

Parks Planning – December 2020 Update from the Recreation Commission

The Erving Recreation Commission thanks all our residents who responded to our Parks survey in August and September and our Public Conversation on August 30 regarding our town's parks and how Erving can better meet the recreational needs of all our residents. Our survey was part of our long-term planning efforts, and was made possible thanks to a generous grant from Franklin Regional Council of Governments (FRCOG). In consultation with Helena Farrell of FRCOG, we focused our survey on park amenities as we move into a 5-Year Strategic Plan involving, among other things, the redesign and upgrading of several of our town's parks.

In addition to input on specific park amenities Erving residents would like to see in our parks, we received a fair number of suggestions regarding programming, much of which is already addressed in our [FY21 Strategic Recreation and Park Plan](#) that accompanied the survey or fall under the purview of other town departments. We are heartened by the confirmation that we are planning in ways that reflect public interests and appreciate the suggestions and feedback as we look to future Recreation programming. In addition, we have already been working on an interdepartmental calendar to help coordinate events among the various Erving cultural commissions, with an eye toward partnering among commissions and committees to offer new programs and events.

Survey Responses

The summary responses are tabulated from 33 respondents – all residents of Erving -- through a number of platforms, including the online surveys, social media (Facebook), emails, phone calls, and the August 30 public conversation. Although the information presented in the [2020 Park Survey Results](#) are sample quotes and summary tabulations, the Recreation Commission and Town Planner received full responses from every platform.

Survey Results and Park Planning

The Commission appointed a subcommittee which reviewed the public responses and feedback. The subcommittee aligned the top 8 preferred amenities with the Town of Erving's Master Plan, the 2018 Open Space and Recreation Plan, and the Recreation Commission's 5-Year Strategic Plan. We considered budgets, funding sources, pragmatics of regular maintenance and labor, balance of services to across population categories, and non-Recreation resources and parks at neighboring towns.

Using all available information, in December the subcommittee developed a "short list" of amenities we would like to see in our parks, with possible locations for consideration by the entire Recreation Commission. In the coming months, the list will be reviewed by the full Commission and updated with any changes. The resulting list will inform a call for proposals from designers for at least two major projects (the third already being underway).

Certain items, including the popular request for a playground water feature or water park, had to be set aside for the time being for budgetary and regular maintenance reasons. We are fortunate that there are other water resources for families nearby, including the water park in

Greenfield and the water feature at Unity Park in Turners Falls, as well as swimming and beach-play at Laurel Lake (Erving State Park), and at Lake Wyola in Wendell, in addition to numerous streams, waterfalls, and creeks in our nearby state parks. The water feature has not been abandoned as an eventual possibility, but has been ear-marked as a favorite if the opportunity should arise.

Similarly, the location of each amenities was considered for a number of factors. Some location recommendations are based on programming and storage needs, while others are more related to physical sites and town layout. For example, Erving Center poses a challenge for neighborhood walks due to traffic along Route 2, while Farley has hiking trails and no Town parks, and Ervingside has many sidewalks and side streets that families and walkers currently use. With this in mind, the subcommittee proposed a walking path for Zilinski Field to provide a local, safe walking option in Erving Center. A dog park was one of the most popular public options, and while it is included in the recommended plans, a suitable location in terms of ground condition, safety, and overall park space has yet to be determined. The subcommittee is recommending consideration of Riverfront Park/Usher Mill be evaluated for use as a dog park.

It is important to stress that the Commission will not be approving a “written-in-stone” list: every item on the approved list will not necessarily be installed in our parks, but is intended as a working guideline for project planning. The realized projects at each park are contingent upon funding availability, designer input, changing park usage, environmental and financial impact, among other factors.

Currently, there are three parks in the Commission’s immediate focus for redesign and renovations: Park Street Park, Veteran Memorial Field, and Zilinski Memorial Field.

Park Street Park

Park Street Park is slated for a playground renovation in Spring/Summer 2021, along with needed updates to the park grounds and signage. Already several trees in need to replacement have been removed, and will be replanted in the spring following the playground installation.

Veteran Memorial Field

By far the most intensive redesign and reinstallation project of the three, Vet’s Field will be the focus of the Commission’s work over the next 5-8 years at least. We anticipate a considerable redesign of the entire park, with additional amenities being added, a new play area being installed for children aged 2-5, and relocating several current amenities within the park. Additionally, we are looking to expand parking if possible, and extend electrical access to more than just the area adjacent to the current storage shed. We will be working with landscape and park designers to ameliorate the impact of water run-off from the road, which has already been lessened somewhat by the recently upgraded sidewalks. The Commission will also consult the Highway Department and the Fire Department at all stages of the design and installation, and is working closely with the Town Planner.

Zilinski Field

In alignment with the redesign of Vet's Field, the Recreation Commission will be developing a plan to redesign and upgrade the facilities and amenities at Zilinski Field. There will likely be a series of short projects in the coming years, including the replacement of some pieces of playground equipment and playground surfacing this coming spring (2021). Over the next 5-10 years we anticipate the creation of a walking path from the parking to the basketball court and playground, potentially extending to a circuit track around the main field of the park. New playground signage and landscaping is also slated for the next year or two, as are additional benches and waste receptacles. Bathroom doors have recently been replaced, along with new roofing and new security cameras at the park. Longer-term potential projects include a new volleyball court, resurfacing the tennis court, and the eventual replacement of the main play structure on the playground (part of the regular maintenance and life-span of playground equipment). The timing, scope, and exact nature of projects and plans are dependent upon work at Vet's Field, and we do not anticipate any major projects at Zilinski to be undertaken until the work at Vet's Field nears completion.

Other Parks

The Commission has scheduled several projects at Riverfront park as it works toward the completion of some of plans originally incorporated into Phase 1 of the Riverfront Park installation. Electrical work and full lighting along walkways and pavilion, the installation of the flagpole, and evaluation of the water tower's condition are currently slated for Fiscal Years 2022 and 2023. We have included plans to install a boat-launch at Riverfront starting in FY2022 as well, pending contractor input and environmental assessment.

Additionally, much needed maintenance work at Church Street Playground is nearing completion. During routine replacement of the protective surfacing under the play structures and maintenance of the slope along back border of the playground, it was determined that the old swing structure required replacement due to sub-ground structural deterioration, causing a public safety risk. Those new structures have been installed, along with a new-ADA compliant walkway from the road to the playground. Upgraded (and more attractive) fencing is awaiting installation in Spring 2021. At that time, the park bench and waste receptacle will be permanently placed as well.

Recreation Office Location

We would like to take this opportunity to announce that, as of December 2020, the Recreation Center at 18 Pleasant Street has closed until a suitable new location can be determined for the Center. For now, we continue to work remotely. You can reach us by mail at Town Hall, or leave a voicemail message at 413-422-1187. If you have any questions about Recreation planning, our parks, or any other Recreation activities, please email the Recreation Commission at recreation@erving-ma.gov.

Thank you again for your feedback, your engagement, and your support. We look forward to keeping everyone updated as our planning progresses. We will see you in the parks!

Recreation Commission

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December 20, 2020