Minutes from June 25th 2020

Attending: John Alphin, Trevor Bruso, Ethan Melad, Brian Tessier, Dale Kiley, Tara Hayes, Michelle Petratits. Daniel Roman.

Mr. Alphin welcomed those in attendance. Mr. Bruso read the following statement; Statement on the closure of the Playgrounds and Basketball courts

Good Afternoon,

I’m sure most of you are here to talk about the closing of the playground and Basketball courts. I first want to say that Mr. Roman and the playground committee are to be commended for the work they do for the town. We know that they work very hard for the kids in North Brookfield.

The North Brookfield Board of Health is responsible for the enforcement of the Orders from Governor Baker and the Department of Public Health as they pertain to Public Health and Safety during the Covid Pandemic. We are here to enforce regulations as best we can. In fact we take an oath “'I,, do solemnly swear and affirm that I will faithfully and impartially discharge and perform all duties incumbent on me in the office to which I have been appointed according to the best of my abilities .” It is not always an easy thing to have implement enforcement within town, and it is made more difficult as people try and skirt the rules.

When Phase 2 of reopening began, basketball courts and playgrounds could reopen, under the following condition (There can be no contact games and there needs to be a plan for cleaning high contact surfaces) As stipulated in the Memorandum of June 9, 2020: Safety Standards for Parks, Open Space, and Outdoor Education Programs – Phase II

After an email inquiry about why the playground committee wasn’t opening the Courts and the Common, we approached Mr. Roman and said that it was up to the PC to open the courts and playgrounds if they wanted to. In every conversation and there were at least 3 we reiterated that there can be no contact games. I also recognized that it would be difficult to get 100% compliance with that point. IT was suggested that if we posted signage, which the BOH would pay for, that should probably be sufficient to discourage most people. We wanted the PC to meet with , our Health inspector and see how best to proceed with a cleaning regimen as well, but it wasn’t urgent and didn’t need to be done in order to open. Since then we have learned that 2 out of last 3 COVID positives were kids under the age of 10.  Knowing that children are being infected in town, we need to use an abundance of caution in the prevention of further spread among youth, which we had hoped the PG Comm would have heard, had they responded to our meeting request.

Never did anyone from the PC raise an objection. On June 14th the chair of the PC announced that the courts were “100% open.”  That is not allowed under the current state guidelines. On the 17th the chair was invited to our meeting to get clarification by what 100% meant exactly. Instead, as the principle administrator of a private basketball league he put out the call for full court basketball games for that evening. While we were meeting the chair of the PC was posting videos of a large group of players, playing full contact. That action was certainly not discouraging full contact play.

The BOH issued a verbal notice that the Courts and playground were to be closed. The Chair received that on the 18th. Mr. Doe called me on the 20th to inform me that the area was closed. He and I had a good conversation and I left that conversation hopeful that Mr. Roman would contact the BOH through email or phone and we could set up times to meet with the Health Inspector, agree on language for signage and so on, to open the courts and playgrounds as soon as possible. we put the health inspector on notice that I would be trying to get her some times, provided by Mr. Roman, as soon as possible. By Monday the 22nd we still had not heard from Mr. Roman, so I sent him an email asking for times from him and even suggested that we look into a portable hand washing station, if it was possible. We have still not received a reply.

The North Brookfield Board of Health wants to work with the PC to get things opened up as quickly as possible. We do try to keep people informed on Facebook but did not respond, for 2 reasons. 1. There are legal issues that make discussing these things in a public forum difficult and we were waiting for some guidance. 2. We do not want to get into anything will cause more resentment or anger and possibly drag out the process even longer than necessary. Frankly we thought the pc would meet with our inspector and it would be reopened immediately. We do not know why they have not and did not want to put public pressure on them.

To conclude, the BOH wants to work with the PC to get the courts and playground open. The signs would need to be in place and they would have to meet with the Health Inspector to come up with a written plan for cleaning and Mr. Roman needs , in writing to affirm that he will not encourage full contact games until we enter the appropriate phase in order to make that happen.

After finishing the statement Mr. Roman and Mr. Bruso discussed what he needed to do to get the basketball courts and playground up and running. 1. Contact the BOH and give times that would be convenient to meet with the town health inspector and see what they can come up with for cleaning protocol, or a handwashing station. 2. Place signs up that discourage full contact games, which the BOH will pay for. 3.Mr. Roman must provide in writing, his commitment to not organize full contact games on the common.

Mr. Roman acknowledged that he had received an email on Monday the 22nd regarding the issue and said that he would contact the BOH with available times.

The Board asked Mr. Kiley what his plans were for the 4th of July event were. He stated that there would be a parade, followed by an event on the common. Mr. Alphin asked him why the BOS had moved ahead with the plan in spite of promising to work with the health inspector before taking a vote on the issue. Mr. Kiley responded that it was all in line with Governor’s orders. Mr. Alphin asked Mr. Kiley why he stated at a selectman’s meeting that our inspector and Mr. Alphin stated in a meeting with him that it was ok to proceed with the event. Mr. Kiley claimed he never said this. He then stated that the event would be called a protest if the BOH objected. When asked how public funds could be spent on political protest, he responded that it was a first amendment issue. Mr. Alphin informed him that the BOH would issue a statement regarding the matter.