

CITY COUNCIL WORK SESSION

Comprehensive Recreation Needs Study

September 7, 2010 – 6:00 p.m.

Eileen Dondero Foley Council Chambers

City Council Present: Mayor Ferrini, Assistant Mayor Novelline Clayburgh, Councilors Lister, Hejtmanek, Spear, Coviello, Dwyer, Kennedy and Smith

Staff Present: John P. Bohenko, City Manager, Rus Wilson, Recreation Director, David Moore, Community Development Director and Valerie French, Deputy City Clerk I

Recreation Board Members Present: Carl Diemer, Chair, Elaine Syracuse, Kent LaPage and Kathy Birse-Siegel.

Mayor Ferrini called the work session to order at 6:00 p.m.

Recreation Board Chairman Diemer explained that the study was completed in May 2010 and forwarded to the Council for their review. He thanked the public for their comments during the process and the stakeholder group discussions that were held. He stated there were also 3 public input sessions held. He continued that the Recreation Board feels that recreation is key to the quality of life in Portsmouth, but is not guaranteed. He stated we need to act to ensure that there is adequate field space and to replace the Connie Bean Recreation Center and although there is a cost associated with these, there is also a cost associated with not taking action. He then introduced Recreation Director Wilson and Community Development Director Moore to discuss looking at the whole scope of needs going forward.

Mr. Moore gave a power point presentation of the process of reviewing the Outdoor Recreational Fields. He stated the general recommendation is new field development based on needs assessment including 3-4 rectangular, multi-use fields and 2-3 adult softball fields. He continued that 2 of the top potential new field locations are Jones Avenue and Peverly Hill Road/Route 33 sites.

Mr. Wilson then reviewed the indoor recreation needs stating that the findings conclude that it is inefficient to run separate programs and that a downtown location is preferred to youth recreation. He reviewed the current facilities and the various issues involved with each including Connie Bean Center which is 100 years old, Spinnaker Point which is leased, Greenleaf Recreation Center and the Indoor Pool Facility. He stated that a long-view recommendation is to have a consolidated, modestly-sized comprehensive recreation and aquatic center. He stated this would provide options for a multi-generational recreation facility and possibly include future partnerships with surrounding towns. He stated other potential partners include wellness and recreational non-profit organizations. He stated the near-term recommendation includes replacing the Connie Bean Center possibly by adding a second gymnasium to the Middle School project. He stated this would provide the opportunity of keeping the facility in the desired downtown location as well as provide for combining of maintenance services, utilities, etc. Finally he discussed the Indoor Pool facility which

currently is under the control of SIPP for 18 months for a targeted turnover date of 12/31/2011 or could be closed if the Council chooses to do so.

Recreation Board Member Birse-Siegel stated that there is a need for the additional space at the middle school and would allow for the carry-over for after-school programs.

Mr. Diemer stated that the consultants did a great job and gave due diligence. He stated the answers are in the report for possible inclusion in the CIP.

Mr. LaPage, School Board Representative to the Recreation Board stated that all of the schools need recreation space. He continued that this was being discussed 16 years ago and has been band-aided ever since. He stated that former Mayor Sirrell wanted this to be a city for children but these projects have been put off and put off. He continued that there have been a number of studies and 5 years ago, one of the recommendations was to have Rus Wilson serve as Athletic Director for the High School which has worked out well and allowed for better scheduling of the city's fields. He stated that even so, the fields are overused and will be worn out in 5-10 years. He stated he also feels it is time to do something with the Connie Bean Center and to have a multi-use complex especially with childhood obesity on the rise. He concluded by stating that this report is timely and it is time to do something.

City Manager Bohenko stated it is important to note that we will be beginning work on the CIP for FY12-17 so he will want direction from the Council and Recreation Board as to how to go forward and feels it should be at least put in the plan to start the conversation. He further explained the CIP process which is a long-term plan and includes a public hearing before being adopted by the Council. He stated that once adopted by the Council, those items are not funded until another vote is held by the Council for each item.

Assistant Mayor Novelline Clayburgh asked when the Council will be asked about including a new gymnasium as part of the middle school project. Councilor Dwyer replied that ideally it would be November, but the bids with alternatives won't come back to the JBC until January. Mayor Ferrini stated that procedurally, if it is the request of the JBC to put it on the agenda, then he will do so.

