

Larz Anderson Skating Rink Task Force Meeting
Thursday, July 15, 2021, 12:00 PM
Virtual Zoom Webinar

Task Force Members Present: Wendy Sheridan Ames, Nancy O’Conner, John Bain, Priscilla Karnovsky, Antonia Bellalta, Jeff Thibault, Randy Lieberg, David Driscoll, George Fantauzza, Jennifer Ng, Avi Urbas

Task Force Members Absent: Jim Carroll and Julie Jett

Staff Present: Alexandra Vecchio, Erin Gallentine, Katie Weatherseed, Scott Landgren

Guests: See attached.

Welcome & Introductions

A. Vecchio welcomed everyone to the Park and Recreation Ice Rink Task Force meeting. She introduced herself and noted that this meeting is considered a working group session. She stated that attendees can enter questions in the Q&A, and if they are not answered, attendees should feel free to follow up with staff. She thanked the Chair, Wendy Sheridan Ames.

Set Meeting Goal & Review Project Goal

A. Vecchio stated that this is the first time the Consultant Team and Task Force are meeting. She gave a brief overview of the agenda. W. S. Ames introduced herself and asked that meeting panelists introduce themselves. N. O’Connor noted that John Bain is in attendance via phone. The Task Force Meeting Members introduced themselves. Staff members introduced themselves, and then the Consultants introduced themselves.

A. Vecchio reviewed the meeting goals and the scope of the project. She stated that this is a feasibility study to determine a few different aspects of the location and design for an ice rink in Brookline. She added that this is a multi-month process and will include several public meetings which will lead to a final report from the consultant, KMDG.

A. Vecchio urged the Task Force members to consider potential funding for the project so they can start assessing what would be feasible, given the scope and design. W. S. Ames noted that the public process is a really important component of this project. She stated that she wanted today’s meeting to be a “round table” discussion.

Review Findings & Feedback from Public Meeting #1

W. S. Ames stated that she was impressed with the number of people who attended Public Meeting #1. She added that it helps the community feel involved and hopes that the degree of enthusiasm continues to future public meetings. She noted that there was particular enthusiasm for an outdoor space. N. O’Connor agreed, but noted that climate change is a real threat which may impact the usability of the rink. She added that if the Town had a covered rink and a site for outdoor skating, all needs would be satisfied. P. Karnovsky agreed and stated that R. Lieberg’s expertise is incredible. She suggested freezing over Larz Lagoon and building a covered rink at the existing ice rink site. R. Lieberg stated that in the town he grew up in, there are several outdoor rinks. One of the

most popular has boards and fencing around it for hockey, in addition to a small area that is connected for pleasure skating. A. Bellalta asked if the Larz Lagoon naturally freezes. E. Gallentine responded that it does naturally freeze, but the Town would need to take core samples. She added that she does not believe that the lagoon would have a safe depth and would be unreliable. A. Bellalta inquired about Frog Pond. P. Karnovsky responded that Frog Pond is a rink on top of an emptied pond. She clarified that she wasn't suggesting bringing in any technology to artificially freeze the lagoon. A. Bellalta added that it is important to recognize the main concerns noted by the public and to make sure we are addressing those. J. Ng stated that she has a summary PDF of polling data, as well as comments from the Q&A which she can share. She stated that at the second public meeting, they plan on discussing the big issues and priorities identified in the first meeting.

J. Thibault stated that he was impressed with the variety of options that were out there. N. O'Connor stated that the Task Force needs to weigh the needs of the community. She reiterated her concern about climate change. W. S. Ames stated that it sounds like the community wants a recreational facility in addition to a space for organized sports. But that recreational facility doesn't necessarily have to look like a conventional rink. E. Gallentine commented that Frog Pond is located in Prospect Park. She noted that it has a covered rink with an attached open air rink, which turns into a splash pad in the summer, and thought that it's an interesting model.

A. Urbas stated that the public engagement piece of the first meeting was great. He stated that financially, the most straight forward approach is a covered rink due to how efficient it is. However, could Brookline afford both options, and if so, what would that look like? He stated that it's important to look at the usability of an indoor rink versus an outdoor rink, and what programs could use it in the summer. He added that if the Town maintains an outdoor rink, he would suggest against limiting it to a ribbon shape, so that it could be utilized for other purposes during other times of the year.

E. Gallentine commented that neighborhoods have voiced concern about parking and traffic. She stated that it's important that we look at existing numbers and that number of cars we are currently accommodating at Larz. Similarly, the Task Force should consider when peak times are at Larz and what that means in increased usage.

