

**WESTON RECREATION COMMISSION  
MEETING MINUTES  
TUESDAY, JUNE 16, 2020, 7 PM VIA ZOOM**

*Pursuant to Gov. Baker's Executive Order dated March 12, 2020 modifying the requirements of the Open Meeting Law, the Recreation Master Plan Steering Committee, to ensure the safety of all participants, held its meeting remotely via Zoom: <https://zoom.us/j/925462282>, Meeting ID: 392 344 366.*

**Members Present:** Eric Rosenthal (chair), Melissa Crocker, Trevor MacDonald, Julie Johnstone, and Marcy Dorna

**Absent:** Elly Pendergast

**Staff:** Chris Fitzgerald (Director), Sharon Locke (Assistant Director), Lauren Smith (Program Coordinator)

### **Recreation Commission and Recreation Staff Comments**

Mr. Rosenthal, Chair of the Recreation Commission, expressed how much the Memorial Pool means to the Town of Weston. The Recreation Commission has met three times over the last month to talk directly and primarily about the pool. The Commission wants to do what is financially right for the town but most of all what is safe for the town. The Commission has been provided with what neighboring towns are doing. The neighboring towns of Newton, Lexington, and Belmont are not opening their pools for the summer. The Town of Wellesley is opening their pond as a "swim at your own risk" facility with no lifeguards. The Town of Lincoln will be opening their pool and the privately-owned town pool in Wayland will be opening but not until Phase 3. Mr. Rosenthal said that the meeting would be split into three parts. Staff comments, resident comments, and then the Recreation Commission & Staff addressing resident comments.

Mr. Chris Fitzgerald, Recreation Director, discussed how it takes 4-6 weeks to start up the pool and anywhere from \$30,000 - \$50,000 between start up and shut down to run the pool each summer. The size of the Memorial Pool makes it a unique operation. The Recreation Department operates under the financial model of an enterprise fund. This means that 70% of the budget must be subsidized with revenue. Each summer the pool loses money but the revenue is made up through other programming. This summer that may not be the case because revenue was lost when spring programs were cancelled and summer programs are still unknown. The Recreation staff spent many weeks attending both state and national meetings regarding aquatics and Covid. Groups included the National Recreation & Parks Association, Massachusetts Recreation and Parks Association, The American Red Cross, Star Guard, National Texas Aquatic Council, CDC, and the National Association of Aquatic Professionals. If the pool were to reopen additional staff would need to be hired to keep up with the cleaning and disinfecting as well as additional staff to enforce social distancing. Other revenue sources such as swim lessons, special events, and concessions would not be allowed. Additional guard training would also be needed so staff could learn the new Covid Guidelines and the new CPR standards. There is also a risk of closure if there is another state spike or an out break at the pool. This closure would come at a high price

after the initial investment of the \$20,000-30,000 it takes to start up the pool. Lastly the pool has recently been experiencing pump problems. A submersible well pump that is critical to startup and operation is currently out to be fixed. Fixing the pump at best case scenario will take 2-4 weeks at worst it is unknown. There may be some way to open with a temporary pump but there would be a high chance of pool closure due to pump issues.

Ms. Sharon Locke, Assistant Recreation Director, is a Lifeguard Training Instructor, a Certified Pool Operator, former Chair of the MRPA Aquatic Branch and has worked in aquatics managing pools for 30 years. Ms. Locke has great concern over the inability to properly train lifeguards this summer. For reference Ms. Locke explained that the Memorial Pool Lifeguards go through extensive training each summer which consists of a solid month of preseason training as well as mandatory weekly training once the pool is open. The American Red Cross Lifeguard certification is basically a base level certification that heavily depends on facilities doing extended training with their guards within their own Emergency Action Plan. This is especially crucial in Weston where the size of the pool makes it more like guarding a pond than a pool. In order for lifeguards to properly train and practice rescues on each other they will need to break the state social distancing rules as well as put themselves at risk. The Red Cross has offered no guidelines as to how this training can take place. Ms. Locke has spoken to other pools that are opening, some have decided not to train their guards. As an aquatic manager the rule of thumb is always that if you cannot open and offer the highest level of care possible then you do not open. Ms. Locke believes that if guards were put on the chair with no in-service training and an accident did occur the town could be held liable.

Ms. Melissa Crocker, Recreation Commissioner, is also part of the Recreation Master Plan Committee. This committee is looking at doing a renovation to the Memorial Pool of the filters, concession area and possible bath house. It is disappointing that the renovations are not ready to be done this summer. In recent summers, under normal operation, the pool has lost roughly \$125,000 but that revenue has been made up with fall programming. Currently there is no guarantee of what fall programming will look like.

Ms. Dorna, Recreation Commissioner, stated that she is in favor of opening the pool this summer because there are so very few activity options for the senior citizens in Weston.

