

NORTH ROYALTON RECREATION BOARD MINUTES

Tuesday, September 25, 2012

The Recreational Board meeting was held on September 25, 2012, at Memorial Park. The meeting was called to order at 6:00 p.m. by Mr. Antoskiewicz.

Present: Acting Chairperson: Larry Antoskiewicz; Committee members: Todd Althouse, Larry Battaglia, John Kelly, Diane Veverka, Barb Zindroski. Administration: Mayor Robert Stefanik, Pat Jones. Council: John Nickel, Stephen Muller, Other: Pete Ragone, Dan Langshaw.

Absent: Russ Wells

APPROVAL OF MINUTES

Moved by Mr. Kelly, seconded by Mr. Althouse to approve the minutes of the July 31, 2012 meeting.

Motion carried.

UNFINISHED BUSINESS

1. Memorial Park Playground Improvements

At the July 31, 2012 Rec Board meeting, Mr. Antoskiewicz asked the Rec Board to give some direction on plans for improvements to the Memorial Park playground. Following is the discussions from the work session which took place at Memorial Park during the Rec Board meeting.

Mayor Stefanik said the city would like to revamp the park by bringing it into this century. He expressed his understanding of the emotional attachment that many residents who were part of the community build may have. He summarized the ongoing work currently being done, which includes the addition of new lights at the Memorial baseball fields, the future replacement of lights in the park being paid for with grants and how the city is working with other private groups, such as the Boy Scouts who have done some work on the deck at the pavilion. The Adventure Guides will be working on a service project to revamp the upper pavilion next April. It is our overall plan to reach out to the different service groups; it's a great partnership we have here in North Royalton. We work very close with the school system and it's a win/win for the community when these groups are able to reach out and help with some of the large projects in the city. Mr. Antoskiewicz continued discussion of improvements currently being done at Memorial Playground which included removal of the old bocce ball court, removal of the shuffle board concrete slabs, the old steel swing set, and the steel equipment which was geared toward the younger aged children that were also a safety hazard. We will begin leveling the dirt in the area where that work was done. We are looking at getting some new benches for around the lake; the service clubs have already shown an interest in buying the benches and having a sponsor plaque on the benches.

Mr. Antoskiewicz said he has received preliminary plans from several companies. We have been having discussion for a while as far as what we can do to upgrade the playground. We have also received calls from residents, and concerned parents.

Mr. Kelley was concerned with the responsibility being placed on the Rec Board in asking them to design or re-design a playground of this magnitude, without having the experience to do so.

Mr. Kelly suggested obtaining a professional site designer who would seek public input, including feedback from children.

Mr. Antoskiewicz said the city had four different companies already come out, walk the playground and submit designs. The plans had a lot of similarities but also a lot of differences. Now we need to get some ideas and feedback with suggestions on what are things we are looking for and ask them to incorporate our suggestions in a new design. Some of the feedback we have already received is to have a separate area for one to five/six year olds, then another area for children seven to twelve years of age. We need to give the companies some guidelines, such as do we want a theme, number of swing sets, do we want it wide open, etc.

Meagan Call, a resident, expressed an interest in designing the playground if there is an opportunity for that. She has taken up researching playground designs for the past two years as a hobby.

John Pepsing, a Royal Valley Drive resident, is the Parks and Recreation Director for the city of Brunswick and owns his own consultation company. He was concerned that the city would be wasting money by removing the wooden structure. He expressed his concern that the city has not maintained the structure over the years and has relied on volunteers and service organizations to do so. He said he would donate 100% of his company's time to come out and help us with the project and would spearhead the effort to get volunteer groups to help maintain the current wooden structure. He felt the hidden areas on the current playground were designed to get parents interactive with their children. He said we should protect what we have and appreciate the investment of all the volunteers' time and donations that went into building the current playground.

Mr. Antoskiewicz said he had discussions with John Dean, the original designer from Leathers Associates who worked with the playground volunteer organization on our current playground. Mr. Dean said 20 years is approximately the life expectancy for these structures. Mr. Dean said he would like to work with us again.

Mayor Stefanik reiterated that safety is the number one issue and we need to address the safety issues on the current structure. We need to look at replacing pieces as they get old. He said we are at the first step of a long process in the design stage. We are reaching out to the parent groups in the community that should be part of this; the ones who are driving the need for change. This will be a group effort and we expect it to be a long process.

Greg Beck with Little Tikes Commercial Play Systems, said he would welcome volunteers to contribute to the designing of the playground. There is not a lot of activity variations that are put into a design; we can standardize a design. The current 20 year old playground if kept, will have ten years of hard maintenance to keep it problem free due to unforeseen problems, such as problems with it being prone to insect infestation such as bees. You have flexibility with the modern structures of phasing in the project and implement them and still address all the kids' needs.

Ms. Zindroski asked if the City Engineer and Building Department can work on this with the parameters that we want and the cost factor to come up with a plan using our departments.

