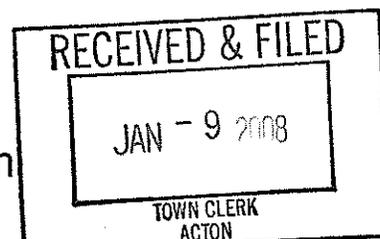




Town of Acton Recreation Commission



**MINUTES
DECEMBER 4, 2007**

7:00 PM

COA-BUILDING

Audubon Hill Rd., Acton, MA 01720

ATTENDEES	Recreation Commission members present were Mr. Ron Schlegel, Ms. Alison Gallagher, Mr. Frank Calore, Ms. Karen Jarsky and Mr. Jon Benson. Also present were Ms. Cathy Fochtman, Recreation Director, Ms. Maura Haberman, Events Coordinator/Administrative Assistant and Ms. Cheryl Getsick, Secretary
NOTE TAKER	Maura Haberman

AGENDA TOPICS

Meeting called to order at: 7:08 PM

Citizens Concerns:

DISCUSSION	No citizen concerns were brought forward.
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CONSENT AGENDA

DISCUSSION	Minutes, November 6, 2007
CONCLUSIONS	Minutes of November 6, 2007 were approved as amended. 5-0

GREAT HILL DOG ISSUES

DISCUSSION	<p>Mr. Schlegel addressed the audience of twelve (as of 7:10 PM) regarding concerns about dogs at Great Hill. The question and plan for the evening-what is the criteria for a dog park and can we make a list so that we can develop a plan. The Recreation Commission and Recreation Department have received correspondence via email from both dog owners and field users.</p> <p>A resident of Arlington Road agreed that dog waste on the field is bad, but once dog pickup bags were put in place, there has been a decline. It was reported that dog owners are continually picking up field user's trash and that both dog owners and field users need to work together. She stated that she would like to see Great Hill not be used as a soccer field but back to open space. She also recommended a committee be formed with both soccer users and dog owners.</p> <p>A resident from Vanderbilt Road questioned what the dog issues are, to help frame the discussion. Mrs. Fochtman reported that complaints were received from Acton Boxborough Youth Soccer (ABYS) President Seth Tower. The problems reported were control, hygiene and safety. Dogs have been running on the fields during games and practices, frequent dog waste not picked up and children fall in it, and holes are dug, which are continually filled with loam they have brought in to avoid injury. Recommendations were made that dogs should be on a leash when children are present and/or playing in a sport. He is willing to help with additional signage through his graphics company.</p> <p>Ms. Fochtman reported that she would like to see all users of Great Hill coexist. Currently, there are two signs in place at the entry to Great Hill and one by a dog bag dispenser and additional signage recommendation was made to the Board of Selectmen and a dog owner responsibility letter with license issuance. The dog waste bags average \$300 every 6 weeks and are provided at Great Hill, NARA and the Arboretum and are paid out of the Recreation Budget as are the signs for dogs. The Recreation Commission would like to see these bags and signs paid for by additional license fees to cover this cost by the users. ABYS uses Great Hill April through November. Mr. Schlegel reported that there are 30 teams who use the two fields at Great Hill averaging 300 kids a week, April through November from approximately 4-7 pm on weekdays and all day on Saturday and Sunday afternoons. Mr. Benson reported that dog issues were brought to the Commission's attention last summer by a gentleman who sent many emails reporting numerous incidents at NARA Park. Ms. Gallagher lives near Great Hill and has run her dogs there and dislikes seeing irresponsible dog owners and field users who leave trash. Many of the dog owners who use Great Hill are responsible with their dogs, but there are some dog owners who give good dog owners a bad rap.</p> <p>An Acton resident expressed excitement that this meeting is in the spirit of community and would like</p>
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to see coexistence. She has witnessed dog owners promoting cleanup. Many soccer users are also dog owners and the soccer players who use Great Hill are young. Another resident who is both a dog owner and mother would be furious if her kids were stepping in dog waste. She reported that she has given bags to dog owners, but they get angry. The issue is how to make the possibility for excuses lower? She also recommended more dispensers throughout Great Hill.

A neighbor of Great Hill reported that dog owners toss the dog waste bags in the woods and that she has concerns about the Sunday gathering where dogs run loose onto her property and into her indoor private residence. She reported that dogs are out of control and kids can't even ride their bikes. Dogs have followed her home and over the years it has gotten worse, and that is why she attended the meeting.

Mr. Schlegel reported that this is why there is dog policy in place at NARA Park. Different user groups have different ethics. How do we protect the field users from irresponsible dogs? What kind of policy do we put in place to solve this problem? Ms. Fochtman reported that there are no surrounding towns which have a dog park. Many of the dog owners are from out of the area. Some of the towns have a leash policy and many do not allow dogs on playing fields and since Acton doesn't have a policy, there are a lot of nonresidents using our fields for their dogs.

