

Mt. Lebanon Sports Advisory Board

Meeting Minutes

November 4, 2021 - 8:00 p.m.

1. Call to Order and Roll Call

Amanda Rost called the meeting to order and David Donnellan called the roll. The meeting was attended by board members Ed Cipriano, Lynn Hagan, Stacie Hill, Tom Langston, Megan O'Brakta, Kristen Reisinger, Amanda Rost, Shelly Saba, Stephen Strotmeyer and Ian Smith.

The meeting was also attended by Commissioner Mindy Ranney, Recreation Director David Donnellan, Public Works Director Rudy Sukal, Parks and Facilities Coordinator Phil Avolio and the school district's Facilities Manager, Jeff Kaiser.

Kari Resler, Katie Sharon and Chad Wertz and were absent.

2. Citizen Comments

There were no citizen comments.

3. Approval of the October 7, 2021 Meeting Minutes

The minutes were approved as submitted.

4. Commissioner Report

Commissioner Ranney reported that the budget process was ongoing, and that the Manager's Recommended Budget was released. She said the Commission would discuss the budget during four public discussions, but the public could not comment during those discussions. She said public comments were welcome at regular Commission meetings.

She reported that the DEI recommendations wrapped up and the Commission is looking at how to implement those recommendations.

She also reported that the Vibrant Uptown construction project is going well.

5. Field Census

Amanda Rost reviewed that a subcommittee of the Sports Advisory Board (SAB) was conducting a study of all fields in Mt. Lebanon to look at using fields more efficiently and make recommendations on improvements. She said the study looked at usage and data from all Mt. Lebanon field users including sports organizations, recreation and the school district.

She said she still needs some information on usage from high school athletics.

She said information from this study would go into the Parks Master Plan.

6. Athletic Fields Maintenance

Amanda Rost said that Rudy Sukal and Phil Avolio from the municipality, and Jeff Kaiser from the school district were invited to the meeting to discuss field maintenance, as well as share challenges and opportunities. She said they were given a list of questions in advance of the meeting.

Rudy Sukal, Public Works Director, introduced himself. He said the municipality has three grass fields, Dixon, Bird and Brafferton, as well as two synthetic fields, Middle and Seymour. He said synthetic fields offer more use to the community and are easier to maintain.

He said the municipality has an extensive turfgrass management program. He said there used to be a joint maintenance agreement where the municipality would provide some field maintenance services to the school district at cost, then the school district decided to use private contractors.

Mr. Sukal said the main problem with the grass fields is overuse. He said weather also causes issues when people play on soft wet fields. He said compaction of soils also causes problems. He said there is not space for additional fields to allow for rotating and resting fields. He noted that Bird Park field has poor drainage. He stated that artificial turf fields would solve these problems.

Jeff Kaiser agreed that overuse of fields and use when fields are wet causes damage. He also said fields couldn't be maintained while kids are outside, and use during the pandemic has further restricted time when the fields can be maintained.

Mr. Sukal noted that moving goals during practice helps to protect the turf. Phil Avolio agreed and said it is also helpful on synthetic turf.

Mr. Avolio reported that the representative from Shaw, the turf manufacturer, said that Mt. Lebanon has done a good job of moving goals which has extended the life of the turf.

Amanda Rost asked if Middle Field was showing greater signs of wear due to extended play under the lights. Mr. Avolio said there were no additional signs of wear on the fibers.

Ms. Rost asked when the turf warranty would end. Mr. Donnellan said 2023, but noted that maintenance of the field has been excellent and the life expectancy is currently 10 years.

Mr. Avolio stated that Gmax readings and wear would determine when the field should be replaced.

Mr. Sukal said any concerns with municipal fields should be directed to the public works department.

Mr. Kaiser introduced himself and agreed that weather is a problem for the fields, and agreed that more turf fields would help. He said that spring is a challenging time of the year due to competing needs for resources.

He stated that the school district typically renovates two infields per year, and has changed the infield mix for better drainage. He said the school district fertilizes and aerates 4 times per year, overseeds in spring, reseeds in late spring and aerates and fertilizes in the fall.

He said maintenance issues for school fields should be directed to him.

It was noted that there is not much overlap between the school district and the municipality in terms of field maintenance, but the two entities collaborate on product and contractor referrals.

Mr. Kaiser urged field users to exercise good judgement when deciding to play on fields in wet weather, and to move to dryer areas of the field for practices when possible.

Mr. Kaiser said his field maintenance budget was adequately funded, and that staffing levels were best in the summer, mixed in the fall and lowest in the spring.

He said if funding were available, he would like to see more synthetic turf fields and do more infield renovations each year.

