

Parks and Community Programs Advisory Committee

3/15/2016

4:00 pm

Mason-Motz Conference Center

Meeting Called By: Karen Jones

Note Taker: Andrea Mittleder

Attendees: Jeff Mason, Karen Jones, Sally Bitan, Janet Dye, Melanie Collins, Andrea Mittleder, Ted Asherman, Russ Anderson

Secretary's Report:

No changes to minutes from February meeting

Parks Division Report:

Presented by Jeff Mason. The parks division has been keeping up with winter work. They groomed the cross country trails five times this winter, but they had a lot of melting, so the trails were not usable at times. They have also started preparing for spring and have painted the soccer field corners and will be recoating the triple courts in June.

FCP Report:

The spring-summer brochure is close to completion.

Pet Forum:

Presented by Ted Asherman from LMAC. LMAC has received a lot of feedback over the last several years regarding pet-related issues, primarily dogs. Several people have been knocked over, been engaged in altercations involving dogs or dog owners, or have expressed fear to use the trails. Staff seems to have to address some issues every week.

LMAC decided to consider proposing revisions to the current ordinances and policies to address these problems. They held a public forum on January 19, 2016 to acquire community input. LMAC then appointed a subcommittee attended by two members of PACPAC, which met on February 25 to come up with suggestions for recommendations to give to the town council. At least two steps need to happen before any recommendations go to the council level: PACPAC needs to weigh in; 2) proposed recommendations should be brought to another public forum at the committee level (not the council level).

Open spaces serve the use of recreation for the public as well as the perpetuation of wildlife and flora. As such, the subcommittee believes several changes should be made to town ordinances and policies:

1-The town should strictly enforce a rule requiring pets to be leashed within 300 feet of any parking lot or trailhead. For smaller parks, this would effectively mandate that pets be leashed at all times.

2-A limit of 3 dogs per person should be enforced at all times to limit opportunities for dog “packs” to be out of their handler’s control. (State regulation requires dogs to be on leash or under voice control at all times.)

3-Additional signage should be placed in parks and open spaces reminding people of pertinent rules, such as the 300-foot leash requirement and the carry out rule for pet waste.

4-A few parks and open spaces should be subject to different rules. Specifically:

- The state-created deer yard at Woods Road Community Forest would benefit from a rule prohibiting pets from January 1 through March 31. (Currently this area is closed to the public each year based on the snow load. Staff from Inland Fish & Wildlife came down a few years ago and after research in the area recommended that the deer yard be removed. However, leadership disagreed and said the deer yard needs to be maintained.)
- Hadlock Community Forest, North Falmouth Community Forest, and Suckfish Brook Conservation Area provide necessary habitat for wildlife. As such, pets should be leashed in these areas from April 1 through September 30.
- River Point Conservation Area contains crucial habitat for a number of bird species, including the woodcock. Prohibiting pets here would prevent disturbance of nests and would also allow community members who are afraid of dogs to have a place they can recreate in safety.

Other pet-related issues that were discussed include necessity of enforcement of town rules and problem of dog waste in parks and open spaces. On the enforcement side, it is recommended that police or other town employees occasionally walk the trails and remind violators of applicable rules. Currently there is little to no town presence on the trails or at parks other than for routine maintenance. Lucky is going to meet with the ACO, town manager and police chief to step up enforcement. Currently, the ACO is an on-call type position, and the current ACO is also the assistant harbor master, so available time is limited.

Another issue is dog waste that is not being picked up by owners or is being left in full dog waste bags on the trail. One option would be to provide bags and cans with small openings, but this option could be a significant expense. An option to try first would be to increase public awareness of the problem through signage, reminders through email or pet registration receipts, etc. The number of dog waste bags left on trails has decreased since the public forum in February.

Town landing is not considered a “park” or “open space,” but it is a town-owned recreation area. Enforcement of a 300 foot leash rule for would prohibit dogs swimming, which is a popular activity for local residents. However, town landing is also a popular place for residents to bring their children to swim. There have been a number of dog-related incidents at this venue. A proposal that would minimize conflict between children and dogs would be to adopt specific dates/times during which dogs are prohibited on the beach or required to be leashed, such as the warmer hours during the day in the summer or on weekends during the shoulder months. Dogs could be allowed off leash during the evenings only. This type of schedule has been successful in neighboring areas such as Higgins Beach, Scarborough, and Pine Point. From an enforcement standpoint, this type of provision should be easy to monitor because there is always a harbormaster or rangers present.

One question that arose was whether it may be beneficial to create a simple online survey for residents. However, the two public forums may be a sufficient venue for obtaining public opinion. The recent article in the Forecaster has also helped to provide awareness of the issues to the public.

Old Business/New Business:

None

Next Meeting:

Currently scheduled for April 19, which falls during school vacation. The date may be changed to April 26.