

Peterborough Recreation Committee (PRC) Meeting
Roland "Beaver" Jutras Recreation Building
Minutes of April 4, 2018
Approved

Attendees: Andrew Dunbar, Chair; Chris Kotula, Secretary;
Kate Coon; Ryan Griffiths; Jeffrey M. King, Recreation Director;
Lisa Koziell-Betz, Program Coordinator; and Lauren Martin, Minute Taker

- I. Call to Order: Andy called the meeting to order at 6:34 pm.
- II. Approval of Minutes: Chris motioned to approve the March 14th minutes as written. Andy reminded Jeff that he is still waiting for figures on Senior Lunch income and expenses, which Jeff then handed him. Kate seconded the motion. The minutes were approved unanimously.
- III. Strategic Planning Discussion:
 - A. Ryan asked for clarification on the process of developing a strategic plan. Noting that at the February meeting Deputy Town Administrator Nicole MacStay tasked the PRC with developing a strategic plan, Ryan explained that he assumed all Town departments would be participating in this. It seems, however, that it is only the Recreation Department being asked to do this. If we do not know what other departments are thinking and we are not sure if our plan would be used, Ryan would hate to have us waste our time.
 - B. Ryan also asked for clarification if our strategic plan is to be providing recreation opportunities *as well as* not increasing the tax burden on residents. Jeff explained that he is going to try to stay as quiet as possible because it is important for the PRC to drive the bus on this. The staff can provide information and professional expertise as requested to help the PRC make better decisions and will implement whatever the PRC wants, but it is important for the PRC to drive the bus. Ryan asked how many years Recreation monies have been returned to the Town. Jeff responded that in the past 15 years that he has been the director, we have returned general fund money to the Town each year. Ryan asked if we could therefore reduce fees, or if we are expected to be a revenue generator for the Town. Kate remarked that if money is being given to the Town as an ancillary benefit, we may decide to make this strategic.
 - C. Kate asked to have the conversation back up to clarify where we are at with the strategic plan. Is there a timetable we are expected to follow? Is Nicole leading this or is the PRC? Jeff referred to the handout Nicole had distributed at the February meeting, which states that the purposes of a strategic plan are to establish priorities from the community's perspective. At some point we will need to get the community involved. Jeff affirmed that there is no specific deadline for completing the strategic plan. Andy pointed out that some of this may happen organically, like how the senior programs have developed over time. Jeff continued reading from Nicole's handout, stating that the strategic plan can inspire staff and generate awareness. He noted that in the summer we grow from a staff of three to 40 people overnight, and he voiced

the question, “Do they (summer staff) know what our priorities are?” The strategic plan should guide decision makers and staff. Jeff questioned how our decisions will affect the master plan, noting that the PRC may need to get involved with the master plan steering committee. Again, members asked to back up the conversation. Kate asked if all Town departments are doing this. Chris commented that Nicole’s presentation in February seemed to come out of the blue and he did not understand where this was coming from. Jeff clarified that the Town Administration had a goal for Jeff to get the PRC to do a retreat and have some strategic planning. Jeff felt the current PRC might be more successful at this process than some previous groups. Members commented that they were not willing to spend time on the assignment if it is not going to be valuable, such as if they develop a strategic plan to develop green space into fields and the Town says no. Jeff explained that the master plan steering committee takes up certain sections of the master plan periodically. He had been told recreation issues would come up when they discussed facilities. After waiting ten years for this to happen, Jeff was fuming when the master plan steering committee discussed facilities without including the Recreation Department in any part of that process. Jeff acknowledged the validity of the PRC’s reluctance to spend time on an activity that may not make a difference. He suggested the PRC might want to ask Town Administration if a Recreation strategic plan would be valued and would be used or if it will sit on a shelf. Again questioning whether Recreation is meant to be revenue generating or self-sustaining, a member questioned why money Recreation generates would *not* be given back to the Town general fund to help reduce the tax burden. Jeff replied that we have never been provided with a revenue target, as if we were expected to generate an amount of our budget through revenue, as some towns are. We *have* been given expenditure guidelines, such as being told we cannot increase our budget beyond a certain percentage.

