

**PLANNING COMMISSION  
APPROVED MINUTES**

**TOWN OF ATHERTON  
June 26, 2013  
6:00pm  
COUNCIL CHAMBERS  
94 ASHFIELD ROAD**

**1. ROLL CALL**

**PRESENT: Herman Christensen Jr.  
Philip Lively  
Mary Beth Widmer  
Eric Lane  
Paul Quinlan**

Assistant City Attorney Jennifer Larsen, Deputy Town Planner Lisa Costa Sanders, and Associate Planner Andrea Mardesich were present.

**2. APPROVAL OF MINUTES**

**MOTION to approve the minutes of the May 22, 2013 meeting.  
M/S Lively/Lane Ayes: 5 Noes: 0**

**3. PUBLIC COMMENTS - none**

**4. COMMISSIONERS REPORTS - none**

**5. STAFF REPORTS – Deputy Town Planner Lisa Costa Sanders gave an update on City Council, noting the Council adopted the budget. The fee schedule item has been continued to a study session in August. The City Council elected a new Vice Mayor, Cary Weist and announced the vacancy on the Council. Deputy Town Planner Costa Sanders announced that applications are being accepted for the vacant City Council seat. If the Council cannot make a decision to fill the vacancy, they will call for an election.**

Deputy Town Planner Costa Sanders also thanked Commissioner Quinlan for his service to the Town. Paul Tonelli has been appointed to the Planning Commission.

**PUBLIC HEARINGS**

**6. Review of Proposed Improvements by Little League to the Existing Baseball Field at Holbrook Palmer Park – 150 Watkins Avenue – Review of improvements to the baseball field including a new building for covered spectator seating, restrooms and storage.**

Chair Christensen introduced the item and gave a brief overview of the process.

Deputy Town Planner Lisa Costa Sanders presented the item. She explained the process before the Planning Commission. Deputy Town Planner Costa Sanders explained that she compiled the list of Planning Commissioner comments and noted that the Public Works Department is the lead on this project and assisted with the staff response to comments.

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Chair Christensen commented that he would like each of the Commissioners to comment on the items brought up by the Commission and then draft a letter containing a list of recommendations from the Planning Commission to the City Council. He would like the letter completed by staff and then returned to the Commission for comment at its next meeting.

Deputy Town Planner Lisa Costa Sanders agreed that a complete list of the Commission's recommendations will be provided to the City Council.

Chair Christensen remarked that he wasn't sure what the timeline was for getting the letter to the City Council. Deputy Town Planner Lisa Costa Sanders answered that the item is currently scheduled for the July City Council meeting.

Commissioner Lively commented that he thinks the letter could be written and reviewed before the next City Council meeting.

Chair Christensen commented that he would like two of the Commissioners to work with staff on the letter of recommendations for review and discussion at the July Planning Commission meeting.

Commissioner Lane expressed concern that if the Planning Commission doesn't have their list of recommendations ready prior to the July City Council meeting, that they might miss an opportunity to provide recommendations to the City Council. Commissioner Lane asked staff what the agenda item for the July City Council meeting is. Deputy Town Planner Lisa Costa Sanders responded that if the recommendations are ready, it will be presented to the City Council. Staff will be asking the City Council to review the recommendations and provide direction to staff for negotiations with Menlo-Atherton Little League on a Use Agreement.

Assistant City Attorney Jennifer Larson suggested that in an effort to remain in compliance with the Brown Act, if necessary, the Commission should hold another hearing to approve the letter so the public can witness the process.

Commissioner Quinlan expressed his opinion that the process has taken long enough and the item should not have to be heard at another Planning Commission meeting. He thinks that the Planning Commission should be able to come up with a list of recommendations tonight without meeting again.

Commissioner Lively expressed disappointment in the staff report; specifically, the responses given by Menlo Atherton Little League. Commissioner Lively gave an example of #5 – in discussion about the color of the benches, MA Little League's response was that the bleachers would need to be painted which would result in higher maintenance costs. Commissioner Lively was disappointed in comments like this.

Deputy Town Planner Lisa Costa Sanders explained that Public Works took the lead on the project in discussions with Little League. She added that the Atherton Police Department offered feedback and they determined, after looking at the plans, that there would not be a public safety issue.

Commissioner Lively expressed regret that the MA Little League group didn't provide these responses in person.

