

MINUTES
**SPECIAL CAPITAL IMPROVEMENT PROJECTS/
ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT COMMITTEE MEETING**
Meeting of Tuesday, October 10, 2023 – 7 p.m.
Conference Room A, Gorham Municipal Center

Present: Councilor Suzanne Phillips - Committee Chair, and Councilors Phillip Gagnon and Virginia Wilder Cross.

Also Present: Caroline Toll - Gorham Youth Football program; Jen Corkum - Gorham Youth Football program; Greg Norton - Gorham Youth Softball Association, and Tasha Gagnon – Gorham Youth Soccer Association.

1. Consideration of the minutes of the September 21, 2023 meeting.

The minutes of the September 21, 2023 meeting were not reviewed.

2. Current Business

- A. Provide a framework for the review and possible revisions to the Chick Master Plan and report back to the Town Council with a recommendation (referred on December 6, 2022).

Councilor Phillips said the Capital Improvement Projects/Economic Development Committee had been discussing this item and they felt it would be best to talk to the people that use the property.

Councilor Phillips introduced herself as the chair of the committee.

Councilor Wilder Cross introduced herself as a member of the committee and Town Councilor.

Attendee Caroline Toll introduced herself as the Vice President of the Youth Football program.

Attendee Jen Korcum introduced herself as the president of Youth Football.

Attendee Greg Norton introduced himself as the President of the GYBSA also known as the Gorham little league.

Attendee Tashia Gagnon introduced as being with the Gorham Youth Soccer Association.

Councilor Phillips referred to the master plan for Chick Property and said that she knows that football uses the Chick Property, baseball uses Little Falls and soccer uses Little Falls

as well. She said that the Town has been updating the plan, and the plan displayed was a more accurate rendering with the school modular being there.

Regarding expansion, Councilor Phillips shared that at a Town Council meeting, they had talked about and realized that they had no master plan like the Town has for the Chick property and other places, so the Council wanted to see what the lot looked like and what kinds of uses could go on there. She noted that with the skatepark moving in, the Town noticed that the modular were kind of encroaching on the athletic area in the back, so before any changes to the plan were made, the intent was to talk to everybody about whether they had any ideas as to how the Town could utilize the areas better. She said one conversation she had years ago about the Village school, they had recommended moving the field a different way.

Councilor Phillips asked if Ms. Corkum had any comments about how the football program uses the field to which Ms. Corkum they pretty much use the entire space, and the actual football field is used on game days. She said they have four teams in the program with about 130 kids total. She said they are there three to five nights a week from August through the end of October with usually two to four teams practicing a night, so they need a football field and plenty of space for four teams to be on the field at the same time for practice. She said they work with it as it is now, and they have their seventh and eighth grade team practicing to the left of the old softball field, and the five-six team is practicing in the right field of the old softball field. She said in the middle section in the middle-right field before the skatepark is the first and second grade team, and third and fourth grade team. She said they lost space for the skatepark, but they've made it work with their teams closer together. She added that the youth running group that Jason Tanguay has that practices there a few nights a week, too, during this time of year as well.

Councilor Phillips asked where they meet to which Ms. Corkum said they set up behind the skatepark, and they use the area for warm-ups and practice. She believes they go up to fifth grade in that group, and they run the perimeter. She said they work well together and make adjustments, sometimes move to Village when there is Cross-Country meet, and they sometimes pull in to make sure the younger running group has the perimeter to run around. She said that she and Jason talk all year long to try make each other aware of what's going on. She said they have to displace their teams when there is a Cross-Country meet.

Ms. Corkum said that the layout is pretty wide-open, and shade trees would actually help. She asked if there was a plan for two ball fields in the plan at one point.

Councilor Phillips referred to the master plan.

Ms. Corkum said the field where football is now is fine, but it is really difficult on game days with allowing for handicap access. She said planning for that and extra parking would be awesome. She said parking is over-filled between the running group, football, Girls on the Run, and Cheer. She added they have had opportunities to host a Jamboree, which is when eight teams come together and have needed to turn it down, mostly

because of the parking situation. She clarified that they have the field space to host the event, but they have two major obstacles – volunteers and parking.

Ms. Toll shared that lighting becomes an issue, especially this time of year as third through eight grade usually practice from 5 to 7pm, and by 7pm it is usually pitch dark, which poses a safety hazard, so they cut practice a little bit. She said that they have always had lighting in the back of their minds, so it would be nice, but they don't know how feasible it would be.

Ms. Corkum agreed with Ms. Toll's comments that a lack of lighting poses a challenge for the program, which is completely funded on its own, and it is hard for them to want to be investing in these things when they don't know what is going to happen to the field space.

