

Joint School Advisory Committee Meeting

Minutes of the October 18, 2006 Meeting

A meeting of the Joint Advisory Committee was held on Wednesday, October 4, 2006 at the Portsmouth Middle School, Room 106.

Attendance: Present:
Chair: Joanne Grasso, Councilor
City Council Member: Ned Raynolds, Tom Ferrini
School Board Members: Nancy Novelline Clayburgh, Sheri Ham Garrity
Planning Board: Anthony Coviello
Advisory Members: Rose Sulley and Eric Weinrieb
Ex-Officio: Robert Lister, John Stokel, Helen Maldini and Steve Bartlett

Presenter: Rus Wilson, Athletic Director

Call To Order: Chair Grasso called the meeting of the Joint School Advisory Committee to order at 7:00 p.m.

Minutes Approved: The Chair called for the approval of the October 4, 2006 minutes. Ms. Ham Garrity moved and Mr. Raynolds seconded the approval of the minutes. The motion was unanimously approved with the understanding that the map request of the area from City Manager John Bohenko was for review only and no other purpose.

Presentation: Dr. Arthur Maerlander was unable to come to speak with the group tonight. He will be contacted to reschedule.

Athletic Director Rus Wilson spoke to the committee about the athletic fields within the City. He represents the school department and the city recreation department. Mr. Wilson explained that the city and school have used city and school fields extensively and cooperatively and are finding a shortage of fields to accommodate all of the athletic teams.

The Portsmouth Middle School has over 30 girls playing field hockey, over 60 athletes playing soccer with 2 boys teams and 1 girls teams, boys lacrosse, girls lacrosse, 2 softball teams and 2 baseball teams. The Middle School does not have soccer, lacrosse or field hockey fields. The softball/baseball field is used by the school teams and several recreation teams including teens and adults. The soccer team plays at the high school which is a vastly reduced field, 2/3 of a regulation field. Lacrosse plays all their games away since we have no Lacrosse field.

Over the last 10 – 15 years there has been a great increase in the sports participants but there are not enough fields for them to play on. Most sports teams do not have practice time. Soccer and Lacrosse have increased drastically over the past 10 – 15 years. Over 700 athletes added to soccer, hundreds to lacrosse but there are not enough fields. Football has now started at the 2nd and 3rd grade level. There is only 1 football field for all the teams.

Some teams share the fields at the same time in order to get practices. Recreation teams do not practice because there is no place for them to practice.

The Alumni Field at the Middle School has the only regulation lit softball field in the city. This field is used by men's softball, women's softball, high school softball, middle school softball, middle school field hockey, middle school lacrosse, numerous recreation teams, wiffleball, t-ball, and a summer day camp.

Tens of thousands of dollars have been spent by our adult leagues to build bathrooms, concession stand, lights, and upkeep of the field. If Alumni field is eliminated there would be no place for all these teams to play. Many issues would arise in replacing this field including transportation which is very costly.

Discussion:

One football, 1 more soccer field, 1 lacrosse 1 soft ball and 1 baseball field added would still find the city short of fields. Every field in the city is used by the school teams and the recreation teams. Newer sports are an issue. Five years ago lacrosse was not a big sport. Soccer is also a fairly new sport. Even the band uses the fields for practices and competitions.

It is hoped that the Parrott Avenue proposal will not eliminate the field. But there is no site plan at this time to determine this. The Jones Avenue proposal shows potentially a multi purpose field, one soccer, one baseball, and one softball field. Jones could possible add tennis courts which are also needed. Currently the tennis courts are in poor condition with fewer courts now. Sometimes the teams have to use the tennis courts at Leary Field for practice and games. The middle school also uses the fields for gym classes with 3 gym classes per period during the school day.

Synthetic Fields provide more time to play on the field with less maintenance such as mud issues and mowing. It would not provide more fields, just a longer playing season.

This shortage of fields came about due to the evolution of the sports teams without the addition of fields. If a field were added at the old stump dump field is one multi purpose field the size of a soccer field. This community is active in sports from adults to youths and has many athletic teams in various sports.

