



RECREATION COMMISSION SPECIAL MEETING MINUTES June 5, 2017

1. Meeting called to order at 7:05 p.m.
2. Roll Call: Christopher Budnik, Mark Campbell, Richard Cook, Jason Krzysiak, Christine Matyas (left before voting), Scott Pietrzak, Catherine Russell, Wendy Schrag, Jacqueline Scully, Shawnie Stamper, Esther Winer
 - Absent: Jean Russell
3. Public Comments not on the Agenda
 - None
4. Consideration of the discussion about the Gainsboro Basketball Court.
 - Scott Pietrzak said the purpose of the meeting is to discuss the future of the Gainsborough Basketball Court. He reviewed the history of the court and behavior of some of the basketball players and visitors since the early 1990s. The court has experienced problems that are observed on many public courts nationwide.
 - Prior to Gainsboro Park's renovation, the basketball court had been closed since 2008. Due to feedback, the park's renovation plans included a new court, which re-opened late last year. In March, the court experienced a sharp increase in users and problems. Some of the incidences included: profanity, littering, public urination, extreme roughhousing, loud music, speeding and not observing traffic signs. When confronted, some of the offenders have not responded appropriately.
 - On April 19, after numerous incidents, Scott locked the rim and posted a letter explaining why the rim was locked. The Recreation Commission, which met on April 26, voted unanimously to keep the rim locked until further notice. Since April 19, no issues have been reported. Some residents, however, are unhappy that

the new court is closed. Scott recommended to the Recreation Commission that the court be reopened with a strategy for closing if there are issues. If three or more rules are broken within a rolling 14 day period, the rim will be locked for an unspecified time. If the rim has to be locked three times during a rolling one year period, it will be recommended that the court be permanently closed.

- Before residents shared their feedback, Commission members had some questions and comments.
 - i. Richard Cook asked about inquiries that the City has received about reopening the court. Scott said a number of residents have called or emailed.
 - ii. Esther Winer asked about a lock schedule, which Scott said is not practical. When Esther asked about the Rec Center being an alternative location for the basketball court, Scott said it would be similar to the current location because the entrance is not private. Esther suggested conducting a public basketball game or event for residents and non-residents to promote good will.
 - iii. Wendy Schrag agreed that a public event might improve relations. She also suggested that other wording be used for the posted letter.

- *Bill Rauch (90 Wellesley)*

He has observed other park visitors – not just basketball players – displaying unacceptable behavior. Also, he wondered if people even know the shelter’s bathrooms are available. (Scott said the building automatically locks at 9 p.m., and is under camera surveillance.)

- *Mike Valentine (65 Sylvan)*

After asking the cost to resurface the court (\$20,000), he said that teenagers need something to do. He also agreed that not many people know the bathrooms are open. He asked if it’s possible for residents to open and close the court. Finally, he said that three lockings per rolling year is too aggressive.

- *Frank Stutcher (85 Amherst)*

He agreed that there is not much for teenagers to do, and that the advantage to basketball (as opposed to tennis or other sports where equipment is needed) is that a lot of people can enjoy the court at the same time. He expressed concern about closing something that tax payers agreed to fund. He asked if the

increase in the number of dead end streets was making it harder for police to have presence.

- ***Police Chief Kevin Nowak***
Chief Nowak said police presence remains strong and confirmed that issues have disappeared since the court was closed. He discussed the challenge of having presence and giving the appearance of profiling.
- ***Cheryl Ramos (59 Kensington)***
After asking about the possibility of securing (key fobs) the court, she encouraged the police to continue the strong presence. She also suggested that the posted letter be replaced with clearly defined rules.
- ***Nathan Schoenfeld (28 Kensington)***
He supported reopening the court and suggested that there be signage about the bathrooms being open. When he asked about surveillance, Scott said that there is a camera inside and two outside.
- ***Debbie Kolesar (79 Maplefield)***
She asked about fencing with an evening autolock. Scott said that problems also happen during the day.
- ***Victor Furnari (46 Fairview)***
He would like the court to reopen as his son used it more than several times a week. (His son was also unaware of the bathrooms.) He asked if the City has ever identified troublemakers and would ticketing individuals decrease the number of incidences. Scott said there are three cameras on the court.
- ***Mark Campbell (Commission)***
He asked if signage regarding the camera surveillance can be installed.
- ***Joe Bizjak (54 Kensington)***
After reporting that he also was not aware of the bathrooms, he asked if police presence can be adjusted based on camera footage. He also said that three lockings is an aggressive number especially when some of the incidences may not be related to the people who are playing basketball.

- *Natalie Welco (76 Wellesley)*
She said she was disappointed when the court closed and asked if other visitors to the park were breaking the rules. Scott said the issues are not happening at non-basketball areas. When Natalie expressed concern that the City may be picking on a group of people, Scott said the focus was on safety.
- *Sherry Gerbi (90 Amherst)*
She said she misses having the court open and enjoying the energy of the people playing on it. She hoped that closing the court has taught a lesson and agreed that the rules should indeed be clear.
- *Jay Foreman (60 Oakdale)*
He asked the rhetorical question: How do we make sure offenders know cause and effect?
- *Richard Cook (Commission)*
He observed that there are two different types of visitors. Casual (young kids) and competitive. Is there a way to adjust the basket to accommodate one group of users? Scott said that adjustable rims don't work very well. Plus a "Triple Shot" will soon be installed on the playground near the shelter
- Christopher Budnik advised the residents that when the Commission voted to lock the rim on April 26 it was not to lock it permanently but to keep it closed until a solution could be reached. Tonight's feedback, e.g., posting clear rules, bathroom information, etc., has been helpful.
- Frank Stutcher asked if the Commission is an advisory or decision-making group. Scott answered that the Commission is an "Advisory Board."

Motion: I move that the recommended Basketball Court Policy and closure schedule be approved and that a park rules and court guidance sign (as discussed) be displayed near the rim.

Motion: E. Winer **Second:** C. Russell
Yeas: 7 **Nays:** 0

- Scott said the rim will be unlocked when the signage is posted, which will be within the week.

5. New Business

- **Richard Cook asked about addressing Amherst traffic. Scott said the speed trailer can be moved there to deter traffic. Additionally, a traffic counter could be installed to monitor activity going into the park.**

6. Adjournment

Motion:

**E. Winer
Yeas: 7**

**Second: J. Scully
Nays: 0**