**DISCUSSION
AND
CONCLUSION**

An attendee feels that dog owners respect the park and that random users are careless and may not be as vested in the park. She recommended that more strategic signage be added and more bags.

A former ABYS president attended and agreed with Mr. Tower's letter regarding hygiene and control but felt that the holes could be other animals and field users. He felt that dogs should be leashed when kids are using the fields as he has witnessed dogs interfering in games. He noted observing dog owners picking up trash and that dog owners report problems. His recommendation would be to have additional signage, better bag distribution and when kids are there, dogs should be restrained.

Ms. Fochtman reported that our Natural Resources crew and ABYS help to maintain the fields and that the Natural Resources crew refills the dog bag stations.

A Maynard resident reported that he has seen approximately as much as 70 dogs on a Sunday morning and finds Acton an amazing community. He is working on a dog park book and has been to the first new dog park in Boston. He expressed that Great Hill is the best managed and kept park versus other towns.

Mr. Schlegel informed the audience that Great Hill is a great place for a dog park, but at the current time, the fields are needed until Morrison Farm is developed and currently, we can't give up the fields. He also reported that soccer is growing and will continue to grow. Ms. Fochtman reported that the demand for playing fields is greater than the supply and to bring more active recreation will cost a lot of money.

Another dog user reported that she cleans up not only after her dog but other people's dogs, and has stepped in dog waste.

Mr. Schlegel sought input on what are the physical things that would make Great Hill a good dog park? The responses were: pond, trails with terrain, wide open space, parking, dog socialization, and an area which can be enclosed with fencing.

Ms. Gallagher questioned the dog owners about how many dogs attend each Sunday and what if one dog irritates everyone? The response was that 40-50 dogs attend weekly and that the owner of an irritating dog is asked to leave.

Ms. Fochtman reported feedback regarding dogs including small dogs being approached by large dogs and in instances where they have been attacked. There was an incident where a woman was bitten and owners were arrogant. The town has a part-time dog control officer and availability is small and police do not have the staffing to monitor dogs. Enforcement is a very difficult thing.

Mr. Schlegel sought input with suggestions on how we proceed to protect our asset. Suggestions made by attendees were a temporary fence used during soccer season (Mr. Schlegel reported that it would cost an estimated \$5,000 for a split rail permanent fencing about 300 feet), enforce and pass a leash policy for one season and see if improvement is made; soccer fields should get priority when the fields are being used.

Mr. Schlegel informed the attendees that the Recreation Commission is an advisory committee to the Board of Selectmen and that the Board of Selectmen asked the Commission for recommendations regarding dogs at Great Hill. A recommendation that will be made based upon input collected. The Recreation Commission would like to see more signage and education.

	<p>In conclusion, these points were stated:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • dog owners and soccer must communicate • dogs owners are willing to do more to keep access to the park • funding for dog bags and signage through license fees • dog bag donation box • more signage • more pickup bags • better education • leash policy when children are present <p>The commission will review the data collected and draft & vote recommendations to the Selectmen at the January meeting</p>
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RECREATION EVENTS

DISCUSSION	Winterfest, Feb. 2, 2008
CONCLUSIONS	Ms. Haberman reported that Winterfest donations are coming in and sought support from the Recreation Commission to help find volunteers for the event.

REPORTS

DISCUSSION	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. Elm Street Update: Ms. Fochtman is negotiating a date with MUSCO Lighting to measure light spill near 14 Elm Street. The citizen at 14 Elm has numerous issues with the lighting. b. Morrison Farm Master Plan: Ms. Fochtman is working adding more Community Gardens in addition to the ones at 2A/27 to meet the high demand. Grounds have been tilled, and a water spigot will need to be added. c. Community Preservation Committee: Mr. Benson reported that they just reviewed W. Acton Library and Theatre III CPA funding applications. d. School Street: No report e. Playground Updates: Ms. Fochtman reported that she and Ms. Jarsky have been researching playgrounds and have submitted a CPC application for a toddler playground at Elm Street. f. Open Space and Recreation Plan: Ms. Fochtman reported that new pieces of the plan are in the early phases of being written. A survey has gone out to the town and is available on line. g. NARA Youth Program and Beach Update: Ms. Fochtman will begin interviewing returning employees over the holiday break.
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NEW BUSINESS/DISCUSSION

DISCUSSION	Assabet River Rail Trail (ARRT) and Bruce Freeman Rain Trail (BFRT) Letter of Support
CONCLUSIONS	The Planning Board is seeking a letter of support from the Recreation Commission regarding the completion of the design phase. The Recreation Commission voted to support the Assabet River Rail Trail and Bruce Freeman Rail Trail letter of support for 100% design phase. 5-0
MEETING ADJOURNED TIME:	8:50 PM