

City of Keene
New Hampshire

MUNICIPAL SERVICES, FACILITIES AND INFRASTRUCTURE COMMITTEE
MEETING MINUTES

Wednesday, February 8, 2017

6:00 PM

Council Chambers

Members Present:

Janis O. Manwaring, Chair
Randy L. Filiault, Vice-Chair
Robert J. O'Connor
Stephen L. Hooper
Gary P. Lamoureux

Staff Present:

Medard Kopczynski, City Manager
Elizabeth A. Fox, Assistant City
Manager/Human Resources Director

Chair Manwaring called the meeting to order at 6:00 PM and explained the procedures of the meeting.

1) PowerPoint Presentation - Parks Build "Community" - Parks, Recreation and Facilities Department

Chair Manwaring introduced the single item on the agenda for the meeting, a presentation by Andrew Bohannon, Parks, Recreation and Facilities Director, explaining the functions of his department.

Mr. Bohannon stated this presentation was the first of many departmental presentations that will be coming before MSFI and the other Standing Committees. He explained that last year the various presentations before the Standing Committees featured other public bodies, such as the Martin Luther King Committee or the Ashuelot River Park Committee, but that this year's presentations would focus on the great work accomplished by staff working behind the scenes. He said the title of the presentation – Parks Build Community – is related to the way Keene residents become attached to the area of the City in which they live through the use of the parks, rail trails and other amenities. He noted that the Parks, Recreation and Facilities Department is responsible for maintaining the quality of the amenities that people want in their community, the amenities that create fond memories for city residents.

Mr. Bohannon thanked Councilor Hooper for providing photos used in the presentation, on the Department's Facebook Page and on its Trails Page and in various brochures.

Mr. Bohannon introduced the mission statement of the Parks and Rec Dept., which identifies four key components that the department is tasked with supporting: quality of services and amenities including a park and cemetery system, environmental stewardship

of parks and open spaces, diverse programming, and active lifestyles for all ages from toddler play groups to Senior Shape-Up.

Next, Mr. Bohannon explained the department's vision statement, which he said highlights the community working together to provide lifelong opportunities and to be good stewards. He noted the examples of the Cal Ripken Baseball Association coming forward to help clean up the fields they use or the Monadnock Conservancy walking city properties and reporting on their status and working with department staff to learn about the different trail systems.

Mr. Bohannon stated that the vision statement also includes a commitment to providing well maintained assets and quality infrastructure to all who want to use city facilities. He pointed out the importance of connectivity, ensuring that everyone has the opportunity to be connected to park and trails systems that enhance the quality of life in the city. He said the vision statement reflects the goals of Healthy Monadnock 2020.

Mr. Bohannon explained the make-up of the department, which he said includes 13 fulltime employees, 2 (soon to be 3) part-time employees. He also noted that the majority and backbone of the department's work is provided by 70 seasonal part-time employees -- high school, college and some folks in between jobs -- employed to do maintenance work, to take care of city pools, and to do the youth trails programs. He stated that in many case these jobs represent a first introduction into the workforce for individuals, sometimes at a very young age. He said the department is very pleased with the way the current structure is working.

Next, Mr. Bohannon identified the properties being managed by his department on a map, which shows the parkland and trail system. In addition, he said that the department manages city buildings, human resources including volunteers and employees, as well as the different amenities in place within parks (ball parks, playgrounds, ice rinks, a campground) as well as other city facilities. He said his department is currently reviewing the campground – the way it functions and its revenue streams – to determine its role in the future.

In the next slide, titled "Community Involvement," Mr. Bohannon said he is presenting the ways in which the department meets its vision. He listed and described ways in which his department fosters community involvement, through Spirit of Place, its work with volunteers associated with the Martin Luther King/Jonathan Daniels Committee, the Ashuelot River Park Advisory Board, Pathways for Keene, sports leagues, and the arts community. He said that his department was responsible for soliciting the artists who painted the mural at the Recreation Center a few years ago and that the department was currently working with the same muralist, Jeanne-Marie Eayrs, to do a mural at the Michael E.J. Blastos Community Room. He said that mural project is being coordinated with public and private schools in the city.

Then Mr. Bohannon introduced Chuck Sweeney, superintendent of maintenance parks and cemeteries, who was to speak about the way his part of the Department functions.

