

A special message from the Parks and Rec Commission: We would like to notify the Barnstead community that we have made the tough decision not to move forward with the Grant we were awarded to build a multi-use Park and Playground in the empty space behind the Oscar Foss Library and the Ice Rink. As such, we have withdrawn our associated warrant article from the upcoming Town Meeting.

Recognizing the importance of play and outside time for kids, Barnstead Parks and Rec Commission identified an opportunity to develop empty space into a new place to play. What is the best brain food for people of all ages? PLAY. What is the best bodybuilding for people of all ages? PLAY. Research and practice over the last century have quantified the economic benefit of play. One dollar invested in children's play will return \$7 in economic benefits over a lifetime: higher wages, stronger families, lower costs in health care, special education, and crime.

Several years ago, the commission started the groundwork for the park and play area. Two years ago, we were awarded a \$75,000 grant from the U.S. Land and Water Conservation Fund to help us realize our vision. The purpose of the fund is to expand outdoor play and recreation and requires a dollar-to-dollar match. While the initial response from the community and town leaders was optimistic, over time, town leaders expressed concerns about the long-term maintenance commitment, cost for the maintenance, the ability to recruit enough volunteers and raising the matching funds.

While the commission has worked to combat some of those concerns and was optimistic as to being able to address some of the others, we are short on commission members and realize we do not have the resources necessary at this time to proceed. Therefore, we will decline the grant based on its agreed-upon terms.

While we are disappointed in this outcome, we appreciate every kind word, every idea shared, and every signature or vote that you have given us along the way. While it may take us a little longer, we plan to continue exploring ways of turning the empty space into an active community play area and we welcome your input as we re-envision the space. Without the grant funds, this project will come in stages - reliant on community donations and fundraising efforts. Our Commission also stays committed to ongoing efforts to improve and maintain our existing basketball and ice rink facilities.

Facing the closure of this long-awaited project is a sobering reminder that the Town's recreation services and programs rely heavily on sustained engagement and support from each of you. Our Commission has a number of vacancies, and we hope you consider how you can use your skills, time, and passion to bring fresh ideas and new activities to the Town of Barnstead.

Please join me in thanking Commission members of the past and present who had the original vision for the Playscape and those who fought tirelessly to try and bring that vision to life. Your efforts show true passion for building community - through play!

As always, reach out to barnsteadparks@gmail.com to get involved!

Thank you,
Barnstead Parks and Recreation Commission