It was noted that drying agents and improper dragging methods cause problems for the infields.

The decision on whether fields are in playable condition varies, but is often in the hands of organizations and individual coaches. Stacey Hill said we have an opportunity to educate coaches and field users on how to prevent damage to the fields. Mr. Sukal suggested that kids should be advised as well.

Ms. Rost said there should be a system to identify open fields, which could also be used to communicate and educate when fields should not be played on.

Ian Smith suggested a recovery period for fields could be considered based on staff recommendations.

Amanda Rost asked if there would be any benefit to having all turf fields from the same manufacturer. Stephen Strotmeyer reported that there are savings for completing two fields at the same time. Ms. Rost noted that bidding and timing would pose challenges.

Mr. Kaiser suggested that drainage be a consideration when allocating fields.

Tom Lagston thanked Mr. Kaiser, Mr. Sukal and Mr. Avolio for their work to maintain the fields. He said they do an amazing job and the community appreciates what they do. Mr. Smith agreed and encouraged groups to work closer with them on field maintenance.

Ms. Rost thanked them for taking the time to attend.

7. Comments on 2022 Manager's Recommended Budget

Commissioner Ranney offered to take questions on the Manager's Recommended Budget.

Ms. Rost asked if any of the SAB's recommended projects were in the budget. Ms. Ranney reviewed the list and said pickleball was not funded.

Ms. Rost asked if the tennis courts at Meadowcroft were already done. Mr. Donnellan said that the project listed in the budget was to install 6 permanent pickleball courts on the tennis courts in Meadowcroft Park. He also clarified that temporary pickleball lines are planned for those tennis courts, but are not yet installed due to delays on the tennis court project. He said that the lines would be installed as soon as possible.

Ms. Hagan asked if phase two of the golf cart path project was funded. Ms. Ranney said that it was not. Ms. Hagan said the cart paths are in bad shape, and asked how that project could be moved forward. Ms. Ranney encouraged her to make a public comment at an upcoming Commission meeting.

Mr. Donnellan reported that the SAB recommended project to reconstruct four tennis courts had been phased in the budget to reconstruct two courts at a time. Commissioner Ranney said two courts were funded in the manager's budget.

Mr. Langton asked if there would be any advantages to converting some of the tennis courts to asphalt. Mr. Donnellan said he did not believe that would be popular within the tennis community.

It was noted that replacement of Dixon Field lighting was funded. Ms. Rost expressed concern that there were projects in the manager's budget that were not on the SAB's list. Mr. Sukal said that some of the projects were maintenance related and some came from the Parks Advisory Board (PAB).

Ms. Rost said she wished the SAB had a better picture of what was going on community wide, including sports related projects within the public works budget.

Mr. Donnellan suggested that the board could look on the website to see past and present Capital Improvement Programs (CIP) to see the full scope of projects. He said the Sports Advisory Board determines its own final list of recommended projects. Mr. Donnellan explained that he provides the board with a list of sports related projects from the CIP, including recreation and public works projects, to consider each year. He said he is not always aware of new projects that the public works department or the PAB may propose.

Ms. Saba said projects may be prioritized differently if they had more information on other projects.

Ms. Rost asked if a discretionary fund could be made available to the SAB to fund smaller projects.

Ms. Ranney said there were opportunities for the SAB and PAB to coordinate and suggested having a liaison join meetings or hold joint meetings. Mr. Sukal said the respective boards had liaisons attend meetings in the past.

Ms. Ranney inquired about fencing. Mr. Avolio said 250' of sideline fencing was replaced at Dixon. He said the outfield portion was still requested in the budget.

He said fencing for basketball courts in Highland Terrace and Rockwood Parks was above the line in the budget. Mr. Avolio noted that steel costs 70% more now. Mr. Avolio said most neighborhood parks need new fencing for courts.

8. Meeting Schedule 2022

The board reviewed the proposed 2022 meeting schedule that included: January 6, February 3, March 3, April 7, September 1, October 6 and November 3.

The board agreed to add May 5 and to change September 1 to September 8 if possible.

9. Recreation Center Feasibility Study/Parks Master Plan

Ms. Ranney announced that there would be a joint meeting on November 10. She asked the board to review the information provided ahead of the meeting. She said additional public input would be collected at Lebo Light Night.

10. New Business

There was no new business.

11. Announcements

David Donnellan announced that the Sports Advisory Board and Parks Advisory Board will be holding a joint meeting on Wednesday, November 10, 2021, at 6:00 p.m. in Room C of the Municipal Building to discuss the Parks Master Plan/Recreation Center Feasibility Study with the consultants.

12. Adjournment

The meeting adjourned at 9:31 p.m.