



**CITY OF PORTSMOUTH, NEW HAMPSHIRE  
GOVERNANCE COMMITTEE  
MEETING MINUTES  
MONDAY, FEBRUARY 13, 2023 – 10:00 a.m.  
Conference Room A  
City Hall Complex, 1 Junkins Avenue  
Portsmouth, NH 03801**

- 1. Welcome and Call to Order - 10:05 a.m.**
- 2. Roll Call** – Councilor Cook, Councilor Lombardi, Councilor Tabor all present. Also present was Deputy City Manager/Deputy City Attorney Suzanne Woodland (DCM), Peter Loughlin on behalf of the Trees and Greenery Committee, Tom Watson on behalf of the Prescott Park Master Plan Implementation Committee, Barbara McMillan on behalf of the Portsmouth Conservation Commission, Michael Griffin on behalf of the Trees and Greenery and Cemetery Commission, and Carl Diemer, Chairman of the Portsmouth Recreation Board.
- 3. Review and Approval of Minutes** – No action taken.
- 4. Old Business**
  - a. Park Discussion**

Councilor Cook shared that that Governance Committee started a discussion about parks about a year ago. Staff input was received previously. Discussion currently centers on getting input from several different committees, those represented here today to evaluate who at the citizen-level is taking a look at strategic planning with regard to parks and open spaces.

Carl Diemer spoke on the history of the Recreation Board. Regarding parks, from his perspective, they typically have someone from the Department of Public Works (DPW) sit on their board for input on maintenance and repairs of fields and buildings. As a Board, they would decide what needed more attention first and that would be something that would be open to public input. The Board would then communicate that to DPW. The Board also suggests programming in some of the parks for recreation purposes, whether it be for adults or children.

The DCM gave input as to where the Recreation Board is established under Chapter 1, section 1.304 Recreation Board. It is a very short ordinance, and it speaks on the Recreation Board's functions. The Recreational Needs Study will also be completed soon. Mr. Diemer highlighted the anticipation for a work session with City Council.

Councilor Lombardi spoke on the health of areas that are not necessarily recreational oriented, but conservation, i.e. the trees, and the health of the spots that have natural paths or animals paths going through them that people use for passive

recreation also need to be looked at and maintained to make sure those are all healthy.

Mr. Watson asked if the Needs survey covered passive recreation like trails and walking trails, and things of that nature. Mr. Diemer said it was to look at not so much new trails, but existing trails and parks. There was additional discussion on future trails.

Councilor Tabor spoke about adding more parks and green spaces within the City. He asked who the advocate amongst the committees is for looking around and asking where there could be more green space. He asked Ms. McMillan if it is the Conservation Committee. He asked who provides input if a person wants to donate land.

Ms. McMillan answered saying part of the Conservation Commission's mission is to protect greenspaces for conservation purposes as authorized by State statutes. She described the efforts made to-date to preserve the Great Bog and acquire other conservation easements within the City. Lately, they have been working with City Council and Planning to secure some funds through the Capital Improvement Plan (CIP) to have funds for conservation and identifying parcels.

Councilor Cook stated all input is helpful to find out who is thinking about a comprehensive plan very broadly with the Master Plan coming up.

Ms. McMillan reported briefly on the Conservation Commission's Open Space Plan and the use of volunteers to monitor properties.

Councilor Cook wanted to ensure everyone knew there was no prejudgment of what will be coming out of the Governance Committee. That is why all were asked to come and have these discussions, sharing thoughts and views so they can make a more informed decision.

Tom Watson spoke on this history of the Prescott Park process. He handed out the Policy Committee Report and a summary of the Master Planning report and spoke about each. He summarized that from his perspective the Recreational Board has been doing well supporting activities and programming. The Conservation Commission had an overview of City greenspace assets. Prescott Park has had the benefit of extensive study in the last 5 years. Maybe of benefit is to determine which committee could look at and create a comprehensive approach to overseeing policies in parks throughout the City (not focused on programming). He also added the committee he presently is attending on behalf of, is designed to sunset as soon as the Park's Master Plan is built out which is a few more years. His view is that moving Prescott Park's responsibilities over to the City Manager with direction has been useful.

