

JOHNSON SKATEPARK & BIKE TRACK COMMITTEE MEETING MINUTES
JOHNSON MUNICIPAL BUILDING
WEDNESDAY, MAY 11, 2022

Present:

Committee Members: Casey Romero, Howard Romero, Rick Aupperlee (via Zoom), George Swanson (via Zoom), James Whitehill, Greg Fatigate

Others: Lisa Crews, Joey Handy, Ian Hutchings

1. Call to Order

Casey called the meeting to order at 5:42.

2. Draft Minutes of April 13, 2022 Meeting

Howard moved and Greg seconded to approve the minutes of April 13, 2022. The minutes were approved by consensus.

3. Financial Update & Current Expenses

Casey said April expenses were about \$550. We need more picnic tables. There are picnic tables available from Laraway at \$150. They are made of painted spruce, and have been outside a few years. There are picnic tables available from Lowe's at \$160-170. They are made of yellow pine and we would have to assemble them. Many reviews indicated the wood was low quality. Lisa mentioned someone on Railroad Street who is selling picnic tables. Casey said we will check into that and make a decision later on where to purchase the tables.

Casey said she thinks we will end the year with a zero balance or with a deficit. She is not worried about that. There are ARPA funds that we can discuss with the town and sometimes people end the year with a deficit.

4. Recreation Coordinator's Report

Lisa said we are in baseball season. Soccer registration will open soon. The rec department is planning some family events for summer. The rec department and the library will kick off the summer reading program in June. The rec department is working with the skate park committee on skating events.

5. Laraway Report

George said Laraway is wrapping up the school year. They are trying to get students outside and away from COVID and they are gearing up for their summer program.

6. Sheriff's Department Info, Speeding and Drug Issues

Casey said she called and left a message for Sgt. Chris Watson. (*James arrived at 5:49.*) New issues related to speed and traffic have cropped up at the skatepark. Some drivers are peeling out of the Loop Road fast enough to alarm a family who lives near there. They don't let their kids play on that side of the yard. People also pick up speed coming down the hill. Kyley and Greg Hill have called the sheriff's department three times about these things. There is also an issue with skateboarders coming down the hill. Sgt. Watson checked the database and the calls from the Hills were not officially logged in for some reason. He suggested that we need more speed limit signs. In talking with him it was decided that we need to restore the stop sign at the end of the loop road. Sgt. Watson is in favor of speed bumps. A speed bump would not be a problem on the loop road as it is rarely if ever plowed. Lisa and Casey talked to Brian Story and the town is on board with what needs to be done on the town end. Sgt. Watson said a traffic study could be done if needed. Casey wrote a memo to Brian Story, Jason Whitehill and Lisa with her ideas. Lisa said Brian said we don't need a traffic study because the speed limit is already 25. We just need more signs. She suggested putting up signage like what we have in other areas where drivers need to share the road with bicyclists.

Casey said Sergeant Watson said the sheriff's department doesn't regularly go after marijuana anymore because they are so overwhelmed. There is also an issue that current laws are all written about cannabis but other laws say that CBD products can be used anywhere, anytime, which makes enforcement more difficult. Joey said you can't distinguish CBD products from other cannabis products.

Ian asked if this is an issue identified at the skatepark. Lisa said after spending the day down there she became curious about what was publicly acceptable/legal and she got clarification from a sheriff's deputy. There was a lot of that there the other day. Ian said he frequents a lot of skate parks and it is not uncommon to see cannabis use. It is there at A-Dog Park. It is a matter of who is using the park and when. Joey said it is not exactly a skateboarding issue. It is a culture issue. It is legal now. The state has been treating cannabis similarly to the way alcohol is treated. You have to be 21 to use it. You cannot operate vehicles under the influence. He believes it is not even legal to smoke it in public but the sheriff's department is overwhelmed and focused on other drugs. Greg asked where people smoke at the skatepark – in their cars? Lisa said at the picnic tables.

Greg said he believes the core problem is that people have been allowed to park in the middle of the grassy area. We did not have these problems when no one was parking there and now it is expected that people can park there. We are trying to make a safe environment for families but cars parked there with music blaring can be intimidating. His opinion is that anything we could do to prevent people from pulling in and parking on the lawn would be a benefit. Ian agreed. He said when people pull their cars in it gives more access to whatever they may have in their car – beer or anything else.