City Manager Bohenko clarified that it is not his intent to make any decisions tonight but does feel we need to concentrate on the Connie Bean Center. He stated there are restrictions on the deed or it reverts back to a non-existent entity so we do have to take action on that so that it will go into a recreation trust fund.

Councilor Coviello asked the City Manager to do a cost assessment of savings if the Connie Bean Center is eliminated.

Councilor Hejtmanek asked about the fields. Mr. Wilson stated that the multi-use fields are ideal as they can overlap uses, but feels it is good to have separate softball fields as well.

Councilor Spear stated he likes the idea of regional use for the indoor facility but wonders if that could also work for the outside fields as well. City Manager Bohenko explained that we have reached out to other towns in the past but didn't get the response we expected. He stated we will continue to reach out.

Councilor Dwyer stated she agrees with Councilor Spear but knows that Portsmouth is where people would rather stay for their recreational uses especially in terms of cost and time trade-offs.

Councilor Coviello asked was the community campus property explored for this use. Mr. Wilson stated it was, but it wasn't a good fit in the final analysis.

Councilor Kennedy asked about the other communities and if they weren't interested or not financially capable to participate. City Manager Bohenko explained that they reached out to the recreation boards and not the town councils and had some good reaction and some not so much. He stated that when dealing with towns they have to go through the town meeting process in many cases and it is a slow process.

Discussion continued on various opportunities that have been or could be explored for regionalization of services.

Councilor Coviello asked if we are legally allowed to purchase land in other towns. Mr. Bohenko replied yes, but we would be taxed on it.

Councilor Lister asked about the aquatic/indoor facility and if down the road we don't include an aquatic facility, would SIPP continue on without us. Mr. Bohenko stated that this is a long-range recommendation and SIPP understands that there may be changes in the long-term.

Assistant Mayor Novelline Clayburgh stated that she visited a complex in Michigan which had public and private sponsors and also locally, the Roger Allen Park in Rochester is similarly structured and wonders if we have looked into this type of partnership. Mr. Moore stated yes, that option is a part of the presentation.

Councilor Spear stated he had discussed back in May a facility he had visited in Vermont which was very heavily used. He stated it was a non-profit center but did have a benefactor. He stated that it was 95% supported by admissions with only 5% subsidized. He stated he supports the long-range conclusions but doesn't feel that it only needs to be youth recreation located downtown as he feels adults would also like that location.

Councilor Coviello agrees stating that we are not a younger city like Dover and Rochester and we are also a tourist city 12 months a year and feels we need to combine the best of everything that Portsmouth has to offer.

Councilor Smith asked about upgrading the elementary school fields stating that New Franklin field sits empty most of the time as well as the school gymnasiums.

Mr. Diemer stated that aquatic facilities are more of the hot topic and more and more of those facilities are become self-supporting. He stated that the fields issue is more challenging. He stated that the Connie Bean Center is a no brainer and will be easy to accomplish and the land trust money could go into a recreation fund for a gymnasium.

Councilor Dwyer stated she agrees and feels we should put the Connie Bean Center into this years' CIP and put a multi-use facility in the horizon for future discussion. She continued regarding multi-use fields stating she would want to see more exploration of involving other communities and perhaps replacing the turf with artificial turf as it has been successful at Portsmouth High School.

Councilor Kennedy stated that in this time of public/non-profit partnerships, we should look at the long term goals and short-term successes. She also stated that she would also like to know how much more field time in terms of minutes/hours can be utilized with artificial turf. Finally, she stated that she agrees with Councilor Smith that the existing school fields should be looked at for maximum usage.

Recreation Director Wilson stated that the fields can be used for 400-500 hours with artificial turf. Kathy Birse Siegel stated this is the first year of artificial turf and now we are also incorporating the Middle School so it will only get better. Mr. Wilson continued that artificial turf will help, but as far as the current fields at the elementary schools, most of those are too small and have been over-used.

At 6:55 p.m., Mayor Ferrini closed the meeting.

Respectfully submitted by:

Valerie A. French,
Deputy City Clerk I