Mr. Griffin asked Mr. Watson if the Master Plan takes into consideration the effects of climate change and with what impacts.

Mr. Watson stated it does. There would be need for adjustment for climate changes, for example, the height of the seawall is impacted by climate change and there are plans to move buildings and add subsurface drainage.

Peter Loughlin spoke for the Trees and Greenery Committee. First stating their committee advocates for trees and greenery in public spaces. He gave some history background on what their committee does. Spoke on the 400th anniversary. They are planting 400 trees for the anniversary and 200 extra trees are available for the public. The information and instructions are on the City's website.

Michael Griffin spoke regarding the Cemetery Committee. He gave background about the committee and their upcoming events. DCM added that the public does use the cemetery grounds to walk their dogs to have that greenspace and its serving as a greenspace component within the City. It also serves as a connectivity space for those passive recreation users/walkers. Mr. Griffin also added during COVID shutdown there were many family using the cemeteries for exercise and to be outdoors.

Councilor Lombardi asked to be able to filter "cemeteries" on MapGeo. He believes it would be a good thing to add.

Councilor Tabor asked if there was a key to all the historic gravesites so someone could walk though and see Levi Woodbury? Mr. Griffin answered a member of the Athenium does walk-throughs of the South Cemetery (which is a collection of several cemeteries) twice a year to highlight the historical significance and the people that are there. Sue Polidura provides guided walks at the North Cemetery on a frequent basis, but also we are hoping to erect signage at South Cemetery identifying all the notable people there.

Councilor Tabor spoke further about the advocacy for adding green space. Which is the best entity to advocate for that; what is the policy body for parks. What if there were an expansion of the Recreation Committee to "Parks and Recreation" which would look beyond programming. That is an idea common in other communities. Prescott Park is a unique case that might not fall under a general parks category.

In terms of programming, Councilor Tabor spoke of the open space at Jones Avenue that has a lot of land and some trails. Noted other parks in the City. He visited parks during National Night Out and there was good community attendance. There are hidden gems like the water access on Sagamore Ave, dock behind Seacoast Mental Health and people don't know about that.

Mr. Diemer spoke on the Sagamore Creek area. There are nice trails we could have out there. It's currently underutilized. The Banfield Road access to the Rail Trail is another spot for expanding trail access. Also Route 33, Great Bog – there are a lot of things we could expand on.

Ms. McMillan put out the question as to what would be the Conservation Commissions role with all of that?

Mr. Diemer suggested that once an idea is created and a site is suggested that the Conservation Commission is brought in as to viability and the Recreation Board would communicate with Conservation when there is an idea or vice versa. Ms. McMillan and Mr. Diemer spoke on working together with lots of communication.

Councilor Cook reminded everyone this is why this group was called together. To reiterate, there is a role for all to jointly work on the planning in advance of the Master Plan. It would be worthwhile to have some joint meetings with the different committees involved in a project. She also suggested having public meetings to get residents to come forward from neighborhoods that maybe do not have resources and want them. It would be helpful to have that open forum discussion around the bigger plan of open space and parks so that individuals could give their ideas and wants.

Councilor Lombardi brought to the attention that most urban places have plazas as well. They are an important piece that may not be green, but are an important public space.

The DCM commended the great work the Conservation Commission has done to look at conductivity, the green spaces and wildlife corridors we have, and future acquisitions. The challenge, in part, is not the lack of good ideas, but a lot of these good ideas cost money. She spoke on how to prioritize the money available keeping in mind all the different costs involved in a specific project. It might be acquisition and maintenance of a building, conservation easements on a property, manpower to run a program, etc. The DCM also made the committee aware that City staff often become aware of available properties for acquisition and do vet them and bring them forward to the City Council if they appear of value.