Commissioner Quinlan commented that process has taken too long. In approaching the decision, he will be constrained by the three things that he believes were in the minds of the voters: improved playing field, bleachers, and restrooms. He was concerned by the subjective nature of staff saying that the proposal by MA Little League was or was not the will of the voters. Commissioner Quinlan agreed with Commissioner Lane's argument at the last meeting that the existing space is a meadow and while he

would like to see the site improved for baseball use, he could see not allowing all of the features so that the site can remain more like a meadow when not being used for baseball.

Commissioner Widmer expressed concern that MA Little League had a rebuttal on every recommendation the Planning Commission brought forward. She would like to see them reach some middle ground.

Chair Christensen remarked that he supports improving the ball field but would approve a much smaller-scale plan than the plan before the Commission. He would like to see a plan that takes into consideration the rural setting of the ball field.

Mike Gardner, Menlo Atherton Little League spoke on behalf of the project. Mr. Gardner addressed Commissioner Widmer's concern and informed the Commission that staff requested that Little League respond to every item on the list presented. He remarked that they are not entrenched and would like to work with the Town to complete the project while staying true to the will of the people.

Commissioner Lane expressed disappointment in the response to the Commission's comments from Little League. Commissioner Lane commented that he understood that Little League has stated that they are willing to include ideas discussed at the last meeting, but the written response did not convey that sentiment

Mr. Gardner reminded the Commission that he is on record from the last meeting that Little League would be willing to look into issues like brown or green benches, etc. He would like to walk the field with the Planning Commissioners and City Council. Mr. Gardner commented that he would like to work with the Town to come to an agreement about the project.

Commissioner Lane commented that in his remarks to Little League he told them what he like about the project and those things he would like to see changed. He would like the same sort of response from Little League. Mr. Gardner remarked that Commissioner Lane's remarks from the last meeting have resonated with him.

Chair Christensen restated the role of the Planning Commission in the process.

Commissioner Lively restated his desire to see more details in the project plan. He noted the grade difference between home plate and the tennis courts and noted that the difference is 30 inches. He is not clear on how that difference will be made up if it is not a retaining wall. Commissioner Lively believes, in regards to this project, "the devil is in the details."

Commissioners reviewed the list of comments by the following categories:

#### **FOUL POLES**

**MOTION that the foul poles shall be removed at the end of the season or upon request by the Town.**

**M/S Widmer/Christensen      Ayes: 5      Noes: 0**

#### **FENCING**

Commissioner Quinlan stated that beyond the dugout the fence should be removable to the outfield fence to keep meadow-like nature.

Commissioner Lively agrees with Commissioner Quinlan.

Chair Christensen feels all fencing should be removed at the end of the season.

Commissioner Lane feels the “permanent” footprint can remain the same as it is now. Any extension should be removable.

**MOTION to allow a non-removable fence similar to footprint as it exists today along the infield, anything beyond that shall be removable at the end of the season or upon the request of the Town.**

**M/S Lane/Lively      Ayes: 4      Noes: 1 (Christensen)**

#### **OUTFIELD FENCE**

**MOTION to allow the outfield fence to be 4’ high and removable at the end of the season or upon request by the Town as proposed.**

**M/S Lane/Widmer      Ayes: 5      Noes: 0**

Walter Robinson, resident, addressed the Commission and questioned their stated jurisdiction with regards to this application. Mr. Robinson believes that their purpose is inconsistent with what the City Attorney has advised. Deputy Town Planner Lisa Costa Sanders and Assistant City Attorney Jennifer Larson advised that in this instance, the City Council has the ultimate authority and the Planning Commission has been asked to make recommendations to the City Council.

#### **SPRINKLER LINES AND CONTROLS**

**MOTION that the sprinkler lines and controls shall be moved to temporary housing during construction and out of the playing surface for final installation, to the satisfaction of Public Works Staff.**

**M/S Widmer/Quinlan      Ayes: 5      Noes: 0**

#### **LIGHTING**

Commissioner Lively asked how much lighting will there be if there is covered seating. Commissioner Lively feels there should be no lighting on the field – only down lit security lighting at the rear and seating area.

Commissioner Widmer is concerned about where the utility conduit will go. Commissioner Widmer has concerns about it going through trees, playground, under the path and field.

Mr. Gardner explained that it is not a case of MA Little League not knowing what they are doing – they are waiting for guidance from staff before including some of the details of the project.

