

January 5, 2017

TO: Essex BOF

FROM: Don Mesite

SUBJECT: Park & Recreation Commission's Request to Release Funds from their Sinking Fund for a Scoreboard at Comstock Field

Dear Fellow Members of the Essex Board of Finance:

While I am unable to attend the January meeting of the BOF, I am aware that the subject matter is on the agenda. As everyone knows from our previous discussions, I have some thoughts and opinions on this subject. And, while I am unable to attend our January meeting, I feel compelled to provide some comments for the Board's consideration.

Let me begin by saying that I think our Park & Rec Commission and our Park & Rec Director do a tremendous job! I believe you all know that I was involved as Park & Rec Chairman for many years. I think (and hope) that during my tenure we raised the bar significantly as pertains to Park & Rec facilities and programs, and I am extremely pleased and grateful that the folks currently involved have taken things to an even higher level. No one would like to support the interests and efforts of Park & Rec more than me. That said, it is our job on the Board of Finance to be stewards of the town's finances and taxpayer dollars, and I have some questions and concerns regarding the use of taxpayer dollars to buy a \$15,000 scoreboard.

We had a very interesting and thought provoking discussion when this matter was brought up at a previous Board of Finance Meeting. Specifically, we had significant discussion regarding the roles and authorities of both the Board of Finance and the Park & Rec Commission as pertains to the handling of their budget. Please be assured that I have no interest in 'micro managing' Park & Rec's affairs. In fact, when I was Chairman of Park & Rec, I took great exception to anyone who tried to get involved in 'our business'. As further background, I have no problem whatsoever with the presence of a scoreboard at Comstock or any other town park and, more importantly, that is not the decision of this Board; that is clearly Park & Rec's 'business'. So, the issue isn't the scoreboard itself, but rather who should pay for it. So, with that background and clarification, please consider the following:

1. I think we would all agree that Park & Rec has complete authority regarding the management of their budget, provided the funds are used for the purpose for which they were approved. To repeat myself, it is not my intent to 'micro manage' their budget.
2. That said, it is my understanding that the Park & Rec Sinking Fund, which they would like to use to purchase this scoreboard, was not ear-marked or specifically designated for this purpose. It is my understanding that the Sinking Fund is intended to be used to cover capital and/or major expenses that cannot be covered by their regular budget provided they are within the scope of

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their existing operations. To my knowledge, there is no precedent to support the notion that scoreboards to support non-Park & Rec programs are within the scope of 'existing operations'.

3. Some further background: The current scoreboard at Hubbard Field was not purchased with Park & Rec or tax payer funds; my recollection and understanding is that it was purchased with funds raised by the Essex Little League. And, correct me if I'm wrong, but isn't it true that the scoreboard to be used at Comstock would be used for non-Park & Rec programs like Little League, Babe Ruth, Cal Ripken, Valley Soccer (perhaps), etc.? So, in my opinion, this scoreboard does not constitute 'park infrastructure'; to me, it is 'equipment' that will support non-Park & Rec programs. As such, it is my opinion that it should be paid for by the programs that will use it; not by Park & Rec or tax payer dollars. And I would contend that this logic is consistent with the concept that rec programs (both those directly managed by Park & Rec or those which Park & Rec supports indirectly) should be 'self-supporting'.
4. I am also sensitive to the notion that it is unfair to believe that town businesses or other benefactors should be asked to pay for things like this. To me, something like this should be paid for by the people who will use it. For example, shouldn't Little League raise their entry fees to cover this cost, just as they would to cover the cost of uniforms or other 'equipment'? (And, by the way, please rest assured that I have no beef whatsoever with Little League, Babe Ruth, Valley Soccer or any other organization....many of which I have been involved with over the years.)
5. And, even if you disagree with my logic, as a steward of the town's resources, I feel compelled to question the dollar amount that is being proposed. Or, said more directly, do we really need a scoreboard that costs \$15,000 (recognizing that the amount also includes installation, etc.)?

Thanks very much for your consideration of this input. And thanks again to the folks at Park & Rec for their excellent work and very positive intentions.

Personally, I will fully support whatever action the Board elects to take relative to this matter.

Sincerely,

Don Mesite