Mr. Sweeney began his presentation with an explanation of the active and passive recreation assets for which he oversees the maintenance. He explained that the difference between active and passive recreation relates to whether or not a given activity is based on a plan. He cited organized sports as an example of active recreation. He mentioned such programs as the youth flag football, the Cal Ripken League, and softball teams. He said that passive recreation areas, such as Ashuelot River Park, Goose Pond and Shadow Lake, provide people with opportunities to gather together to enjoy the open spaces in a less organized way.

Mr. Sweeney stated that he would explain the functions of the recreation responsibilities by describing the department's work through the seasons.

In the winter, Mr. Sweeney said, the department is responsible for plowing the police department parking lot, the skating rink, the ice arena, and at other locations such as the parking lot at Goose Pond. He described the ice-making work the department does at Wheelock Park, the skating rink, the hockey rink, also the rink known as the "kiddie rink," encompassing both active and passive recreation. He mentioned the skating provided at Robin Hill Park as well, relating how changing weather conditions create the need for frequent repair and upkeep of the ice. He stated that maintenance of the ice requires that staff get to work flooding the surface at 4 am, which is the optimum time for refurbishing the ice.

He said the department's other winter work includes brush cutting and tree work, painting and other maintenance projects, which this year entailed work on a vented pesticide storage area, a gasoline storage area, and equipment repair, and the department's trailers.

Mr. Sweeney said spring work usually begins with snow removal from the fields because the teams want to begin play by a certain date. Then, he said, staff turns its attention to ballfield preparation, which is a very involved process. He explained that the fields first need to be rototilled two or three times, and then adjustments are made with the addition of sand or clay, the fields are rolled, scarified and leveled using a ladder rigged up for that purpose.

He explained that clean-up is a major part of the work that is undertaken in the spring, involving all the fields, the recreation center and the parks. Staff mechanically rake, over-seed, and fertilize the fields. The bathrooms, irrigation systems, and the campground are put in order and repaired if necessary in preparation to a new season of use.

Mr. Sweeney explained that summer brings work on swimming pools and the splash pad at Wheelock Park to prepare them for a new season of use. He said water is drained and leaves are removed from the covers, and the pools are cleaned. The chemical and chlorination process are adjusted as needed.

He stated that mowing and weed-wacking take a major amount of the time for maintenance staff in the summer because it entails the upkeep of 4,123,000 square feet – 95 acres – per week. In order to fulfill that work, he said, the department employs three full-time people, one contract worker, and five seasonal workers (college and advanced high school students) hired for eight weeks in the summer.

In addition, he described the daily work undertaken by grounds crews to maintain a desired level of playability on the city's fields. He said that requires the crew to rake, scarify the infields, re-roll and re-level, and maintain the irrigation systems. He said the softball season extends over 18 weeks, the baseball season over 13 weeks plus four weeks of postseason playoff time, followed by six weeks of fall baseball. Each year, he said, his crew do 960 ballfield preps. He said ballfield maintenance requires painting the lines on the field once or twice each week, which averages 5,850 feet of paint for 13 fields, which is about 179,200 feet during the course of the season, or about 34 miles of painting done by the city's dedicated staff each year. He said that the crew puts down five pallets of lime, or 12,500 pounds of lime, on the batter's boxes and pitching circle during the course of a season.

Mr. Sweeney stated that in the fall, work is undertaken to close up the recreational areas, including pools, and to prepare for the winter. He said this is when the bulk of the field aeration, over-seeding and mechanical brush cutting, and leaf pick-up are accomplished, as well as work to prepare the hockey rink for the winter. At the same time, he said, staff lays out fields for soccer and flag football, which requires another eight miles of paint.

Regarding the community gardens, located at Monadnock View Cemetery, Mr. Sweeney noted that rototilling and marking off a total of 88 plots is accomplished in the spring. This year, 36 plots were used, he said, noting that the usage of the community gardens has increased over the past few years.

Mr. Sweeney said the maintenance of cemetery properties is accomplished with the help of two fulltime and two summer employees. He said active burials are taking place at Monadnock View, Woodland, Woodland Northeast, West, and Greenlawn cemeteries. He reported that there were 37 full casket lots and 19 cremation lots sold in 2016, but he noted that there were additional cremation burials performed on existing full casket lots. Last year, he said, there were 39 full casket burials and 60 cremation burials, for a total of 99 burials. He stated that his office functions almost like a funeral service, helping families with cremation burials. He mentioned the landscape work that is done in the cemeteries, including mowing, leaf pick-up, seeding, fertilizing, and spring clean-up.