Mr. Ranucci, a Christopher Drive resident, had organized groups once a year, for ten years, to seal the entire wooden structure and make repairs. We asked some of the different groups who had the children who were using the playground to take over some ownership and responsibility of taking care of the playground. This was a huge community effort, but for 20 years our administration has not taken ownership of the playground, relying on volunteers and community groups to take care of it. It requires regular maintenance. He questioned if the safety issues were a real concern and whether these safety issues could be addressed and corrected. Mr. Ranucci volunteered to organize a group of volunteers to spend one weekend to work to correct the safety issues. He added, that in two years, if there is no regular maintenance, we will be back to square one. He is in favor of repairing the structure with new materials and adding on with new equipment where necessary. Mr. Ranucci spoke with someone at Leathers and Associates; for \$700 they would have someone come out, review the current structure and make recommendations as to what can be added to it. He would like the city to consider requesting their service in the planning of the playground.

Mr. Pat Jones said he also was a part of building the playground and it was a great experience for the community, his son and himself. He worked with the county on the safety audit with this facility, as well as many other facilities in the city. We had to address several issues that day or we would have had to shut the facility down, such as pinch points with the chains and other pinch point areas; we addressed a large number of safety concerns, but not all. Our insurance required us to take out some pieces of equipment immediately, such as the toys on springs. There are still some issues such as spacing of vertical pieces of wood, a lot of issues with the aged wood and splintering. There are some ADA issues we need to look at. The biggest concern he has received from parents was the site issues.

Mr. Nickell felt he would like to see a blend of the new with the old. He requested that the safety report be made available, so we can look further into what the citations were. He would like to keep the entire front structure; possibly a bridge that goes from the old to the new.

Mr. Antoskiewicz said we need to start doing something to address it; we have heard from the early education groups and the parents who say we love it but... in today's world, the parents do not like the hideaway areas. We are trying to upgrade the park and make it better. We can't go back and rehash how the city didn't maintain the playground, but yes we will maintain the park, we will not ignore it, we have to get it back to where it should be.

Amy Kuntz, President of the Early Childhood PTA., she is a representative of the children from birth through age five. She was involved in the Early Childhood Center playground project which was recently built. Most of the playgroups plays at the Broadview Heights playground because it is fenced in completely, it provides the ability to see them at all times so they can't run off. We do not like the site points where it is dark inside for the children and can create a problem for the parent if they are unable to locate their child quickly if needed. The Early childhood PTA is ready to be involved and have earmarked some of our budget to do something at the playground as a community service project for their group. They are looking forward to being involved.

Michelle Gross, a resident, asked if the city would maintain the playground, or will it still be up to volunteer organizations to maintain.

Trudy, representative from Little Tikes and a national playground certified inspector. She said their inspections follow the consumer safety guidelines. They feel the wooden playgrounds can be a huge liability for a city due to lack of maintenance; several wooden parks are now being taken down. Those that have not been taken down and not maintained will need constant service and repair.

Jim Gross, a resident, questioned what the budget would be, where the funds are coming from, and how much would be committed for maintenance.

Mayor Stefanik and Mr. Antoskiewicz did not feel we are at a point where we can answer that because we still have to decide if it will be a community build, which is cheaper, and would the committee feel comfortable going out and asking for donations from businesses. Will it be private or public funded, can we ask City Council for future capital Rec funds or bond it as part of City Hall project, and are there grants we can apply for. We have a long way to go. The Mayor reminded us of the preventative maintenance and regular maintenance programs that are now in place in the city. Mayor Stefanik agrees that nothing was done from 2007 all the way back into the 90's; nothing was touched in this park. We have a lot of great things going on in this city and this park deserves an upgrade. Old versus new, we have asked the companies doing the designs to keep the front part of the structure and that would also including the signage and the bricks; and incorporate the old with the new. It has served it's time, it is 20 years old. Parts of the structure needs to come down, there are many safety issues. Times are changing; the older kids do not use the playground like they used to; it is the younger children with their parents who are up here. We need to change with the times. We have to look toward the future. Here is an opportunity to improve on this. If everyone wants to get together and form that committee, we welcome you; we encourage you to be a part of that.

Mr. Antoskiewicz encouraged everyone to come up to the Rec Board meetings as we continue to discuss it. Final thoughts by Mayor Stefanik was to invite anyone who is interested in being part of a committee of approximately ten people or so, who are open minded and want to investigate the different options, to come up to the next Rec Board meeting.

NORTH ROYALTON RECOGNIZED CLUBS:

Soccer: Mr. Ragone –The soccer fields have been great; our thanks to John and his crew in the Rec Department for doing a great job cutting and prepping both Heasley and Memorial fields. The new fences/backstops are in at Heasley; American Fence did the project at a cost was a little over \$13,000 which included a discount which was his donation to the Soccer Club which helped defray the cost. During Soccer Days last June, we had an issue with a coach having words with one of the players from an opposing team, he has been asked to appear before the soccer board for a hearing; he elected to resign as a coach. We informed him he would be ineligible to coach in North Royalton in the future without having appeared before the Board. A question was raised regarding this person's ability to coach other sports in North Royalton; Mr. Ragone said he could only speak for the Soccer Club. Soccer Days will be the first Saturday in October. We are doing Foot Skills clinic for both the Rec and the Travel programs this fall at Heasley.

ADJOURNMENT

Moved by Mr. Kelley, seconded by Mr. Althouse to adjourn the meeting. Motion carried. Meeting adjourned at 7:25 p.m. The next meeting is scheduled for Tuesday, October 30 at 6:00.