#### **MOTION: Lighting**

- a.) shall be minimal downlit security lights at the rear of the structure,**
- b.) shall be minimal downlit security lighting within the seating area,**
- c.) shall not include field lights,**
- d.) the electrical conduit path shall minimally impact trees.**

**M/S Lively/Quinlan      Ayes: 5      Noes: 0**

## **FIELD IMPROVEMENTS**

Chair Christensen feels that the whole field should be improved. Some parts may need more than others.

Commissioners Quinlan and Widmer are wondering if there is a standard for deciding what parts of the field need work.

Commissioner Lane asked who holds the liability. He feels that depending on Town's legal vulnerability, they may want a better field. Commissioner Lane commented that right field is not the same height as the rest of the field. Commissioner Lane stated that he trusts the applicant to create a good field.

Commissioner Quinlan remarked that liability insurance will be addressed during the use agreement.

**MOTION that the entire field should be improved for a quality playing surface (some places may need more work than others).**

**M/S Quinlan/Christensen      Ayes: 5      Noes: 0**

## **SCOREBOARD**

Commissioner Lane thinks the scoreboard should be in the seating area to minimize impact.

Commissioner Lively wants the scoreboard put away.

Commissioner Christensen would also like a portable scoreboard in order to restore the field to the meadow.

Commissioner Widmer asked if a portable scoreboard would be battery or solar powered and expressed concern over running a power line.

Commissioner Lane commented that there should be no scoreboard along either foul line. He is OK with either a portable scoreboard or in the seating area.

Mr. Gardner assured the Commission that MA Little League will consider all recommendations, see what's available in the marketplace and make a determination.

**MOTION that no permanent scoreboard be located along either foul line.**

**M/S Lane/Quinlan      Ayes: 5      Noes: 0**

**MOTION that as an option, the scoreboard could be designed as part of the main seating structure or as a portable scoreboard, that would be stored at the end of each game.**

**M/S Lane/Widmer      Ayes: 5      Noes: 0**

## **PATH**

Commissioner Widmer thinks we should be reducing hardscape.

Chair Christensen is worried that a 6-foot path won't be enough for maintenance vehicles to drive on.

Mr. Gardner remarked that the path is an upgrade to the existing path and that the Town's Public Works department requested the path be 8 feet wide. The Town's carts are tearing up the sides of the current path. MA Little League will follow the direction of the Town.

Commissioner Widmer asked why the Town is making homeowners reduce hardscape but is not following their own standards. Deputy Town Planner Lisa Costa Sanders answered that the Town doesn't restrict hardscape but that it just triggers more drainage requirements.

Commissioner Lane commented that due to the use, the path should be asphalt.

**MOTION that the path from the parking lot to the field shall be no greater than 8' in width, asphalt material as recommended by Public Works.**

**M/S Christensen/Lively                      Ayes: 4                      Noes: 1**

## **DUGOUTS**

Chair Christensen would like the roof to be removable at the end of the season.

Commissioner Widmer asked if the fences are removable then won't there be a big hole during the off-season

Mr. Gardner clarified that the dugouts have always been proposed at grade level. They will not be sunken.

Commissioner Quinlan believes the dugouts need a roof, as it gets very hot.

Commissioner Lane also sees the dugout roof as a safety issue from foul balls.

Mr. Gardner again commented that the drawings are conceptual and MA Little League very much wants to work with the Town on the design and to make sure it fits in with the surroundings.

Commissioner Lively believes the roof should be removable at the end of the season. He feels the same about the roof on the seating area.

Commissioner Lively is concerned about pigeons and other animals living in a roof structure.

**MOTION to allow the dugouts with a roof cover that is removed at the end of the season.**

**M/S Lively/Widmer                      Ayes: 3                      Noes: 2 (Quinlan, Lane)**

## **BACKSTOP**

Mr. Gardner explained that the covered part is standard of most backstops. The proposal consists of a see through black-coated chain link fence to keep foul balls from reaching the spectators, walking path, or tennis courts.

Commissioner Lane asked if the top would be arched or flat. Mr. Gardener answered that it is proposed as flat.

Chairman Christensen would like the backstop taken away during the off-season.

Commissioner Lane passed a picture of the dugout and is concerned that it needs to be a very secure structure due to its height and angle which may not work as a temporary structure.

Commissioner Lively asked how much taller the backstop is than the seating area with cupola.

Mr. Gardner answered that he doesn't know exactly but the fence will be under the height of the cupola, the part that extends will be higher but not sure how much higher.