Regarding things that the Youth Football program has to have, Ms. Corkum said they have a concession stand there now and they would have to have that as it brings in a lot of their funding for the program. She said they also have on-site storage, which is removable. She said they have installed some lights on the concession stand, but there is not nearly enough. She added that they have tried to do what they can with the means that they have, and that there is power out to their on-site storage and concession stand. She said they would love an indoor bathroom.

A discussion ensued regarding the softball diamond not being used by the sports groups present.

Mr. Norton said that per a conversation with the Town, the Town owns a small portion on the other side of the field that could be turned into parking that would then allow access to the GYBSA to the bigger field. He said that baseball is now 12 teams and growing, which is a great problem to have, while softball hasn't felt the same growing pains.

Councilor Gagnon asked if we ever heard back from the school with regard to the use of the Chick Property to which Councilor Phillips said that she has not had the conversation yet as the intent was to meet with sports groups first, then talk with the School department.

Ms. Corcum said lighting and an indoor bathroom would be nice to have.

Councilor Gagnon referred to the maps and said that we lost two fields for softball, one at the Chick Property and the other at Little Falls. He said that it makes sense to look at, when we're shifting, how to configure it so that we get the GYSBA where they need to be also.

Councilor Phillips said that the next conversation with the School department was to designate, with the School's input, a school expansion zone.

Councilor Gagnon said that when we get a new elementary school down the road, we need to earmark that.

A brief discussion ensued regarding maximizing investments.

Mr. Norton said that all groups present are at the mercy of shifting priorities.

Councilor Gagnon said a good example is the softball diamond that the GYBSA invested \$1,000 into, but were told not to use it anymore.

Councilor Phillips said these comments were what started this conversation, because she wants to be sure that if the groups are investing their money that they have clear access and no issues.

Councilor Gagnon asked if tours could be scheduled while groups were using fields so the facilities could be seen in action to which Ms. Corcum said to come this weekend when football will play their last weekend of home games.

Councilor Gagnon said he is more interested in as he is trying to get a vision of where the school outline.

Regarding work done, Ms. Corcum said that football put a new roof on their concession stand over the summer out of their funding. She said they need a new storage unit, a new announcer's booth, and new sound system.

Councilor Phillips said their next step will be to talk to the School department about Chick Property, and they will fix and update the Chick Property Master Plan.

Ms. Toll shared that their current football shed, as well as the snack shack has been prone to break-ins. She said it has previously been just the equipment shed, and now the snack shack. She said nothing is ever taken. As a board, she said they have talked about getting a game camera on each corner, but their Wi-Fi doesn't reach all the way there, so they have been running their own Wi-Fi hotspot. She asked if that could be looked into as well.

- B. Review the Little Falls Master Plan, explore current and future capital improvements for the Little Falls Recreation Area and Little Falls Community Center, consult with community groups and stakeholders for input, and take into account grant funding for parking area light improvements, and how best to incorporate them into the site, and make recommendations for changes to the Town Council (referred on February 7, 2023).

Regarding Little Falls, Mr. Norton said that the GYSBA uses it exclusively. He said they had a quick chat with Recreation Director Cynthia Hazelton about using an area currently not being used at all as a practice space, which the School department is already mowing. He said that the little league put some money into it a few years back, but has the same challenge with no access to parking, which is why it was no longer used. He pointed out the group having big issues with sunsets as their game time is 5pm and the third basemen are staring directly into the sun with balls coming at them.

Mr. Norton said that they have talked to the Town about moving the drainage, at which time he pointed out where the elevation was high on the Little Falls master plan, and how it trickles down and tends to backfill with water in a swampy area. He said they would like to get that fixed over time. He added that in order for them to host a tournament, they have to have a batting cage, which they don't have on-site. He said that would be a great use of that area since it is currently swamp, and it wouldn't take room away from other groups.

Mr. Norton said parking will always be an issue for them, so additional parking at the site in any way would be very helpful. He further said they do not currently have access to concessions, and they haven't been approached with interest, but if the space at Little Falls is not something they will have access to, they would wouldn't mind having a small removable shed-type of concession stand that would fit in an area on the master plan that he pointed out, not far from home plate.

Mr. Norton said their biggest issue at Little Falls is practice space, and the additional lights will solve their game issues, but practice space will remain an issue. He said their group talked with Mrs. Hazelton and Town Manager Ephrem Paraschak a little bit about ways to alleviate that pain, but fitting more practice space at Little Falls is really daunting and not super feasible from what he can see. He added that having lights will help alleviate that since they could then have two practices and games on a night.

Mr. Norton said that parking is another pain point as the parking at Little Falls is already maxed out with use from the Recreation department, GYSA, and other groups.

Councilor Gagnon reminded the group not to forget that the Gorham Sno-goers use the parking to park their snowmobiles, which is why there is unstable aggregate in the parking area. He said that will always be dirt, but it serves more function than just parking.