Lisa and Greg said we now have a more defined parking area. Lisa said we are trying to get “Please don't park on the grass” signs. Howard said he likes the idea of fencing. Lisa suggested we could have a split rail fence so the rails could be pulled out if the town crew needs to drive in. Casey said we could start by leaving one end open. She and Lisa need to follow up with the town about fencing. Split rail is expensive. Howard said if we had split rails people would use the rails for skating purposes. He suggests seeing if we can get sections of used telephone pole. We could set them perpendicular to the road but not quite going all the way to the property line so that those who need to can drive around for access.

Casey said at one point we had a defined smoking area. She believes it is time to go back to that again. Lisa said in her recent experience what happens there is not in any way similar to behavior we allow in any other park in this town. She feels we need to be enforcing the rules sign that was voted on years ago. It is a substance-free park. She thinks it should be smoke-free but Casey disagrees. Some people feel as if it is their park. It is nice to have a feeling of ownership but when they lose recognition that using it is a privilege, that is a problem. On Green Up Day about 40 people were there. Most were people with young kids. She heard people saying that it is normally too dangerous to bring their kids there. At the elementary school she hears parents saying that they used to love the skatepark but can't go there anymore. We want to make it so those who currently use it are still welcomed but we also want the next generation to feel comfortable using the park. She and Casey had a long talk with Brian Story yesterday about the approach to take.

Joey said he thinks we need to start showing more interest in the park. He doesn't think there are that many people there smoking cannabis. Lisa agreed that it is a small number of people. Joey said he thinks they are able to run roughshod because no one else is there.

Greg asked who has been posting on Instagram recently. James said he has. Greg said that is the first time he has seen the skatepark rules posted there recently. He thinks we need to take a multi-pronged approach. He thinks people don't realize their effect on the neighbors. He thinks social media posts are helpful. The demographic interested in the park is probably more interested in Instagram. He also thinks it is helpful for people who use the park to be at skate park meetings.

Ian agreed that a multi-pronged approach is good. He would say the issue is probably mostly from one group of maybe seven or eight consistent users. The problem is how they use the park. They pull their vehicles up on the grass, play music out of their trunks and feel comfortable drinking while they are there. Earlier he stated that cannabis use is pretty standard in a lot of skate parks but drinking from open containers is not, except at Johnson. He doesn't want to take a heavy-handed approach. He wants to use a more diplomatic way to get the message out. Joey suggested we could make an announcement online that we have gotten a lot of complaints and ask people to respect the park and not smoke or drink because that affects overall usage and how much funding the park gets. A message like that tells people that we see them and we know what is going on.

Casey said she has been ambivalent about saying something to people who have beer at the skatepark, largely because there is no town ordinance saying you can't do that. She thought that although we had the goal of no alcohol at the park, it was not enforceable. But Brian said the Skatepark Committee can make its own rules for the park. There is a rule that people can't drink at Old Mill Park. Lisa said we have rules that have been posted for years: no drinking, no drugs, no smoking. We have let it go and now it is time to rein it back in. Howard said sometimes people who are drinking are dads having a couple of beers while they watch their kids. It would be nice to have some way of accommodating those people on a case by case basis. Joey said it is a liability for the skatepark if people are drinking there. Skateboarding is an Olympic sport. Perhaps we could get school funding involved and develop the park into something nice. At football fields people are not drinking or smoking weed. Does working with the school sound like a possible venture? Casey said she doesn't know about that, but possibly, and that Lisa had a similar idea.

Lisa said after the success of the lessons on Saturday the rec department would like to offer skateboard lessons at the skatepark. It would be very easy to set up and run. But we have to be able to ensure the space is conducive to it. We can't have music with expletives, cannabis or beer. Ian said he noticed that on Green Up day the people who normally show up around dusk to party arrived, sat around for a while and then left. He thinks offering programs at the park, having staff there and cultivating the culture we want is going to create an environment that those people will not want to hang out in.

