

MINUTES
TOWN OF GORHAM
ROBIE PARK MASTER PLAN STEERING COMMITTEE MEETING
Monday, July 10, 2023 – 6:00 p.m.
Gorham Municipal Center, Conference Room A

Committee Members:

Present: Michael Chabot, Rob Delaney, Katherine Garrard, Jacinda Wilson, Laurel Emersen, and Councilor Phillip Gagnon.

Absent: Councilor Ronald Shepard and School Committee member Stewart McCallister.

Also Present: Councilor Virginia Wilder Cross; Director of Community Development, Thomas Poirier; Grace McNeil with Aceto Landscape Architects, and two members of the public.

1. **Minutes of June 7, 2023 meeting**

A motion was MADE by Michael Chabot, SECONDED by Katherine Garrard and voted to accept the minutes of June 7, 2023 meeting. Unanimous vote.

2. **Current Business:**

A. Discuss set up of Community Charrette – Room Layout

Director of Community Development Tom Poirier addressed the committee and noted that Grace McNeil with Aceto Landscape Architects was in attendance. He said they [Aceto Landscape Architects, hereinafter Aceto] put together a draft design charrette for review that was provided to the committee last week. As part of Aceto’s presentation, Mr. Poirier said Aceto put together what they need the committee to discuss today. He said that the committee also needs to discuss the room layout to confirm any questions, comments, or changes the committee would like to see.

Ms. McNeil said they were expecting maybe 50 people to attend the charrette.

Mrs. Garrard asked how people will be divided into groups to which Ms. McNeil said there will be tables with five chairs to encourage groups of that size arrangement with the number being flexible for any groups that come together with six or seven people.

Councilor Gagnon asked if Mr. Poirier will be putting the tables in the Council Chambers to which Mr. Poirier said that staff will do that.

Councilor Wilder Cross asked if there will be a committee member at each table to which Councilor Gagnon said that was a lovely idea and the committee should strive for that. He said it would be good if the committee members could split up and help dialogue.

Councilor Gagnon said it would be great if the committee members could share what they heard from each table during the charrette at the next committee meeting to which Ms. McNeil said that it would all be written down for the committee's review as well.

B. Review draft agenda for Community Charrette

Ms. McNeil referred to the charrette agenda and said she would then go over the draft presentation after. She said the charrette will start at 6pm in the Council Chambers with her and Kaitlyn Aceto to provide a team introduction and share what the firm does. She said they will then review the overall project scope, including a sequence of events of the meetings that were had in the past, where this initiative is at now, and where it will be going forward. Next, she said they will introduce the charrette goals and how they will work, then introduce the site and its assets, as well as the current graphics that she will show the committee. She said the graphics reviewed the last time that the committee met included the context map, existing conditions map, and she created another map based on what Recreation Director Cindy Hazelton shared to reflect existing facilities in Gorham to give the group an idea of what other amenities and facilities already exist so the group can decide whether or not to duplicate them. Next, Ms. McNeil said she would go over the community survey results so the committee could hear what community members have expressed as desires for what they want and do not want for the park.

Ms. McNeil said that Aceto removed the item on the agenda of going out to the park before the breakout work session as they think it will take too much time to wrangle everybody back in and settle down in a timely manner, and most people attending the charrette will likely have a good idea about Robie Park and feel strongly about it to want to come to a charrette to talk about it. She noted that the initial poster announcing the community charrette event encouraged people to swing by and take a look at the park beforehand if they haven't already. She said after the meeting progresses from the introduction and the overall project scope, they will do the breakout work session and allow everyone to put their thoughts down on paper with a printed out existing conditions map on a table, as well as sticky notes and markers to let everybody to write down their thoughts of what they'd like to see and not see. She said there will be four key questions that will be left up on a screen for reference while working to have guidance on how to work through the charrette process. Once done, Ms. McNeil said they will have someone from each group talk through the main points for their group, after which they will do a pre-closeout and Ms. Aceto will talk about the next steps. Ms. McNeil will then collect all of the maps and sticky notes to transcribe so the committee will have a copy of what all of the notes say.

Councilor Gagnon asked if staff will alert the public of this meeting right before such as on Facebook and any additional media to which Mr. Poirier said – staff can put something out on the Town's Facebook, as well as the website listserv.

Ms. McNeil then reviewed the draft presentation, which explained who was representing Aceto, what they do, the scope of the project and that there would be more meetings in the future ending with a Town Council presentation.

Councilor Gagnon asked if dates were set for the future meeting and presentation for the Town Council to which Mr. Poirier said – no. Mr. Poirier said that once the design charrette is held, Aceto can then work on getting the concepts done, then setting up meetings with this group to review. He said after each meeting we will be able to better understand how much leeway is needed between the meetings.