In conclusion, Mr. Sweeney thanked the committee for providing him with the opportunity to report on the work of his part of the department.

Next Megan Spaulding, Recreation Programmer, reported on recreation activities provided for city residents of all ages.

Ms. Spaulding reported that the Department offers a wide range sports programs for youth, including soccer, flag football, basketball, and also an afterschool program called CATCH, three playground summer camps at Wheelock and Robin Hood parks, and Adventure Camp located at the Rec Center for 12- and 13-year-olds. She said the department offers swim lessons at both the pools and has a jump rope team, which started three years ago with about ten children and now has 18 members who participate in competitions. She reported that the Archery Program at the Rec Center, which began more than 30 years ago, continues to be successful. She said that there were 884 participants in youth programs in 2015, in youth programs generally, and in 2016 that number increased by about 10 percent, bringing the total to 969 participants.

Ms. Spaulding reported that adult recreation programs include a kick ball league, men's basketball and a co-ed indoor soccer league. She said that there were 336 adult participants in recreational teams in 2015, and that number fell to 300 in 2016. She noted that 46 adult volunteers served as coaches for various sports this past year, helping to make youth programs successful.

Ms. Spaulding cited a collaboration between the Keene Housing Authority and the Recreation Department as an example of the way recreational programs can be used to improve the quality of life in the city. She said that last year the collaboration brought 22 children into the department's programs, and noted that she expects to see the number of participants increase this year based on the fact that in the first two months of the year 11 kids have already joined youth basketball.

She said that the Revolving Fund is supplemented by youth and adults sports binder fees, pointing out that the fees cover all of the supplies and the uniforms, and the required staffing, including the seasonal help, the officials and scorekeepers.

She stated that on Monday, February 6th, registration for the three summer camps began, and in three business days there were 110 registrants for 180 openings. She said that she expected that all remaining openings will be filled by the end of February, so the department is looking forward to a very successful summer season.

Chair Manwaring asked about the relationship between the Rec Department and such organizations as the Monadnock Squares and the Rugby league. Ms. Spaulding explained that rugby is operated like men's and women's softball in that each has its own board and the Rec Department works with them. The teams use the fields and Monadnock Squares uses the Rec Center, making an in-kind donation to the city at the end of the year to be used for improvements to the Rec Center.

Scott Martin, facilities manager, thanked the committee for the opportunity to explain what facilities management entails. He said that most people understand that facilities management is involved with keeping the city buildings clean and fixing things when repairs are needed, but noted that there is much more to it than that.

Mr. Martin explained that his department looks at Capital Improvement Program (CIP) and tries to assign priorities to the projects identified in the program. He noted that there are a large number of jobs that need to be done and that his department attempts to get as many of the earmarked jobs accomplished as possible. He said that they try to keep the CIP projects on schedule, but that adjustments sometimes have to be made based on needs that come up during the year.

Mr. Martin said his staff provides the routine maintenance on all the mechanical systems in the buildings, including the boilers, the HVAC systems, changing out air filters, installing belts on equipment. He said that they are working with the IT Department to bring in a cartegraph program to help the department track all the city's Project Management (PM) programs.

In addition, Mr. Martin said, his department works very closely with the purchasing department both with the Joint Procurement Initiative (JPI) and with day-to-day operations to find ways to save money for the city. He said they've gone out for bids for electricity, propane and number two heating fuels. He said that they signed a two-year contract to purchase electricity at a price of 0.0717 cents per kilowatt hour. He stated they bought bulk propane for the 350 Marlboro Street complex and were able to lock in a price of 89 cents per gallon. For the smaller tanks, he said, they were able to lock in a price of \$1.15 per gallon, whereas the current going rate is \$2.99 per gallon. He reported that his department looks for ways to work with the school district, the county and the Keene Housing, to save money by purchasing materials in bulk. He cited recent moves to partner with the school district to purchase custodial supplies and to contract together for relatively small roof repair, which have resulted in significant savings.

Mr. Martin said that the Department also works with the Environmental Purchasing Team, the EP3 team, which is a small group that focuses on finding ways to purchase items in an environmentally friendly way. He cited one small initiative accomplished with the EP 3 team, involving replacing failing water coolers with a type that allowed people to fill their own water bottles. As a result, he said, 20,000 bottles were saved over the course of a year by people using their own bottles.