There have been requests over the last few years for state funding but those have been granted to other towns. 3 years ago lacrosse was not a high school sport. Now there are 6 teams. Elementary has added lacrosse.

There are other students who wish to play other sports but there are not enough fields available. Ultimate Frisbee has just been added with 40 – 50 students involved at the high school.

Also at issue is that sports are no longer seasonal. Some athletes play more than one sport at a time and at times there are overlaps of participation in multiple sports.

About 5 years ago the Athletic Committee accepted the philosophy of the Middle School Concept that no athletes should be cut from teams. Every student that wants to play is allowed to play. This is another reason for the increase in the number of teams.

The school gets many requests from the community and from AAU teams asking to use the fields. These requests cannot be granted due to the number of teams already using the fields for games and practices.

Handout: Chair Grasso handed out information given to her from Diane Kelley Teft, Citizens for Preservation of the Peirce Family Trust.

Not all of the area residents agree with the view of this Citizens group.

There was an interest in having a public hearing about the use of the Peirce Property due to misinformation in the public. The City Council would be responsible to call for a public hearing. Until critical information is available, there will not be a public hearing. There is a need to be informed of the costs and what the plans are, and have a comparison of the two sites prior to any public hearing even being considered.

Action Steps: Remove from the table to the motion concerning the Parrott Avenue site. Moved by Mr. Coviello and seconded by Mr. Ferrini. All approved unanimously.

Phase I:

An A/E consulting firm is asked to submit a proposal and fee with hourly rates to study the feasibility of expanding and renovating the current middle school building at Parrot Ave. The study should determine if it is feasible to expand and/or demolish portions of the existing middle school building and expand onto other city-owned land. At this point, the consultant would be asked to ignore any deed restrictions.

The consultant would be expected to provide up to five (5) conceptual site plans that includes the outline of any building expansion/demolition, parking, traffic routing, and playing fields. The study should consider the programmatic needs as described in the Middle School Needs Assessment Summary provided by the School Department. These include but are not limited to, a middle school building structure of 180,000 sf (minimum) housing classrooms, offices, library, a gymnasium, etc. all meeting the goals of the middle school concept. The

consultant is not expected to develop an interior layout plan of any buildings, however the shape of the building should not prohibit team teaching and cluster learning - key components to the middle school concept.

The study should include the consideration of adjacent city-owned land for parking and fields, with the understanding that additional playing fields might be considered at a separate location. The study should not exclude the use of the Peirce Land for building expansion, parking, and/or playing fields. However, use of the Peirce Land should be limited to the smallest impact necessary. The selected consultant is encouraged to provide innovative traffic, parking, and building configuration solutions to this constrained but valued location for a middle school.

All city files shall be made available to the selected firm.

The consultant would be expected to complete this work in 2 to 3 weeks and report back to the Joint School Advisory Committee at one (1) evening meeting on January 15th.

The motion was approved unanimously.

The sub committee will be meeting to gather the information for both the Jones site and the Parrott Avenue site to determine what needs to be done to obtain an equal comparison. The sub committee will return to the JSAC committee with a report of what has already been done at the Parrott Avenue site. The sub committee will be meeting on October 31, 2006. It would be beneficial to have all work already done available to the sub committee before the 31st so the members of the sub committee can review the information and have questions ready when they meet on the 31st with Steve Parkinson of the Department of Public Works, Team Design and Appledore. We need to acquire all the information on Phase I of the Jones Avenue site and proceed with the Phase I on Parrott Avenue site. The sub committee will come back to the JSAC committee on November 8, 2006 with a report.

The Jones Avenue site walk was very helpful. Looking at the rough draft shows the building on wetlands. Every site will have its issues; taking land, wetlands, purchasing lands, bussing. Each site needs a value given to it but not until all the necessary information about these two sites is gathered and reviewed.

Future Meetings: Wednesday, November 8, 2006, 7:00 p.m., Portsmouth Middle School, Room 106.

Tuesday, November 21, 2006, 7:00 p.m., Portsmouth Middle School, Room 106 or other - look for signs.

Thursday, December 14, 2006, 7:00 p.m., Portsmouth Middle School, Room 106 or other – look for signs.

The meeting was adjourned at 8:55 p.m.

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