

To: The Portsmouth Town Council

From: Daniela Abbott

Date: March 5, 2019

Re: Portsmouth Parks and Recreation

Under the Portsmouth Town Charter:

605. Parks and Recreation. The Town Council may establish a Department of Parks, Recreation, Arts and Activities. The Department shall be headed by a Director who shall be appointed by the Town Administrator with the approval of the Town Council. All adult and youth related activities including but not limited to facilities, parks, beaches and trails shall be placed under the jurisdiction of the Department with the exception of those within the jurisdiction of the School Department. There shall be coordination between the Department of Parks, Recreation, Arts and Activities and the School Department with regard to those properties under the control of the School Department. (Adopted November 7, 1972; eff. date July 1, 1973; amended November 6, 2012; eff. date November 6, 2012.)

Currently, we have a part-time Parks & Recreation Director who is in charge of “facilities, parks, beaches and trails,” including but are not limited to: Melville Park, Glen Park, Seveney Fields, Coggeshall School, the Senior Center, and Sandy Point Beach. For a more complete job description, see attached document (JD Recreation Director). Most comparably sized towns have a full-time Parks & Recreation Director and do not have nearly the number of “facilities, parks, beaches and trails” that Portsmouth has under its care.

Historically, volunteers have assisted in maintaining town properties. Volunteer town committees include the Melville Park Committee, Glen Park Committee, and Dog Park Committee. In addition, there are numerous independent youth sports groups, visual and performing arts groups, the Portsmouth Garden Club, the Portsmouth Historical Society, the Senior Center, and other community groups that also assist the Town staff and contractors in maintaining town properties. Numerous volunteers have recently indicated that they need more help keeping town properties properly maintained.

The recent “Facility Conditions Assessment” undertaken by the Jacobs Engineering Company for the Town of Portsmouth concluded:

The facility condition assessment identified \$5.84 million in current need. The projected life cycle renewal need for Portsmouth, Rhode Island’s facilities over the next five years is estimated to be \$6.85 million. Combining current needs with the next five years of anticipated life cycle renewal forecast, the Town of Portsmouth can anticipate \$12.68 million in facility-related needs.

This assessment indicated that a community needs assessment is required in order to develop a sound strategic plan and set priorities to properly manage and maintain Town properties, including those related to parks and recreation. In addition, recent efforts to determine how to best use town properties (such as Coggeshall School and Leonard Brown House) show a need for greater community input and coordination. This effort is often undertaken by a Parks and Recreation Committee in other

communities. Such a committee would greatly help elected leaders and staff develop policies and programs that serve the best interests of our entire community.

In sum, it is important for the Town of Portsmouth to:

1. understand the parks and recreation needs and goals of our entire community,
2. develop a plan to properly manage and maintain properties to meet identified needs and goals,
3. have an effective Parks and Recreation Department, and
4. properly value and utilize volunteer support.

To achieve these goals, the Town Council should pass motions to:

1. request that money be budgeted in the next fiscal year to pay for a professionally conducted parks and recreation community needs/goals assessment,
2. create a Parks & Recreation Committee consisting of seven (7) members who represent a diverse range of community stakeholders and to coordinate with existing town committees,
3. request the Parks and Rec Department Director be made a full-time position as soon as possible,
4. task the Parks and Rec Director and new P&R Committee to help develop proposals about how best to manage and maintain properties, including how best to respond to the needs/goals assessment, and
5. ask the Town Clerk to place an advertisement in the paper asking for volunteers to be on the new Parks & Recreation Committee so that a committee can be appointed by June 2019.