## **Resident Comments**

Mr. Peter King, 687 Wellesley Street, advocated for the pool being open with the following points:

- Placing arrows on the deck for one-way foot traffic, no furniture, colored wristbands for families to easily identify social distancing between family groups, concessions sold outside, signage, and additional staff to enforce social distancing. Mr. Peter King stated that
- The risks outdoors are very low; benefits of exercising outdoors outweigh the risks of COVID-19
- Weston is a low risk community and only has one case of community spread.
- People are used to social distancing and would have no problem following the rules.

- Young lifeguards will not be at risk due to their age and will rise to the occasion to get the job done.

Ms. Kathy Dell’Erario, 40 Westland Road, stated the Memorial Pool can open because Valley Pond in Weston has opened and managed to train their lifeguards. She made the following points:

- Open just half the pool with fewer people.
- Find work arounds to the pump issue and financial issues.
- People will obey the rules just like they are doing at Valley Pond

Ms. Dell’Erario asked Mr. Fitzgerald to further elaborate on the financial aspect.

Mr. Fitzgerald responded that the financial piece is bigger than just this pool season. The deficit of FY20 is a longer discussion but the recreation department is restricted in what it can withdraw from the reserve funds due to the laws that govern it. It is predicted that the Recreation Department deficit will be over \$100,000, which assumes things return to relative normalcy in the fall. Covering the loss has been discussed with the possibility of some relief programs that are still in litigation, but there are no guarantees. A transfer of funds would need approval from the Finance Committee as well as a town meeting vote. All possibilities sited are speculative at best, and something more definitive is needed in a short period of time.

Ms. Dell’Erario asked for comments from members of the Recreation Commission. Ms. Crocker does not believe the pool can open due to the financial unknown and not being able to train the guard staff to our level of expectation. Ms. Dorna feels that the pool can open. Mr. Rosenthal responded that running a small deficit is one thing but running a large deficit which is currently predicted is not being fiscally responsible to the residents of Weston.

The following residents spoke, with a summary of additional points made listed below: Nancy McFarland, 676 Wellesley Street; Carol Ott, 50 Indian Hill Road; Susan Cannonberg 115 Meadowbrook Road; Kim Glaiel, 32 Bay State Road; Adam King, 105 Cherry Brook Rd.; and Dan Curtin, 291 Glen Rd., Lisa Lappi, 141 Montville Road; Becky Dempsy, 27 Silver Hill Road; and Katharina Wilkins 63 Brook Road

- The pool can open with time slots and suggested getting volunteers to enforce social distancing. also agrees with the above comments.
- The pool is very important for the COA and Brook School Apartment members and the Recreation Commission should let adults decide for themselves and not make the decision for them. agrees that opening the pool should be a priority.
- Elderly residents have very few exercise options in Weston and would be willing to pay a much higher fee if it meant that the pool could open. Ms. Glaiel thanks the Recreation Commission for all their hard work but\_would also like to see
- The pool should open for swim instruction.
- Process of closing could have been better.
- Demand may be higher than anticipated.
- Regulations might relax by Phase III.

- Awareness should be raised about pool deficit to help rectify the problem.
- Agree with staff and full trust in the elected Recreation Commission, residents shouldn't try to undermine qualified staff.
- Expecting kids to socially distance at the pool is unrealistic.
- The Covid risk is more of a concern with kids yelling, coughing and spitting the water.
- Lack of community spread in Weston right now is not good enough reason to justify opening.
- As parents, the lifeguard training points made previously is very concerning and enough alone to keep the pool closed.
- All solutions supporting opening are speculative at best and residents should just move on this summer.
- The town should be focus more on slowing the spread this summer so that the kids can go back to school in the fall.

Lisa Reitano, 409 Conant Road and Chair of Finance Committee, stated that that the Covid regulations will let less people into the pool which means less revenue, this will create lots of financial concerns especially with the predicted year end deficit. Who is going to pay for the pool? And how are they going to pay for it? There is reduced state aid, less pool revenue, and more expenses. There should be more resident interest in paying for the unexpected stuff than in something that we know for certain is going to run at a large deficit. Opening the Memorial Pool this summer would not be fiscally responsible.

### **Recreation Commission Closing Comments:**

In closing, Ms. Crocker, Mr. MacDonald, Ms. Johnstone and Mr. Rosenthal all spoke in support of keeping the pool closed this summer due to the various financial and safety concerns stated previously.

Ms. Dorna stated she felt the pool should be opened, and that the pool deficit would be a small addition portion to the overall projected deficit of the town. Absorbing this would be worthwhile to continue providing the pool's services to the seniors in town.

Mr. Rosenthal asked if any Recreation Commissioners want to offer a motion given the discussion that took place. No motion was made.

**The meeting adjourned at 9:45 PM.**