

Thurston Park Committee  
Minutes of December 19, 2024

The meeting was called to order at 6:40 pm

In Attendance: Steve Nelson, Sonia Nelson, Scott Monroe and Jen Smith

The minutes of the November 17, 2024 meeting were approved unanimously after a motion to approve from Scott Monroe and seconded by Steve Nelson.

Jen Smith reported that she met with Town Manager Becky Hapgood last week to discuss the letter we had intended to send to Pete and Dawn Haskell and our plans for improving access to the park. Becky had contacted Jen to see the letter before it was sent and to discuss the plan as she felt that Select Board approval would be necessary. The intent of our letter was to ask the Haskell's to meet with us so we could discuss the south entrance and to see if we could come up with a mutually acceptable plan. Becky decided we needed to hold off on sending the letter and added this to the Select Board agenda for December 30, 2024. The committee discussed this again tonight and felt that it was important to improve access to the park. Town residents have asked for that to be done in both of the surveys that have been taken over the last 2 years. Maintenance issues on the north end continue to be very costly and a more permanent solution is necessary if that continues to be the main access to the park. The south entrance is in town and would be much easier to maintain on a long-term basis. The committee also felt that access from both ends is necessary from the standpoint of emergency access for fire or if a park user needs emergency medical attention. Jen has met with the Select Board previously on this issue, but it has gone nowhere. We plan to have the full committee in attendance and ask members of the "Friends of Thurston Park" group to attend as well. The committee felt that it was important we present a strong front and ask that a solution be found.

We discussed the new state trail funding that recently received voter approval in November. These grants will be available for improving and developing trails throughout the state. Competition will likely be stiff, and we need to make sure our application stands out. Since many grants require handicapped accessibility, the committee decided to develop a handicapped accessible trail. We discussed possible locations for the new trail. We will need to enlarge the handicap parking

area and provide an accessible toilet. Jen Smith will look into the recommendations for accessible trails and check to see if application materials have been developed.

We discussed China Ice Days 2025. Last year we held an Owl Prowl on Friday evening at the park. We had also planned to have sledding and a bonfire with s'mores and cocoa, however there was not enough snow to hold the event. After discussion the committee voted unanimously to hold the same events again.

Under old business we tabled the trail name signs discussion as neither Steve Nelson or Jen Smith have had time to contact the sign makers. The FEMA funding from last winters' storm damage looks like it has been approved but still needs some final documentation before finalized. Hopefully, that will come through soon so we can make plans for repairs this spring.

We discussed our TIF application which is due by 2/28/2025. We will need to know if we are getting the FEMA funds before we can determine what we will be requesting from TIF. If we get FEMA funds we could focus on further trail development. We discussed adding a Ridge Trail starting at the handicapped parking area and ending at a junction with the Town Line Trail. We also discussed improving the Monument Trail and the Waterfall Trail for mountain biking. NEMBA members have seen and ridden the trail and are interested. They expressed interest in holding a Last Man Standing race in the park. This would bring good publicity and interest to the park. We will look at getting estimates.

Finally, we decided to request the same budget as last year (\$13,000) for the 2025-2026 fiscal year and hope that it is not cut by the Select Board.

The meeting was adjourned at 8:00 PM.

The next meeting will take place on Thursday, January 16, 2025 at 6:30 pm in the portable building at the town office.

Respectfully submitted,  
Jeanette "Jen" Smith