Ms. McNeil then referred to the site context map to help orient everybody if people have not been to the park before, followed by a map reflecting the existing conditions, then site photos, and a facilities map highlighting Robie Park as well as all other facilities and amenities that are listed on the Town's Recreation website. She said she would then review the community survey findings from which she would summarize people's thoughts. Next, she will introduce the charrette activity, how it will work and how they will refer to four key questions that Aceto has used in the past for other charrettes to get people's initial thoughts; the slide with these questions will be left up on the screen while everyone is working so people can refer back to it, and the questions will also be listed on the agenda.

Mr. Chabot asked how the personal opinions of committee members can be limited from influencing the process since it could be very easy to slant things to which Councilor Gagnon referred to that as "flavoring."

Ms. McNeil said that it was okay for the committee members to share their opinions since they live here, too, and it's also their park. She said that participating is fine.

Councilor Gagnon said that members don't want their voices to be muted, and that as part of this group and as a citizen, you want to be able to say "this is how I feel about this area," to which Mr. Chabot said he has never done this before and he wants to make sure it was on the up and up.

As far as time-keeping goes, Ms. McNeil said that they will take a look at what time it is when they're done presenting. She said they are allocating 20-30 minutes for the work session.

Mr. Chabot asked if the charrette would be recorded in the Council Chambers to which Mr. Poirier said staff could try although the conversations at the tables would not be picked up in the audio.

Mrs. Garrard noted that the presentation itself would be taped.

Ms. McNeil said that the group sharing process in the end could also be recorded.

Councilor Gagnon said, ideally, if the Gorham Times or American Journal could come to do an article or story on it - that would be helpful.

Mr. Chabot said he talked to Bob Lowell [of the American Journal] to let him know about the charrette.

Councilor Gagnon said he also talked to Mr. Lowell, which is part of getting this out to the public in a positive way.

Laurel Emerson asked if members should arrive 30 minutes early to which Ms. McNeil said - yes. She said Ms. Aceto and she would probably be there 30 minutes early to get set up and ensure all the tables and materials were there.

Councilor Gagnon asked if admin. could send a reminder tomorrow – July 11th - to the committee to arrive at 5:30pm prior to the charrette to which Mr. Poirier said – yes.

Councilor Gagnon asked if paper and pens would be provided for people to which Ms. McNeil said that Aceto would provide them along with one printed existing conditions map for each table, and at least two large sticky note pads for each table, as well as markers and agendas.

Comments were shared that the existing conditions map looked nice.

Mr. Poirier asked if a couple of tables should be placed at the front of the room for the committee members to sit at during the beginning part of the presentation, then dispersed after, to which Ms. McNeil said that would be fine.

Mr. Chabot suggested members wear name badges, and Councilor Gagnon said that it would be good for all attendees to wear one, but ones that separate out committee members would be helpful if people had questions.

Ms. McNeil said she could bring the sticky name tags.

Councilor Gagnon asked if Aceto had anything lined up for people if they ask “what would a better playground look like.”

Ms. McNeil responded that they don’t have anything at this stage, but they would at the next stage when they put together a concept design.

Mr. Chabot said the number one question he has received from the public is “what is a charrette.”

Ms. McNeil said it is really just a fancy word for a community work session.

3. **Other Business**

Councilor Gagnon said that the next steps and expectations from this group is that we are going to have at least four or five more meetings.

Mr. Poirier said there would be five more meetings if committee members attend the Town Council meeting.

Councilor Gagnon said that it appears there would be the design charrette, then a post-charrette meeting, then another meeting and before that, he asked if there would be a concept plan.

Mr. Poirier said that is correct. He said the post-charrette would be held for Aceto to share what they compiled and see if there is consensus with the group on what they heard; then taking that information, they can go forward and create a concept plan. Once the three concept plans were done, there would be a committee meeting, and the public engagement process would be started to hear what people liked and didn't like about the plan. Then the group can move forward.

Councilor Gagnon said that the committee has at least four more meetings to go in addition to the Town Council meeting to which Mr. Poirier said that was correct.

Mrs. Garrard asked how much time after the charrette would Aceto need to compile everything to which Ms. McNeil said a week, maybe more since Ms. Aceto would be compiling the information. Ms. McNeil added that it also depends on their workload with other projects as well.

Ms. McNeil said Aceto could give a better answer the day after the charrette as to how soon they could provide the information. She said that she and Ms. Aceto can regroup the day after the charrette to figure out a time when they can create another light presentation to share all of the thoughts.

Councilor Gagnon said that once the committee is able to get the post-charrette follow up, they should be able to get a cadence of when they need to meet.

Mr. Poirier said the next meeting may be the beginning of August if he had to guess to play it safe. He said the concept plan is going to take some time. He said he would rather see Aceto take their time and present three really good complete plans.

4. **Adjournment**

There being no further business, the meeting adjourned. Time of adjournment: 6:26pm.

Respectfully submitted,
Jessica Hughes, Executive Assistant