**MOTION that the backstop with foul ball screen along the top as proposed with black vinyl coated chain link fence is acceptable as permanent.**

**M/S Lane/Quinlan                      Ayes: 3                      Noes: 2 (Christensen, Lively)**

Commissioner Quinlan wanted to clarify from Commissioner Lively the reason for his vote. Commissioner Lively clarified that he would like to see the backstop shorter than what is shown in the drawing.

**SEATING/STRUCTURE (not including the roof)**

Commissioner Lively feels that the stands will hold 200 people and he thinks that is about three times too many people.

Deputy Town Planner explained that the current Building Code specifies for 18 inches per seat for occupancy calculations. MA Little League is proposing more space per person per seat. Little League indicates they have designed the seating area to accommodate 100 spectators with more width per seat than is specified by the Building Code.

Mr. Gardner assured the Commission that it is not intended for 200 people. It is intended for 100 people to sit comfortably.

Commissioner Quinlan and Lively are in favor of reducing the visual impact of the seating area.

Chair Christensen is unclear on how to quantify a reduction in size. He suggested a reduction in percentage and also a reduction in seating capacity based on the 24" wide seat.

**MOTION to minimize the visual impacts of the structure and significantly reduce the size of the structure (60-100 people, using 24" wide seat as a standard).**

**M/S Lively/Christensen                      Ayes: 4                      Noes: 1 (Quinlan)**

**COLOR**

Deputy Town Planner Lisa Costa Sanders noted that the Parks and Recreation Commission recommended that the building color mimic the color of the darkest existing building in the park.. Mr. Gardner answered that they will paint the structure whatever color the Town wants it to be. Commissioners were in agreement with the Parks and Recreation Commission comments.

**ROOF**

Commissioner Lively would like something other than permanent covered roof.

Commissioner Quinlan thinks a covered removable roof will cause a lot of trouble and won't look very good. Commissioner Quinlan also commented that covered seating was the linchpin of the vote. He feels constrained that he should support covered seating.

Commissioner Widmer thinks it should be permanent but it doesn't have to have such a high profile.

Commissioner Lane thinks the structure doesn't need to look like so much like a roof. Wants to minimize the look of the roof from a distance and give it less impact.

**MOTION to allow the roof to be permanent as proposed, with a modified design to minimize the visual impact.**

**M/S Quinlan/Lane      Ayes: 3      Noes: 2 (Lively, Christensen)**

### **OPERATING CONDITIONS**

Chair Christensen asked about the condition of the field in prior years. Mr. Gardner spoke candidly that the Town's lack of maintenance was to blame for the condition of the field.

Commissioner Lane wants to make a recommendation to Council that they give clear direction to MA Little League – i.e. what is the maintenance schedule, what is the time of use.

Commissioner Lively would like to reiterate that there will be no snack bar ever so it cannot be added at a later date.

**Operating Conditions recommendations:** The Planning Commission recommends the City Council give clear direction to applicant for excellent performance taking into consideration the items listed below:

- Maintenance: the Parks and Recreation Commission should oversee Town maintenance of the field to ensure long-term quality.
- Time of Use:
  - Specific times outlined
  - Exclusive use during times as noted in Use Agreement
- Lighting: as discussed above
- Snack Bar: no snack bar
- Signage/advertisements: none allowed
- Amplified Sound: none allowed

Commissioner Lively requested that they revisit the potential drainage issues posed by the grade difference on the path.

**MOTION to examine and address any potential drainage and safety issues created by the change in grade between home plate and the tennis courts.**

**M/S Lively/Quinlan      Ayes: 5      Noes: 0**

Chair Christensen would like himself and Commissioner Lively to work with staff to put the recommendations into a more formal letter. He would then like to bring it back to the Commission for approval.

Commissioner Lane would like to leave the task to Commissioner Lively and Chair Christensen to formalize the recommendation and present it to Council.

Commissioner Lively thinks the matter should come back to the July Planning Commission meeting so that the public has one more opportunity to comment on the matter.

Commissioner Quinlan feels the Commission has prepared a list of recommendations to the City Council and that the process not be delayed further.

Commissioner Lane does not want to miss the window to submit recommendations to the City Council. He suggested that if the item is put on the Council agenda for July 17 that they at least present the Council with a draft of the Planning Commission recommendations.

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Chair Christensen agreed that they want to be heard by the Council.

Chair Christensen and Commissioner Lively commended Commissioner Quinlan on his contributions over the last four years and thanked him for his service to the Town.

7. **ADJOURN** – The meeting adjourned at 8:40pm.

Respectfully Submitted:

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Lisa Costa Sanders, Deputy Town Planner