

Recreation Commission Meeting
4/3/2023
Zoom

DATE: May 1, 2023
TIME: 2:33 PM

Commission Attendees: Paul Cowing (chair), Cortney Eldridge (secretary; acting chair tonight), Anthony Ferrante, Joshua Gould, Theresa O'Connor, Ken Krilla, Theresa O'Connor, Steve Warner

Town Attendees: Brandon Fitts

Guests: Pickleball community

Call to order 5:33pm

Minutes from last month (March 6th)

No changes

In favor: Anthony Ferrante, Josh Gould, Paul Cowing, Cortney Eldridge

Abstain: Steve Warner

Citizens Petition

Bylaw 40-325: Proposed that fees are waived for use of permit for parks site if permittee is 501c3 nonprofit based in Belmont, event is open to public, and attendees are not charged to attend

Discussion:

- Anthony: Our fee is reasonable, moving towards an enterprise fund; every user who uses the field should be charged for its use
- Cortney: Agree – reasonable fees, these groups potentially put wear and tear on the fields, and their use may prohibit other parties from using the fields at that time
- Paul: in agreement – fees are reasonable, an important part of our maintenance of the fields; to push the cost of a nonprofit group onto others who may or may not be able to attend is unfair
- Josh: the wording is unclear, “attendees are not charged a fee to attend” – does that mean “for a game”?; a change should be done holistically

Motion:

Recreation Commission does not support the Citizens Petition of removing the field fees for nonprofit group.

Favor: Anthony, Steve Warner, Josh Gould, Theresa O'Connor, Ken Krilla, Paul Cowing

Town Field Future Pickleball Court Management: Brandon

Background/context

- Residents expressing concerns and opinions on management of pickleball courts. Town Field will have four new pickleball courts when Town Field is done in May
- Playtime Scheduler app – a tool where you can find others (same skill level, geography, etc.)
- Some towns (e.g., Natick) has taken their court(s) off the app
- Options: keep the app; permit only some of the courts (e.g., half of them); do not allow any permitting

Discussion

Playtime app vs not

Fees for courts (reservations)

Overall vision of court(s) – first of a few conversations

- Anthony: spring is when this issue is particularly acute – tennis courts are heavily booked and limits the number of courts available
- Brandon: potentially could treat pickleball courts like tennis courts – keep two courts reservable for Belmont residents only
- Steve: How long have we been using Playtime Scheduler for other courts? Do you use it to reserve a court?
 - Brandon: Playtime Scheduler app – users across the country – not a “scheduling app” – is more so a meet-up time; if you’re not on the app, sometimes people have been asked to leave the courts and there is a conflict on the courts
- Anthony: app does not interact with the Belmont scheduling system
- Theresa: it’s incredibly popular and not a lot of courts are going to become overwhelmed
- Josh: It seems that anybody can list a court (independent of the policy?)
 - Brandon: this is correct – PQ courts are listed; but we do have the ability to remove the courts from the app if we choose
- Steve Warner: are there other locations in town that we keep “open to residents only”?
 - Brandon: no – public is public – we only reserve courts for town residents but you can show up and play; if somebody has a reservation then you may be asked to leave
- Ken: who does enforcement?
 - Brandon: part of the rub – we don’t always monitor the courts at all hours of each day
- Anthony: whatever we decide, there needs to be clear signage; further clarify – you can play with outside folks – the one who books the court must be a Belmont resident; we can have the same for pickleball
- Brandon: we see pickleball players stay on the courts for extended period of time (e.g., more than an hour)

Discussion

- Kathleen Hagan: majority of players who play in Belmont – we understand Playtime Scheduler is not a reservation system – it’s more of a meet-up/connector of people; it is a few people who may disrespect this and the community; flexibility of it makes it easy (and easy to communicate); Watertown has been very welcoming to use their courts and we’d like to invite folks to use the Belmont courts
- Amie Rumbo: echo Kathleen – in total agreement; Playtime Scheduler also allows us to see if another group wants to play at the same time, one of the groups could potentially move their group to a different time – if we move to permit-only, how do we see what’s booked?
- Joanne Hawkins: echo Kathleen too – there is a sign at Grove Tennis that says “For Belmont Residents Only” and we’re looking at this as all or nothing (which is not right). Maybe PQ can go onto Playtime – not all of them need to be on Playtime (such as the new courts). There are a lot of court – Cannalonga, Victory, Newton (and then ours). Could treat it “like the pool” – have a seasonal pass.
- Bob Singler: Watertown is not that pickleball friendly. People have been kicked off of pickleball courts; the pickleball Cannalonga court is an MDC court (not Watertown). Plays in Butler gym with a number of people and some concern that when Town Field opens up, we might be overrun by folks from the wider area. In favor of not putting Town Field on playtime scheduler for first season (at least). Let Belmont residents have the opportunity to use it more easily.

- Trey Klein: play a lot of pickleball and have never reserved on Playtime Scheduler and played “next to them” and they’re fine. Concerned about Belmont being a welcoming town and would like to see Playtime Scheduler come into all the courts (PQ, Town Field) and see how that goes for a year/season. You can have two pickleball games going per tennis court.
- Mary Beekman: both a tennis and pickleball player – concern is that now that we have 10 fewer courts than it used to (got rid of the HS courts) there are only 12 tennis courts in town. At the moment, the entire spring – at least 2 of them are rented out to schools and unavailable to citizens from 2:00 pm – 6:00 pm because schools have taken them over. Concern is this’ll be difficult to keep animosity out of the picture b/c pickleball and tennis players are in competition and would like creative solutions for pickleball and tennis to coexist.

Commission Comments/Discussion

- Courtney: I am potentially concerned with the season and speed of which we can make changes – my personal preference is to “go slow” and then change where needed
- Anthony: real issue is during High School tennis season – not many tennis courts available to public – would recommend not available on the app during the week day or take them off (and can put them back on after)
- Jean Cabral: wanted to ask Bob about the four courts of Town Field not on the app for the first year—how does that work
- Bob: if you keep it off the Playtime Scheduler, it may help reduce the crowds
- Kathleen: potentially only two of the four Town Field
- Paul: has been down at PQ since 4:00 pm and there hasn’t been anybody using it since he’s been here
- Brandon: General proposal – likes the Playtime Scheduler app. What if we put a few courts on the Playtime scheduler app from the get-go – could then remove Grove Street and PQ from the app – we could then say PQ will be pickleball courts and put nets in there for Belmont Residents only (tag system perhaps)
- Ken: general public would not necessarily know about Town Field if it’s not in the Playtime Scheduler app – if we have PQ and Grove Street open – it’s still a few options for pickleball players to use with the app

Next meetings

April 24th: 5:30pm on Zoom

May 15th: 5:30pm on Zoom

Adjourn 6:49pm