N. O'Connor stated that the Task Force needs to be realistic in regards to restrictions on the Larz property. She stated that she's uncertain if the Town will be able to have an enclosed rink on this property. W. S. Ames suggested that the Task Force leave that to the Consultant Team to determine. E. Gallentine concurred that she believes an indoor rink would be very difficult at this site. G. Fantauzza asked that R. Lieberg speak to the efficiencies of using ice making equipment for two rinks, as opposed to one. R. Lieberg stated that the Town could put a single oven in a house, or a double oven, noting that a double oven takes more power, but would mean that all components you'd need for a second ice sheet are already accounted for. He stated that the more rinks you can add onto one system, the more efficiently they can run. G. Fantauzza commented that the Town could phase this with a future plan, and do it incrementally.

Concepts & Footprint of Building Types

A. Vecchio stated that the Task Force was presented with some different concepts of what the design could be for an ice rink and she would like the Task Force to discuss the pros and cons for these different concepts.

The Task Force discussed the pros and cons for open air rinks. R. Lieberg stated that there is a significantly romantic appeal to open air rinks, particularly being able to see the stars. He asked if this is a generational appeal. W. S. Ames responded that she thinks there is romanticism from older generations, but noted that she does also hear a similar desire for an outdoor space from younger people.

A. Urbas asked if the consultant will look at the pros and cons and cost assumptions for each model. He asked if the Task Force is trying to inform the consultants what the Committee's preferences might be. A. Vecchio responded that the consultants will provide a desired design for both locations: Larz and an alternative site. She asked that the Task Force determine what we want to build and what is critical to the Town, and then the consultant team can determine the feasibility of certain designs. E. Gallentine added that it is this Task Force's job to make a recommendation. She noted that there will be other options put forward by the consultants, but this Committee should make a recommendation that is presented to the full Park and Recreation Commission for their consideration and adoption.

G. Fantauzza stated that he is trying to hear what the priorities are. For instance, if the priority is that users can see stars while skating, and the Task Force is looking at a site where there is a lot of ambient light, the consultants may not recommend that site, even if it is a great fit in other ways.

P. Karnovsky discussed the magic of Larz Anderson Park, including when it begins to snow. W. S. Ames commented that it is critical that the Task Force also think about the communities needs – particularly the need for a reliable rink. She stated that it sounds like there is consensus from the Task Force members that there is a need for both outdoor and indoor facilities. J. Bain stated that to use the lagoon, the clay in the lagoon would need to freeze before the water would freeze. N. O'Connor noted that she would hate to only build an outdoor rink and lose days on the rink. She noted that some communities have ponds for skating, and the ice is not safe to skate on for several weeks.

P. Karnovsky suggested that the Town build a closed rink at Putterham Woods, and reimagine Larz, perhaps for a different recreational opportunity. She suggested that visitors could still go to Larz and get hot chocolate and be out in the cold under the night sky, but not skate. W. S. Ames agreed that a very well-designed closed rink with outdoor opportunities could give the Town everything it needs.

A. Bellalta agreed that building a closed facility that is not at Larz Anderson Park and having some recreational skating elsewhere is best. She noted her fear of bringing a

sports facility to Larz, which could affect the historic importance of the park. But added that she would hate to lose outdoor recreational skating opportunities.

J. Bain stated that he would prefer both an indoor and an outdoor facility. N. O'Connor agreed – and noted that at the last public meeting, there was a clear need for a covered rink and a desire for open air. She added that there's a lot to be said for an open air facility, but it doesn't need to take up as much of a footprint as a covered rink. She inquired where the Town could put a covered rink when Brookline has such limited open space. She wondered if there was a public/private partnership somewhere.

E. Gallentine stated that this Committee should be focused and clear – the Task Force should be thinking about what the Town can build.

Alternative Site Locations

A. Vecchio stated that she has developed several maps to help visualize what alternative sites might be considered. A. Vecchio showed a map depicting public and private open space throughout the Town, followed by a map showing municipal open space. She then noted that the parcel would need to be approximately 2 acres (minimum) in size to accommodate a rink, parking, operational facilities, etc. She showed a map depicting open space parcels greater than 2 acres (excluding school grounds).