Councilor Phillips said she thought the concession stand at Little Falls was supposed to be operational; she expressed her disappointment that it was not so groups could use it.

Mrs. Gagnon said that the snack shack has now been there for a second season, and the GYSA has seen the building up and have not been able to use it. She said they were told that it had something to do with a fan that if you were cooking, that was the part that was needed. She added that another thing they are running into is with the bathrooms. She said they were open when the food trucks were there, but not open for any of the soccer games or practices, so they have 17 teams and probably 300 kids in the program with two porta-potties.

Mrs. Gagnon referred to the Little Falls Master Plan and explained where six different soccer teams were practicing on Thursday nights in addition to fall ball. She explained that people park on both sides where it is marked as no parking, as well as off into the woods. She further said that at Robie, people are parked all over the lawn, and down Gray Road.

Councilor Wilder Cross said she worries about emergency vehicles turning into the parking lot to which Mrs. Gagnon said people have to stop and let one car pass at a time at the gate, which can be a danger considering how far back the fields are if someone gets injured.

Mrs. Gagnon said part of their frustration is with Rec. moving soccer there, too, as they don't have access to any of the back fields on Saturdays until 2:00 pm. Additionally, she said they can't schedule any games past 5:00 pm because it is dark out so they are having to go to other towns to ask if they can use their fields since they don't have access to the field in Gorham on Saturdays. She said that parking was a frustration for people from Rec. as well, because it was taking 30 minutes to get out of the parking area on Saturday mornings. She recommended moving parking back where trees would be cut down, where the ice rink is in the winter, would make more sense. She referred to the map where there were other opportunities for parking at Little Falls. A complaint she shared was that the field in the middle of the map was elevated and steep, making it difficult or not feasible for people that are handicapped or in wheelchairs to get out to a field, and kids slide when they come down the front side.

Mrs. Gagnon said that Sea Coast had their tournament in Gorham in the spring at the middle school although there were no concessions, which would have been revenue for the town. She said the facility is nice compared to other towns, and we have the opportunity with multiple fields at Little Falls, which would bring many people to the Town.

Councilor Wilder Cross asked if a ramp could be built up to the elevated field to which Councilor Phillips and Gagnon said it was pretty high.

Councilor Gagnon said that when it was graded, they found out it was not a naturally occurring hill and it used to be a sand dump, which could have had another 10 feet removed from it.

Regarding the U13 and U14 soccer teams, Mrs. Gagnon said five of their 17 teams don't practice at Little Falls, because the fields are not large enough. She said that instead, they are over at the multi-purpose and middle school fields. Regarding tournaments, she said it would be nice to have two areas for teams to go.

Councilor Gagnon said that he is hearing that groups would like wider entrances and access to get in, parking, maybe room for an additional soccer field in the upper right corner.

Mrs. Gagnon said that regarding parking along both sides, people are not supposed to park there, but people still do even with a no parking sign posted. Regarding food trucks, she said that a larger place like at Cherry Hill could be a better space for them since they take up half of the parking lot at Little Falls, and there so many little kids running around with cars driving 10 mph. She said it brings a lot of people around into a youth sports area, which is great.

Councilor Phillips said she believes Cherry Hill is already being used.

Regarding Little Falls, Mr. Norton said a big goal for us [GYSB] would be fixing the drainage issue at the elevated field and using space that is currently unused by anybody. He said we had already talked about fixing the drainage since it is causing problems for other parts of the field, and that they probably have put about \$45,000 into the field in the last four years improving drainage, putting dugouts in, scoreboard, and they still have some drainage issues, which they have no problem with picking away at. He said cages would be necessary if want to host a tournament, and a concession stand is a goal and a requirement to host as well. He further said that lights are preferred as it allows after-hour opportunities, whereas cages and a concession is a requirement. He said a clear plan on what is going to happen with the concession would be great, because it would allow them to make plans of their own; a concession stand would not be needed for Tuesday night games, but it would be needed for tournaments and bigger events.

Councilor Phillips said it was the whole point of the concession stand to be open and used for whoever.

Councilor Gagnon said he likes the idea of having two snack shacks, one for behind the backstop, because they can control their game and the scoreboard, but it takes away the conflict, which he doesn't think is a big ask.

Mrs. Gagnon said they were told that they would purchase things, and the sports groups would reimburse them. She said a question would be whether she is getting upcharged on that as her preference would be to go to Sam's Club or BJ's and do it themselves.

Councilor Phillips said that she wouldn't want that either with the department purchasing stuff and groups having to reimburse them.