- D. Andy remarked that the Select Board does not seem concerned that we are providing services to other towns at the expense of our taxpayers, referencing statistics gathered thirty years ago about non-residents’ usage of Peterborough facilities and programs. When it was pointed out that we try to offset those costs by charging slightly higher non-resident fees, Andy responded that the town portion of our tax bill is greater than for surrounding towns. Chris noted that this is part of being a “market town” and some people choose to live in Peterborough because of the services and facilities the Town has to offer. Andy commented that we have a hospital and regional school that do not pay taxes, but we have to provide services (ambulance, fire, police) to those facilities. He stated that Peterborough pays higher taxes because other towns do not have to build a fire department or library. Jeff stated that Sharon is the only town in the ConVal School District that has \$0 for a recreation budget. The other towns have recreation budgets ranging from \$25,000 – 35,000 a year in appropriation, while Peterborough spends half a million dollars. Someone commented that it is good that out of towners come here and participate in our programs. Jeff stated that we have non-resident fees for some programs but not all, and they are usually an addition of a token amount like \$5 or \$10, except for our big ticket summer camp programs. The small non-resident fees for most of our programs do not really offset the costs. Ryan questioned whether raising non-resident fees to truly offset costs

would be more transparent and would prompt other towns to recognize they need to contribute more.

- E. Jeff described how if a strategic goal is to have equity among towns in paying for recreation, he can imagine two approaches. The first would be to create a regional parks and recreation department with pooled resources that would serve a broader base. This model is used in many areas around the country except for in New England, which is odd since we have regional school districts. The downside of this structure would be that Peterborough Recreation would likely become ConVal Recreation. The second option, which Jeff thinks may be more palatable and more likely to come to fruition, is to have other towns “pay in” to get recreation services, similar to how they pay for ambulance services. In the past, other towns initially balked at ambulance fees but when they investigated the cost of starting their own ambulance service, they were willing to pay what we asked. Jeff pointed out that this model would provide a greater budget for programs, as well as give others “resident” status. Lisa explained that the differential would have to be built in; they would have to go back to their towns to request they pay a per capita fee for recreation to Peterborough. Regarding the comparison with ambulance services, Ryan noted that an ambulance is something people know they need, but many might not be willing to pay higher taxes for recreation. Andy responded that the fees might not be presented a la carte but that towns would pay Peterborough a per capita fee for ambulance, fire, library and recreation. Chris pointed out that we can measure people’s resident status when they register for programs but no one checks residency at the playground, tennis courts, or among members of adult softball teams. We cannot measure non-residents’ use of all facilities. Jeff agreed that it is not practical to try to check residency at all our facilities. Kate stated that a certain amount of non-resident use should be expected, like on the Rail Trail. Chris felt we all benefit from people coming in to town, especially when it comes to youth sports. We need a large enough pool of participants in order to make those programs viable. Andy remarked that non-residents do not pay as much as residents for what they enjoy here. Discussion ensued about how people know what their taxes go toward when they choose to live here.
- F. Jeff stated that this board needs to wrestle with their long-term goals. Is it important to this committee to try to recoup costs from other towns? It is a fact that we will not do so, unless we make a point to work on this and tie resources (ambulance, fire, library and recreation) together. Jeff pointed out that because federal funds are responsible for Adams Pool, we are bound in perpetuity to *not* exclude anyone from enjoying that facility. The pool was built as a federal government OWCF project, so fees are subject to fee control by the federal government. We are charging a nominal fee to non-residents now and we could charge a reasonable fee, but the federal government will not allow us to charge astronomical fees. Ryan commented that what he hears from residents is simply that they question paying fees. He feels we are doing an excellent job with the budget, but since we return some fees to the Town general fund it seems like we could reduce the fees we charge residents. Jeff noted that we subsidize the Summer Teen Challenge (STC) program. One year we cut the subsidy and it killed participation in the program. This year, in addition to funding a

position for STC, we are using the Revolving Fund to subsidize a bus for Playground Program field trips to make them more affordable. Jeff questioned if we want to subsidize all our programs to make them more affordable, which will increase our budget, or do we want to keep the budget down and make programs self-supporting.