Tom Watson spoke on the larger committee idea is that you have everyone in room who is balancing competing interests and it's already filtered and has already had public input. This is the case with the Master Plan for Prescott Park; it has two functions: to make recommendations to the City Manager and allow for public input.

Councilor Cook asked the panel if they would like to continue discussions together. Michael Griffin said the Cemetery Committee would like to be kept in the loop. Tom Watson said Prescott Park's future is already planned out and is uniquely situated as to how they would fit in. Councilor Lombardi suggested that Tom Watson would have the experience in creating a plan and thinks that's valuable. Mr. Watson said he would be happy to help.

Ms. McMillan understands the public process but wanted to talk about and understand City staff's role in all of this because they have been handling this and know the background. Councilor Cook said the Council approach City staff first and they are all responsible for all different areas for what are currently park and open areas. There was no clear consensus from the City staff as to what the recommendation should be. That's why you all were brought here to see if you had insight from citizens serving on your boards, committees, commissions. The City staff will be included in further discussions as well for their valuable insight.

The DCM asked Ms. McMillan to send her materials that she may want to have distributed to the Governance Committee.

All Committee Invitees left meeting.

**b. Administrative Ordinance**

Councilor Cook stated she is still working with the legal department as to what is feasible and what is not. There is research being done and she will bring it back for discussion when she has information from the legal department.

Mr. Tabor asked for a short break. Councilor Cook agreed. (The Committee took a 5-minute break.)

**c. Committee Structure**

Councilor Cook spoke on committee structure and presented a slideshow in PowerPoint. She noted that when the entire structure is looked at it could be confusing to people. Not all committees report in the same manner.

During the presentation, there was discussion about the Mayor's Blue Ribbon Committees and how they are established. Councilor Lombardi added it may be worthwhile to investigate whether to make some of the existing Blue Ribbon Committees permanent.

General discussion on the several types of committees described in the presentation.

New Business:

Fee Study - Councilor Cook brought a draft motion for discussion. There may be need for a third person on the Fee Committee to avoid a tie-vote.

Councilor Lombardi made a motion to add a third person to the Fee Study Committee. Councilor Tabor seconded the motion for discussion.

Councilor Lombardi asked the Chair if she wanted to suspend rules for public comment on this motion. Councilor Tabor seconded the motion. All in favor.

Public Comment: Petra Huda, 280 South Street: She was on Fee Committee with Councilor Tabor. She gave information as to why this committee is important to forming a budget. She had no opinion as to having a third person.

Councilor Cook seeing no one on Zoom closed public comment and resumed Fee Study draft motion that is on the table.

Councilor Cook asked if there were any other thoughts. Councilor Tabor confirmed fact that a couple of councilors need to look at the fee schedule so that is ready to roll into the budget. I'm

not sure we have to burden a third person, other than one incident that occurred. Councilor Lombardi said he would agree with the majority.

Councilor Cook discussed issue. Asked legal question because in the event a third person was required could there be an “alternate” or “standby” person. Or perhaps we say to Council there is no need for a third person on the Fee Study Committee, if anything is referred to the Fee Study Committee beyond its regular scope of work, then it’s a simple motion to add a person.

The DCM agreed that would be easiest. Councilor Tabor asked if we could do that on an ad hoc basis. The DCM confirmed, yes given the nature of the committee.

Councilor Lombardi withdrew his motion with the agreement of the second.

Councilor Cook will report back to the Council at next meeting that the Governance Committee has discussed this and the consensus is that the current structure is adequate to deal with its regular tasks but if there is a need to address a task that falls outside its regular order of business, the Mayor should appoint a third member to the committee.

**5. Public Comment**

No additional public comment.

**6. Announcements**

Discussed the next series of meetings and topics.

**7. Adjournment** – Councilor Lombardi moved to adjourn, seconded by Tabor, all in favor. Adjourned at 12:00 p.m.

Meeting Minutes prepared by  
Donna D. Splaine, Admin Assistant/Paralegal and DCM Woodland, Deputy City Manager

Approved by Governance Committee on: March 13, 2023