwater system elements and the "bubbles and lines" represent programmatic elements, not preliminary designs and some schemes felt to tight. A second option presented proposed keeping the recreation center in a similar location to where it currently sits, with an adjacent playground for young children. Public parking, Pickleball and tennis courts would be relocated to near the existing Parks Garage, with an improved access road and a pavilion/restroom area. This concept also included expansion of the Arena parking lot and a possible future connection to Depot Street with a pedestrian boardwalk from Park Place. A third option presented was described as a "full build out" which proposed improved access with significant wetlands restoration to the uplands area near the existing Parks Garage area, with the existing Parks Garage being relocated to a different location. This option included keeping the existing playground near the elementary school, but the recreation center, basketball, pickball and tennis courts, and a playground for younger children all being located in the area currently used by Parks. This option also included a skate park in the area near the Arena parking lot, and would keep the number of baseball fields at 3. They also suggested formal sidewalks on Park Place and a pedestrian boardwalk through the wetland areas, as well as a future connection road to Depot Street.

The consultants also looked at the needs for the new recreation center, noting that this was just preliminary information and intended as a test of the new Rec Building space needs. final design would depend on the footprint of the area where it would go, based on the options outlined above. They looked at the possibility of repurposing the existing Parks Garage or expanding on the existing Garage.

The overall goals for the building would be to have office space, storage space, multipurpose rooms to fit a large number of children, more toilets and a larger kitchen. Additionally, having covered outside space was discussed depending on the location. Matt Frazee indicated that while the Summer Camp program is the Town's biggest program with 150 children, that program is only run for 8 weeks out of the year and the building was not intended to be designed to fit that many children at once, as they can utilize supplemental space such as the school, tents and arena. He indicated that most programs have up to 35 participants and would like to be able to run multiple programs at once, so having a dividable space for multiple programs would be ideal. It was also discussed that repurposing the Parks Garage is not a great option due to it being constructed as a utilitarian garage without a frostproof foundation. The general conclusion was that the 5000 SF+/- program was appropriate for the new Rec Center.

HS suggested that given what we now understand regarding the site restrictions and school program (little building change), that we focus our efforts going forward on evolving two preliminary designs alternatives, one which redevelop the existing developed area of the site excluding significant program in the upland area near the Parks Dept, and the other with the utilization of this upland/parks area. These hopefully would incorporate many of the practical and desirable "bubble and line" concepts into Schematic Plans that can advance discussions with VTDEC regarding permit requirements and help inform future discussions and municipal decision making.