- G. It was explained that pool fees, Cunningham Pond sticker fees, kayak and paddleboard rentals all go into the general fund. Program fees and Peterborough Community Center (PCC) rental fees go into the Revolving Fund. We receive a small subsidy from the food pantry at the PCC, to cover a percentage of the heat and utilities costs that is proportional to the amount of space the food pantry occupies.
- H. When asked if the PRC would like to pursue the topic of more equitable fees for recreation services, Jeff remarked that this is such a large topic that we will probably need more than a meeting or two. Chris stated that having served on the PRC for two years or so, we usually listen to report and tell the staff that they are doing a good job, but he would like to see us become more involved. He said the PRC never hears about programs that are being considered, asked which ones we should pursue, or how much we should charge. While PRC members agreed that they want to remain informed about what is going on at the Recreation Department and they do read the written reports before monthly meetings, it is not necessary to rehash all the details found in the reports. Jeff affirmed that the PRC members are the eyes and ears of the department, noting that people will tell the PRC things they would not say directly to Jeff or Lisa, like complaining about program fees. Jeff asked that if the PRC hears from members of the community about interest in a program or issues with a park, they need to let us know. He stated that in the past, the PRC did not want a lot of input on fees or choosing programs. We can certainly do more of that if the current PRC is interested, but he cautioned that the staff needs flexibility to do what we need to do to make sure programs make ends meet. We have tried hard to keep fees reasonable. For example, some participants in adult softball were grumbling about the fees, but when they went out to see other possibilities, they came back to us.
- I. Andy acknowledged that April 1st was Jeff's fifteen-year anniversary working for the Town of Peterborough, presenting him with a cake and thanking him on behalf of the entire PRC for his service to the town.
- J. Chris stated that he would like to see the PRC involved in more of a planning capacity than simply reviewing and giving their thumbs up. For example, he feels the problem with outstanding balances is being addressed and we do not need to spend time each month reviewing that status when we could be using our time for planning. Jeff replied that we will do whatever the board wants and that it was a priority to the PRC in the past to know where we stood with collecting on outstanding balances. Jeff said that the PRC needs to decide what they think is important, but if we spend a lot of time reviewing what we've already done, we will have less time for planning and problem-solving. Ryan suggested that at the monthly PRC meeting we compromise by reviewing changes on a need to know basis, otherwise accepting reports as written. Jeff pointed out that even if the PRC chooses to accept most reports as written, the staff still needs to take the time to write the reports, unless the PRC only wants these reports twice a year. Andy remarked that we do not need to spend time on all of this during the monthly meeting, but he can still come to the office to discuss outstanding

balances, because if we take our eyes off this it will become less of a priority and it might turn into a problem again. Members clarified that they do find the reports valuable and Chris stated that he was only speaking about reducing the frequency of the balances due reports. Jeff noted that program budgets are important to review. We can see in lacrosse how fees pay for the expenses of the program. Lacrosse is an expensive sport and Jeff just purchased new equipment, but we have 92 kids participating.

- K. Kate remarked that strategic planning encompasses all these conversations. She proposed the following questions: “What is the role of a PRC member?” and “How does staff work with the PRC and with the Town?” Regarding Chris’ point, she suggested we could fiddle with the meeting time structure to allow more time for the more important planning than for listening to reports. She cautioned that we need to delegate so the Recreation staff do not have to wait for a PRC meeting to set program fees or hire new staff. Ryan expressed that listening to reports is not being a productive member of the committee.
- L. Jeff offered some background information on the situation with playing fields. He explained how the former group PAYS (Peterborough Area Youth Soccer) led the youth soccer program. At its height, they had 250 kids participating. Now it has gone down to 100 or 125 as the school population has decreased. This program is being absorbed by ConVal Youth Soccer Club. We have not been asked to take it on again, but Jeff stated he would not consider doing so if we were unsure about the reliability of facility reservations. Jeff is having lunch with the ConVal Schools Superintendent tomorrow. Andy mentioned that he met with the ConVal athletic director to introduce himself. Jeff remarked that he welcomes the PRC’s assistance with creating a stronger relationship with the schools. Ryan questioned whether the PRC could approach the ConVal School District to learn if we can have a more structured relationship with them regarding school sports. Chris noted that this is what Cougar Volunteers for Youth Sports (CVYSA) was trying to do. Lisa stated that CVYSA ran youth sports for two years but it is now dissolving. It was primarily led by one family in town. Kate and Jeff both remarked that these are strategic discussions. Jeff noted that nowhere in our mission does it mention youth sports. There was agreement that it is valuable to a community to have youth sports. Jeff stated that we used to run many of the youth and adult sports in town. Youth lacrosse is the only sport that was not here when Jeff arrived. We ran youth soccer (in partnership with PAYS), youth basketball, we ran youth lacrosse clinics, Babe Ruth softball and, for a time, we ran baseball. Ryan stated that if we build this relationship with ConVal and then discover we need more athletic fields, that is a different approach from building the new fields first. Jeff said this community has talked about this before that we do not have enough rectangular fields for soccer, lacrosse, and what have you. For years, Jeff asked to have money set aside for fields, but they wouldn’t give us any because we had no plan. Jeff felt he could not make a plan without the money to buy land for fields. ConVal High School has had issues with us over using fields. Jeff said in the past it was always him speaking to the capital planning committee, but the message needs to come from the community and it needs to come from the schools. Kate remarked that this is where the PRC could come in, if we have a strategic plan. Lisa

stated that PAYS had been charging \$10 per participant to be put aside for field development, but they received pressure that fees were too expensive so they chose to stop setting aside that money and lower their fees. Jeff commented that our youth lacrosse program is planning practices on two fields at the Dublin School, the Well School field, a small lacrosse field beyond Ecco and the Ecco outfield. We were fortunate these schools have allowed us to use their fields. The Dublin School just contacted us to ask about using the PCC for their ultimate frisbee team and we accommodated them without batting an eye. Chris acknowledged that in his experience with the ConVal Soccer Club, it is hard to get access to the South Meadow School field and almost impossible to get the ConVal field. ConVal Soccer Club uses the Hancock town field.