Lisa said she got a call from Healthy Lamoille Valley today. They have offered us \$1500 or more to for signage and events. But it is tobacco money, so to get it we would have to make the skatepark substance-free. Casey asked if we could have a smoking zone. Lisa said no. Howard said in the past we have said that the parking lot is not the park and people could smoke there.

Greg listed things he feels need to be prongs of our multi-pronged approach: a defined place for vehicles to park, an online presence with reminders that we have neighbors, and reaching out to the community.

Joey asked, what if we started an official Johnson skate park club with a membership fee? People could get t-shirts and there could be weekly or monthly meetups. Greg suggested maybe we could find

someone at the college who would want to take that on. Joey said his idea is that it would not be limited to the college but open to anyone. Lisa said it could be a separate fundraising entity.

Craig said he thinks in the coming months we need to discuss more details of our online presence. Lisa said she likes the idea that by the June 4 event we could have clear, concise messaging available to everyone about the skatepark.

Greg asked if there is a way to engage users of the park. Maybe once or twice during the skateboard season we should have our meeting there. Casey suggested going there for the event planning meeting after this meeting.

Lisa said the skatepark is on the Selectboard agenda for Monday night. Brian Story has reached out to the sheriff's department, letting them know our goal is to go back to the original rules for the park. Lisa said no one should take a personal stand if they observe inappropriate behavior at the park. They should just report the situation and ask for the police or someone from the town to help take care of it so we don't create a confrontational situation.

Casey summarized the prongs of the multi-pronged approach that had been discussed – define a parking area, establish an online presence with a unified message, work on community outreach, work on bringing park users into our process by having meetings there, etc., look for an NVU link and consider having some clinics, programs, etc at the park. Greg suggested adding regular upkeep of the park. It looks fantastic now and he thinks we should keep that up. James said he doesn't think we should completely eliminate the movable ramps, etc, just keep an eye on them and remove them if they are falling apart. Lisa said the town insurance agent is going to do a walk-through with us and will tell us what has to go. The committee agreed by consensus to pursue this multi-pronged plan and share it with the selectboard.

7. *Revised Rules Sign*

Casey said this will be bumped off tonight's agenda.

8. *Events*

Casey said Green Up Day was fabulous. Planning for the Jam will happen after this meeting.

9. *Site Issues and Site Work*

Howard said he spent time trying to adjust the two hydrants so they shut off. He got them so they both close but they still drip if the handle is all the way down. He tried to hook up the foot valve for the drinking fountain but it was not working so he will turn the drinking fountain back on with the hand button and he will fix up the foot valve

Howard said he noticed that when a lot of kids were playing on the teeter totter Saturday it sagged. He would recommend putting a steel strap on the top edge of the two beams that support it. That would about double the load it can take. Parts will cost about \$30 to \$50. The board agreed that Howard could spend money to do that.

Howard said he would like to have someone from the town set some posts and supply us with cable for a fence. Lisa said she can ask about that. Howard said he can mark where he thinks the posts should go and others can see if they agree.

Casey said someone reminded her that there is broken glass, etc. under the hip ramp. She got in touch with Ashton and asked him to look for some old roofing in the scrap pile and see if there is a piece big enough to use as a temporary barrier to block the area off from kids and dogs until we can get it

cleared out. Since the planning meeting is going to be there later tonight those who are there can also look for something to use as a barrier.

10. Events (continued)

Joey asked about getting flyers printed. Lisa said she can take care of that. (*Ian and Joey left at 6:45.*)

11. Seasonal Employees and/or Contracted Work for 2022

Howard moved to go into executive session for a personnel matter, Greg seconded, the motion was passed and the committee went into executive session at 6:45. Rick and George did not participate in the executive session. The committee came out of executive session at 7:00.

Howard moved and James seconded to approve the plan for personnel that had been discussed (to offer part-time salary work to Ian Hutchings, Joey Handy, and Kayla Handy, and to offer stipend work to a small crew of young adults who ride and volunteer regularly in the skatepark.) The motion was passed.

Casey will update the selectboard, Brian Story, Rosemary Audibert, and key stakeholders.

12. Adjourn

James moved to adjourn at 7:10 p.m., Greg seconded and the motion was passed.

Minutes submitted by Donna Griffiths