Ms. Corcum said that football handles everything themselves, and she can't imagine trying to figure everything out. She said that if they were working with another program, they would figure out how to do that, but they have fridges and freezers, warmers, a grill, a frialator, and a hot dog steamer – there is a lot of stuff that stays in there all the time, and they are stocked with fries – all of which lives in their freezer. She said they could be pulling that in and out. She added that they have to take care of cleaning and maintaining all of their equipment, which would be difficult to share, and she definitely would not want someone else to purchase things. She said they do a lot of their funding in concessions, and she couldn't imagine their group being able to stay afloat without their concessions, so it's important that they are able to go and purchase the things that sell, and they are always trying new things.

Councilor Gagnon said Mary Mercier had him work the concession stands 10 years ago, which made him realize that the football group does a lot.

Ms. Corcum said that their current board has been together four or five years now, and they are all very passionate about it and want to see the program improve, so they put a lot of time and effort in, which is a lot of work.

Mrs. Gagnon said their group is on the same property, but most of their games are not the same times as other sports groups so they would not have conflicting needs of the concession stand.

Mr. Norton concurred that the GYBSA would not have a conflicting need.

Ms. Corcum said youth lacrosse started using the Little Falls facility last spring where they were previously at the middle school, and she thought they were planning on staying at Little Falls.

Mr. Norton said that would not be much overlap at all since it is a not a large program.

To Mr. Norton's point about how the sunlight affects the third base person, Councilor Phillips said the field could not have been oriented another way since that would be a bad idea.

Mr. Norton reiterated his point regarding lights at night since there would be no issues with sunlight in players' eyes. He said they would probably have older kids playing at night since that would be when the ball would pick up speed.

Councilor Wilder Cross said it is good to have everyone's input.

Councilor Gagnon said from his work on the Robie Park Committee, a defined path around the field would add more to the community and the site.

Councilor Phillips said there is a trail out back, and she knows a lot of parents that come to soccer from the Sleepy Hollow area. She said there is a snowmobile trail that comes up the back of the area to get to the field.

Councilor Gagnon said as the area gets developed and the trail gets more action, it will be the premier trail to get to those areas. He said it was good foresight and it wasn't his idea, but he did point out the site.

Councilor Phillips said that the Town Council always talks about areas of expansion for fields, cemeteries, etc. She said there could be an opportunity to purchase land in the right area at the back of the Little Falls Recreation Area.

Regarding parking, Councilor Wilder Cross said she doesn't understand why people are so afraid to park across the street.

Mrs. Gagnon said that for their family and families with younger kids, Route 202 can be such a busy road.

Councilor Gagnon said they have been playing pickle ball at the Little Falls Community Center, which has great pickle ball courts, and he saw almost three accidents while just playing there. He said it is a result of people turning to come into the community center, and the people are racing behind them. He believes we [the Town Council] talked about this road at the beginning of the road and people are going too fast.

Mrs. Gagnon said that people don't slow down because they are going 45 mph, and they go down the dip and they're still going that.

Councilor Phillips said it could be a hazard walking across the street for the kids heading to/from baseball lugging their bags and bats, as well as for spectators and people using the food trucks.

Logistically, Councilor Gagnon is happy to hear about the use of the facility, and there could be some widening, some parking adjustments, and a few other things to improve the access.

A brief discussion ensued regarding alternative locations for the food trucks, including the Village Elementary square field area and Cherry Hill.

Councilor Phillips said the reason that area was chosen was because of the revitalization of the Little Falls area. She said she didn't think it would be hard to move the trucks.

Ms. Toll suggested splitting the trucks, with half at the Little Falls, and half elsewhere.

Councilor Phillips said we started our food truck night, and now Westbrook has their own food truck night on Wednesdays in the summer.

Ms. Corcum said she personally likes the food trucks at Little Falls, because she lives in North Gorham, but the middle school has extra parking to which Mrs. Gagnon said their group has soccer practice on Wednesday nights.

Councilor Gagnon said that food trucks could be on the other side of the containers at the middle school, because that area is huge.

Councilor Phillips said there has been some mention of a pavilion/ice rink/farmers market at Cherry Hill, which could be a good spot for the food trucks.

A discussion ensued regarding more parking being needed for tournaments and how lighting would allow for more practice and game time.

Mr. Norton said that the GYSBA has invested a lot amount of money at Little Falls, and they're about to build dugouts on their own dime at the middle school fields so the middle school can use it, although it stops you from investing a significant amount of money when you don't know if things will be shifted or access to the space will be lost.

3. Items Referred for Future Meetings/Action

4. Other Business

No items were discussed.

5. Schedule next meeting and discuss agenda items for next meeting.

The next regular meeting will take place on November 16, 2023 at 12pm.

6. Adjourn.

Time of adjournment: 8:08pm.

Respectfully submitted,
Jessica Hughes, Executive Assistant