- M. Andy thanked Jeff once more for his fifteen years of service to the Town of Peterborough, which the rest of the PRC unanimously approved.
- N. When Ryan remarked that he would be comfortable if field development became a strategic plan, Jeff responded that we can provide information on what has happened in the past from old PRC minutes. Jeff feels the master planning committee did us a major disservice in the past when this need came up but they did not give us the opportunity to talk about it. This has been an issue for a long time and we can certainly revisit it. Kate proposed that we work on this issue during PRC meetings and maybe at another meeting we could talk about recreation budgets for other area towns. Jeff and Lisa both pointed out that we are about to head into our busiest season and the staff will be limited in our availability to do research or spend time during the day discussing these issues. Jeff said that we are about to bring on 40 seasonal employees and our major staff training will take one and a half months to implement. Jeff added that this morning we were hit with a Town freeze on discretionary spending, until they sort out winter expenses. He remarked that we spend most of our money in the spring. We need to purchase a new gator, in addition to top dressing, lime, chlorine and CO2.
- O. Andy departed the meeting at 8:00pm, asking Chris to assume the chairmanship for the duration of the meeting. Andy thanked Jeff once again for his 15 years of service.
- P. Concerns were expressed over whether Recreation is being expected to give money back to the general fund, to make up for the difference in Highway Department spending. Jeff said that there was a lot we did not do last spring to prepare our facilities, because of a similar spending freeze, and we were hurt by it. Ryan said the PRC will back Jeff up if he needs to explain that our spring spending is not discretionary but needs to be done so the townspeople can enjoy our recreational facilities.
- Q. Jeff commented that a lot of towns hire out their strategic planning because it is a fairly major undertaking. Jeff expressed his appreciation that the PRC is interested in looking at fields again, saying that we can try to provide as much background information as we are able to compile during our busy season. Kate responded that fields do not have to be addressed in the May meeting and could wait until later. Jeff acknowledged that it would be helpful to have this discussion at the beginning of the capital process. It was suggested that we discuss field development at the August meeting and think of similar blocking related to different Town structures and fee

structures. Jeff remarked that as elected officials, the PRC can help by talking to representatives from surrounding towns to find out what they spend on recreation and what they have for resources. He noted that the school district's capital process takes place in June and July. After Jeff meets with the school superintendent, he will let the PRC know if the proposed timing for the field development discussion makes sense. Ryan suggested that at the May PRC meeting we discuss Jeff's meeting with the superintendent and how the PRC can develop a relationship with the school district. Kate suggested that at Jeff's meeting tomorrow with the superintendent, he explain that some PRC members are interested in exploring a more cooperative relationship. Jeff thought perhaps the PRC could arrange to bring this up with the school board. It was agreed that at the May PRC meeting we debrief some of what has been discussed tonight and discuss how we can move forward in our relationship with the school district. Kate added that we should examine the role of these different boards and entities and how they relate to us, facilities and programs. Jeff said quite a bit of programs have gone by the wayside or are on hold because of a lack of facilities. Lisa remarked that Antrim Recreation asked if they would be stepping on our toes if they offered adult women's soccer, and Lisa replied that they should go ahead with this because we do not have the facilities to offer that program. Jeff noted that the Antrim town gym gets a subsidy from the Town and school district.

- IV. Director's Report, Program Report, Senior Program Report, Facilities Reservations and Outstanding Balances Reports:
 - A. Kate motioned to accept these reports as written. Ryan seconded the motion. It was approved unanimously.
 - B. Lauren commented that the outstanding balances through 2016 are now under \$2,000.
 - C. There was consensus that the committee is happy to read the information shared in these reports and happy to hear about anything a staff member wants to point out, but they do not want to spend time during monthly meetings rehashing the reports.

- V. Adjournment: Chris motioned to adjourn the meeting and Kate seconded. With unanimous approval, the meeting adjourned at 8:24pm.

Respectfully submitted,
Lauren Martin,
Minute Taker
April 10, 2018