He said the department also made use of a report generated by EMG Assessment of all city facilities, which involved an in-depth assessment of everything from mechanical systems, to building structures, to carpeting and floor tiles. He said the report was used as a tool to help the department evaluate and make projections about the work that will be needed in city facilities.

He said the city has about 650,000 square feet of building space, which the departments attempts to maintain as economically as possible. He pointed out that the best-laid plans don't always work out as planned, for example the plan to install a new air conditioning system at the airport terminal, but adjustments are made and work moves forward.

In summary, he said, that facilities staff, working behind the scenes most of the time, is always open to suggestions for ways to improve.

Mr. Bohannon expressed appreciation for the fine work of Mr. Sweeney, Ms. Spaulding and Mr. Martin.

Mr. Bohannon continued the presentation with a report on trails, which is not in the department's title, but which start with the Planning Department, get constructed by the Public Works Department, and are handed off to the Parks and Rec Dept. to maintain. He said that a couple years ago his department created KeenePaths.com as a marketing vehicle to get the word out about the trail system. He said his department takes care of the marketing and the collaboration with all the different interested groups such as Pathways for Keene, the Monadnock Conservancy and Antioch University. The university, he said, is adopting a trail section from West Street down to Island St. extending to a new section of the Cheshire Rail Trail all the way to Winchester Street, and has committed to adding some amenities such as bike repair stations.

In addition, he mentioned the opening of the South Bridge in the spring and a plan by Pathways for Keene to provide solar lighting along some of the trails. The latest project, he said, is the Cheshire Rail Trail Phase Three, for which there is a public meeting at the Rec Center on Monday, February 13th at 6 PM in Room 14.

Mr. Bohannon finished the presentation with a report on plans for the future. He said the department has begun using cartegraph, an asset management program used to build a database so the department can make better informed decisions. He said the department has RecDesk, which is the software the department is using to get better program data. He also cited the department's work with Community Services, both senior and youth services.

Mr. Bohannon explained that the department approaches its work with a question: "How might we . . .?" He said the "how" assumes that there are solutions out there, and the "might" implies that it is acceptable to put any idea on the table, and the "we" signals that the department members will all work together. Using that question, he said, enables all members to feel free to share their ideas.

He turned the question to the committee regarding how his department might help to have people "work, play, and stay" in the community. He emphasized the need to use the amenities offered by the Parks and Recreation Department to keep college students to remain in the community after they graduate. He pointed out that activities sponsored by the Parks and Rec Dept., such as tournaments, contribute to the economic development of the city.

City Manager Kopczynski pointed out that Mr. Bohannon was the first of the department supervisors to volunteer to present a detailed discussion of his department's work to the City Council. He told the committee that it would be seeing more of these discussions from various departments, although not all departments will be providing presentations to this particular committee. He said that it is important to get feedback from the city council as the council evaluates programmatic issues not just departmental issues.

In addition, City Manager Kopczynski said, he would like the council members to consider the prominent role of community services in Mr. Bohannon's presentation. He noted that when talking about such services as those provided by the library and Parks and Recs it really means talking about cultural value.

Mr. Kopczynski reported that the Parks and Rec Department has focused on furthering the credentials and education of its staff, and asked that Mr. Bohannon to provide specific information regarding that. Mr. Bohannon said that there had been a full turnover of the department's front office, but that the new staff members were doing a great job becoming familiar with the operations of the department. He noted that the department has staff who are certified pool operators and certified building operators. In addition, he said Mr. Sweeney has a pesticide license and Ms. Spaulding is working towards certification as a Parks and Rec professional, a credential that Mr. Bohannon said he holds.

Mr. Bohannon said it was a real pleasure to work with the staff of his department that all contribute to the success of his department.

Council Philip Jones thanked Mr. Bohannon for the very educational presentation, which he said would set a high bar for future presentations by other departments.

Councilor Lamoureux made the following motion, which was seconded by Councilor Filiault.

On a vote of 5 – 0, the Municipal Services, Facilities and Infrastructure Committee recommends the report from the Parks, Recreation and Facilities Department be accepted as informational.

The meeting adjourned at 6:56 PM.

Respectfully submitted by,
Kathleen Fleming, Minute Taker

Additional Edits by,
Terri M. Hood, Assistant City Clerk