Within this list, the Task Force identified open spaces that are *not* applicable:

- Brookline Reservoir Park
- Walnut Hills Cemetery
- Longwood Mall (historic beech trees)
- Cypress St Playground (directly adjacent to the high school)
- Riverway/Olmsted/Beacon Street Mall (the shape is not conducive for these purposes)
- Emerson Garden (parking issue and density issue)
- Griggs Park (density issue)
- Knyvet Square (density issue)
- Skyline Park (don't want to remove playing fields)
- Amory Park (don't want to remove playing fields)
- Robinson Playground (don't want to remove playing fields)
- Warren Field (don't want to remove playing fields)
- Single Tree Reservoir (emergency water supply)
- Corey Hill Park (challenging due to topography and parking)
- Brookline Avenue Park (it a heavily utilized park, and was redesigned within the last 5 years)
- Waldstein Park (density issue)
- Dane Park (has ledge and rock, topography is challenging)

J. Bain noted that if the Town constructed a covered rink with open sides, it could host hard court events during the off season or roll out synthetic turf. The Town could use it for seasons other than winter.

W. S. Ames inquired if the back field of Soule Recreation Center could be converted into an enclosed facility that turns into an indoor rink in the winter. She also noted that Newbury College was missing from the list.

N. O'Connor stated that she is intrigued by Soule Recreation Center and Newbury College.

D. Driscoll suggested a public/private partnership. He stated that Boston College just merged Pine Manor into their portfolio, and are in desperate need of a hockey rink.

J. Bain asked if the Town owns the parcel near Skyline Park. E. Gallentine wasn't certain which parcel he was referring to, and noted that Skyline is surrounded by some DCR land and a conservation area.

A. Urbas inquired about whether it would be at all possible to consider Brookline Avenue Park. P. Karnovsky responded that it is a heavily used greenspace in a dense neighborhood. E. Gallentine added that it is also in a flood plain and has a FEMA designation.

E. Gallentine commented that the Town invested \$7 million in the Fisher Hill Reservoir Park, and it would be a hard sell to invest more money on that parcel.

A. Urbas noted it may be a little early to narrow the options down to one by the end of the meeting, and suggested ranking them. A. Vecchio responded that the Task Force doesn't need to have it narrowed down to one today, but they should by the end of August. She noted that the consultants can only do the assessment on Larz and one other site.

High Level Funding & Partnership Discussion

A. Vecchio stated that in regards to private land, she reached out to the Economic Development Department and asked them if there are any possibilities in Town with private land that they could think of. She stated that she has a list the Task Force can go through.

A. Vecchio presented several parcels owned by WS Development along Route 9. The development company were open to the Town's proposition, but stated that they still have a 10 year lease. She stated that there would be 10 years before work could begin and the Town would also need to investigate zoning limitations. N. O'Connor stated that 10 years is too long to wait. A. Bellalta asked if the Town could buy out their lease. A. Vecchio replied that they are not willing to let go of that 10 year lease.

A. Bellalta asked about Maimonides School and whether that might be a good option. W. S. Ames stated that this would require someone from the Town reaching out to various local schools and universities (Hellenic School, B. C. at Pine Manor, Beaver Country Day School, Park School, Maimonides, etc). A. Vecchio responded that staff will reach out. A. Urbas noted a location in Newton and inquired whether this is something Newton might want.

W. S. Ames reminded the Task Force is that their goal is to narrow the list down to one alternative option. J. Thibault suggested a Cleveland Circle site and the possibility of partnering with DCR. E. Gallentine responded that she has spoken with Boston and pushed hard for a partnership but it is not on the table.

Discuss Next Steps

A. Urbas stated that he has seen other facility groups take a short list and do a limited pros and cons assessment for each. He stated that doing a high level review of each site and identifying any legal non-starters could help the Task Force prioritize their list.

M. Klopfer inquired about the possibility of moving the public works facility on Hammond Street. E. Gallentine stated that that is not possible, but we could investigate the possibility of building a recreation complex next to the Municipal Services Facility.

E. Gallentine asked if staff could work with M. Klopfer and J. L. G. to create the shortlist and work to understand the constructability of certain sites.

W. S. Ames agreed with A. Urbas and suggested doing a pros and cons list for each site on the short list as a jumping off point for the next working session.

A. Vecchio suggested planning another working group meeting to discuss pros and cons. A. Bellalta noted that the golf course just released a master plan study, and suggested staff inquire whether we could pull the ice rink into the study.

A. Urbas inquired about what deliverables the consultant team will be providing, and when the Task Force would need to provide input. W. S. Ames stated that the deliverables were discussed in the RFP. A. Vecchio stated that staff will schedule working group meetings between public meetings to reflect on and move forward any decision making that has to happen.

W. S. Ames thanked everyone for their time.

A. Urbas asked that staff send him the proposed timeline.

Adjourn