



Interoffice Memorandum

TO: Robert C. Zarnetske, Town Manager
FROM: Theresa Murphy, Leisure Services Director
DATE: March 3, 2020
RE: Proposed Conceptual Design for New High School at Curtis Corner
Related to Impact on Recreational Facilities

This memorandum serves to provide the Town Council with feedback relative to the School Building Committee's proposed conceptual design for the South Kingstown High School to be relocated to Curtis Corner Middle School. As you are aware, the Recreation Commission Chairperson addressed the Council on Monday, February 24th to voice concern about the potential impact that the proposed design would have on recreation space at Curtis Corner Play Fields. It was asked that the Commission provide an advisory once they have had an opportunity to meet with Town staff and review the plans.

A work session of the Recreation Commission was held on Monday March 2, 2020, to review the latest conceptual design (dated Jan. 14) for the high school, and as presented by the contracted consulting firm, Robinson Green Beretta. Staff present were Park Superintendent Rex Eberly, Planning Director, Kaela Gray, Town Engineer, Rich Bourbonnais, and myself. The work session centered around identifying design features that, as currently proposed, would impact existing recreation facilities and to what degree, as well as possible alternatives for relocating them. It was first noted that ideally the established goal would be to retain the existing suite of recreational services that are currently offered at Curtis Corner. Understanding that this may not be an option, consideration of relocating impacted features on site would be required. And thirdly, if retaining all features on site was not viable, then specific identification of other sites for relocation and cost implications of development would need to be considered.

To provide some background, Curtis Corner Play Fields were constructed between 1997 and 2000. The facilities include a softball field, baseball field, large multi-purpose field, small multi-purpose field, a track field event area, five tennis courts, asphalt trail system and natural hiking trails. In 2014 a disc golf course was constructed within the natural trail system and on the perimeter of the multi-purpose fields. Also located within the play fields area is a playground and comfort station. The football field behind CCMS is also maintained by the Parks and Recreation Department. With the exception of the football field, use of the athletic facilities are shared between the South Kingstown School Department (for physical education and interscholastic athletics) and the Parks and Recreation Department. This unique partnership between SK Schools and Parks and Recreation has been a mutually beneficial one. Park athletic field use by the SK interscholastic sports program extends beyond the Curtis Corner Play Fields and includes Tuckertown Park, Broad Rock Play Fields and Old Mountain Field. The Town's athletic facilities are a source of pride for the Parks and Recreation Department, the SK Interscholastic Athletics Department and residents alike. Curtis Corner, in particular, has become a jewel in the Town's inventory of parks,

offering multiple opportunities for both passive and active recreation in a location that is connected to several neighborhoods within walking distance to the property. In the peak outdoor school sports seasons of spring and fall, the fields are scheduled daily for practices and games by the middle school and high school athletic teams. This includes two teams (JV & Varsity) in just about every outdoor sport: lacrosse, field hockey, track and field, baseball, softball, soccer. They are also used by multiple locally based youth sports leagues during times that the schools are not using them. The football field is used for games only, due to the wear and tear that consistent practicing would have on the turf, resulting in an unsafe playing surface. In the summer, the Recreation Department offers popular summer athletic camps like tennis, soccer, and lacrosse at the same fields. In addition to scheduled activities, the park receives visitors (residents and tourists) throughout the day, who hike the trails, play disc golf, and use the playground. Since this park was established, as the Town has grown and athletic leagues and clubs for all ages have increased, the level of recreational activity and demand for field space continues to increase year over year. This is true of the entire municipal fields inventory.

It was acknowledged by the Commission that the School facilities committee and school committee aspire to develop an educational facility and experience that will afford the youth of South Kingstown every opportunity to grow intellectually and socially. The Recreation Commission is fully supportive of this objective and recommends that the committee also consider how the surrounding resources can best match the opportunities that an expanded, redesigned building presents, by enhancing and improving what already exists in the form of athletic fields and recreational space. Despite the benefits of having athletic fields on a campus-like setting, the Curtis Corner amenities as they exist now will not be sufficient to accommodate all of the high school interscholastic teams and they will still be required to travel to other facilities in town for field time. Practically speaking, it is understood that funding limitations restrict the visioning of the property's potential beyond the school building. That being said, at a minimum, it is recommended that the project budget include necessary funding to relocate, reconstruct, and/or develop all recreational amenities impacted by the project.

In more specific terms, the following Curtis Corner Play Fields recreational features as related to the design plan have been identified as areas of concern; and broad recommendations made to begin a more in depth discussion.

1. Proposed parking lot sited on small multi-purpose athletic field.
 - Recommend that this field remain untouched as it is scheduled and used regularly by youth sports programs such as soccer and lacrosse. A loss of field space will further challenge the Town to accommodate interscholastic sports and multiple youth sports organizations. This field is also incorporated into four holes of the disc golf course.
 - Recommend discussion of alternate location for parking lot
2. Proposed Tennis Court relocation
 - Recommend exploring another location for tennis courts. The proposed location's topography and steep grade is likely to make construction of courts in that area extremely challenging and costly. Concern that design revisions may involve siting the courts on a portion of the large multi-purpose athletic field.
 - Recommend discussion of alternate location for courts, and potential increase in the number of courts to accommodate the school tennis program. Currently, the high school program uses two different locations: Old Mountain Field and Broad Rock Tennis Courts.
3. Disc Golf Course – Impact on five existing holes

- Ideally, the recommendation is to leave the course as is. The disc course, along with the bike path and dog park, is one of the most utilized outdoor recreation features on a year-round basis. It is played by all ages and ability levels, in all weather conditions. The Recreation Department runs a league through the summer, and tournaments are held several times a year. It also is situated among natural hiking trails that are also used by the public on a regular basis.
- Recommend discussion of possible relocation of impacted holes on site along with cost estimates for reconstruction.
- If relocation of holes is not viable, an alternate site should be identified along with cost implications of construction of course in another park.

The above items are pointed out to suggest and request that a broader discussion be held in order to answer questions that may not have been posed when the project focus has been, understandably, on the building itself. While it is still in the conceptual phase, it would be helpful for the committee to hear from Parks and Recreation Department staff, who have firsthand knowledge of the site conditions, the Parks Division being responsible for maintaining and developing the park amenities. A walk through of the grounds may also help to understand the site limitations.

With athletic field availability already at maximum usage in South Kingstown, at this preliminary stage of the design process, the Recreation Commission respectfully suggests that the Building Committee, School Committee and Town Council view this project not solely through an educational needs perspective. It is important to view it through a recreational lens and base decisions on how the site can continue to be a hub of community recreation activity as well as an effective campus setting for critical extracurricular programs. It is further requested that the impact to recreational facilities at Curtis Corner Play Fields be placed on a School Building Committee meeting agenda as soon as is feasible.

Cc: South Kingstown School Building Committee
South Kingstown Recreation Commission
Rex Eberly, Park Superintendent
Rich Bourbonnais, Town Engineer
Kaela Gray, Planning Director