

Harvard Parks and Recreation Commission – Annual Report 2013

The Parks and Recreation Commission is accountable for the oversight of the town's common lands, in addition to the beach and boat ramp areas at Bare Hill Pond. The commission also has responsibility for the town's recreational programs including the scheduling of fields for Harvard Athletic Association programs and the administration of the programs managed by Park and Rec directly – the Hershey Track Program, the Ski Program and the Beach/Pond Programs. All of these programs are funded through revenue generated by registration fees and other usage fees such as Beach Parking Stickers, Canoe/Kayak Storage, Mooring/Slip Storage and Boat Launching Fees and Field Usage Fees.

The Commission takes the lead on projects to upgrade common lands and fields by proposing funding from CPIC or through the Capital Funding process. There are several projects in the pipeline currently including the Restoration of the WW1 Monument and Flagpole, the Reconstruction of the Mass Ave. Stone Wall, the Replacement of the Wooden Dock at BHP, and the construction of Additional Parking for Boat Trailers at BHP.

During the winter of 2013, there was a major project initiated to redesign the parking/boat ramp area at Bare Hill Pond. The project involved the Bare Hill Pond Watershed Management Committee's plan to complete their storm water management program. The project involved the Pond Commission as well as the Conservation Commission to ensure all were aligned and in agreement with the plan. Several Open Forums were also held to keep the public informed.

The project was successfully completed in the spring; however the work resulted in less beach area for canoe/kayak storage along the water's edge and eliminated the 6-7 slots that had been available for boat trailer parking in the woods next to the boat launch area. Both situations presented problems that had to be mitigated as we worked through the spring and summer seasons.

The canoe/kayak area had previously enough space to accommodate the large crew boat rack. That space was no longer available along the shore, forcing an alternative solution in the upper parking lot. There were also a lot of resident complaints about the loss of boat trailer parking. The commission is working with the Conservation Commission, Pond Commission and Highway Department to define a small lot along Pond Rd. for the parking of 5-6 boat trailers before the spring of 2014.

The Beach Lottery in 2013 confirmed the interest in Canoe/Kayak storage at the pond exceeds current capacity with 143 resident applications against 100 available slots. The demand for Cove and Outer Moorings also exceeds available slots by a factor of 40% - demonstrating the strong resident interest in boating on the pond.

Under the leadership of the new beach Director, Alexandra Luck, the Swimming and Boating Lesson Program was very successful again this summer with 354 and 117 lessons signed up this

year. Boat Sticker sales were down from 2012 at 610 vs. 648 last year. Out of Town launch fees were at a significant shortfall due to a staffing gap in the spring that will be corrected in 2014. There was a Deep Water Aerobics Class added this year that was very well received. The commission is looking at an upgrade project for the Swing Set Area at the beach that is long overdue.

Marcus Lewis managed the Tennis Program this year and the arrangement went very well. There was a total of 70 participants in the program over the course of the 8 weeks of the summer.

The Harvard Lion's Club sponsored the first Triathlon Event in town, registering over 350 participants. There are plans in progress to do this event again in 2014.

The Long Board Competition was also held in town again this year – with expanded events over 2 days. This large event was very successful and well run based on input from residents and participants. We expect this to be repeated in 2014 as well.

The Civil War Memorial was professionally cleaned this fall. The statue across from the Center on the Common is now restored to its original condition and looks great.

Bob O'Shea, BHP Harbormaster, prepared an excellent study on the traffic use on the pond as a means to determine whether we needed to control access during the various seasons of usage – both recreational as well as BHRA crew team practices and other events on the pond. The results indicated that the pond capacity was under-utilized for all seasons with the exception of the summer when we will need to trial the limitation of the number of boat launches of speed boats during peak hours. This was the first study of this kind ever prepared. Bob is a committed volunteer who should be thanked and commended for this excellent work.

This fall, the commission funded a project to upgrade the Pond Rd. Baseball Field. The project was proposed by Darren Magan and the Bromfield Baseball Booster Club. The field was in serious need of re-construction of the pitcher's mound, the base paths and infield. The project also funded the addition of infield mix to improve drainage and mitigate weeds. A similar project was funded last winter for the Softball field at HES. It is clear that the current model for the maintenance of all town fields is not adequate. Rather than spending money to maintain the fields every year, we allow them to deteriorate and then reactively try to recover them. The commission will be working with Town Administration to define a more proactive model.

The Ski Program continues to be very successful and we offer our thanks to Anne Hentz and Doug Thornton for their volunteering work to make this program possible. The program provides Bus Service and chaperones to and from Mt. Wachusett for 6 sessions. Between the Bromfield and HES, we will have 3 buses totaling over 140 students this year.

There was a considerable amount of time and effort dedicated to working with the Bare Hill Rowing Association (BHRA) to define a working agreement that met the needs of all

stakeholders of the pond and beach areas. The previous agreement was never reviewed with town counsel and it lacked clear accountability and governance from the Bromfield School and the BHP Harbormaster. The crew program includes participants from Acton-Boxborough HS as well as the Bromfield and BHRA is legally an “out of town” entity. The complexity of the agreement and the related liability, fee schedule and participation levels at the beach contributed to difficult debates over the course of several months.

To complicate matters further, the Board of Selectman and town counsel researched the history of the town bylaws as it pertains to the jurisdiction of the beach area at the pond. That research indicated that the Board of Selectman has responsibility for granting access to any outside entity’s usage of the beach area at the pond – not Park and Rec. As a consequence, all requests to access the beach area by any outside entity must be approved by the BoS. This includes BHRA, the Lion’s Club Triathlon and the many Fishing Tournaments we historically support. We are currently waiting for clarity on that approval process so we can move forward. Town Counsel and Administration are also going to provide Liability Language and a Fee Schedule for the BHRA Agreement which must be in place before the crew season starts in the spring.

The commission lost a valuable resource with the resignation of John Lee. His knowledge and commitment to the work of Park and Rec has left a significant void and we thank him for his years of dedicated service. Steve Gordon applied to fill the vacancy and was approved to join the commission in John’s place.

This year, the commission has made a concerted effort to engage with the senior citizen community in town to better serve their unique interests and needs. Sue Guswa is invited to all meetings to represent the COA and Seniors in the community in general.

Respectfully Submitted,

Pat Nelson, Chair

Anne McWaters, Secretary

Joe Schmidt, Treasurer

BJ Pessia

Steve Gordon