

Bonnie Reemsnyder, Statement regarding the planned Love Your Playground project and the process.

I want to thank Selectman Sibley for taking the time to articulate his concerns and thoroughly explain why he abstained from the vote taken at the August 7, 2017 Board of Selectmen's meeting. While I understand his concerns, I feel it is important to point out the facts of the history of this approved expenditure.

The Jr. Women's Club first came to the Board of Selectmen with the Cross Lane Playground proposal on Oct. 19, 2015, when they reported that they had raised funds for maintenance & replacement of the playground at Town Woods Park. At that playground, due to removal of some broken playground pieces, there were areas with no equipment, and the gazebo was in need of safety repairs, so the Club arranged to run the concession stand during Saturday morning soccer to raise funds. That, along with other fundraising events, raised approx. \$15,000 to complete their planned work. They thoroughly explained how they had vetted several playground equipment companies, requesting quotes and researching the quality. After their rigorous process, they settled on Columbia Cascade Designs, due to the quality. The Board of Selectmen approved the installation with no oversight, as there were no town funds expended for this playground. We expressed our appreciation and encouragement for their work, and I might add, trusted their recommendations for equipment that would be our responsibility once installed. At that same meeting, the idea of a larger project for Cross Lane was brought up, including the idea of making it handicap accessible, and the BOS applauded and encouraged their efforts. I also recall discussing financial support from the town for this effort, even if done over a two or three year period.

On March 15, 2016, the Jr. Women's Club presented to the Board of Finance the full scope of their plans for Cross Lane, handing out the overview of the plan to all present (all three selectmen were in attendance), and reviewing their process. The minutes reflect their request to fund THEIR plan, as presented:

The LYPC collected bids for a new playground from four companies and has selected Columbia Cascade Company to design and build a new playground. The proposed playground will include two play structures with assorted swings and climbing activities completely surrounded with a fence. Equipment cost is \$104,840, installation - \$13,800, rubber surfacing - \$46,981.71, rubber surfacing installation - \$3,000, mulch - \$2,200, paving - \$14,850 and fencing - \$13,275. Total project is \$199,946.71. The Junior Women's Club plan to raise themselves \$15,000, \$10,000 from community support, and \$125,000 in outstanding grants. Anticipated Town of Old Lyme request estimated between \$50,000 and \$175,000. So far, the Committee has met with and received approval from the Parks and Recreation Department and Parks and Recreation Commission, and has received acknowledgement of the project by the Board of Selectmen.

At that meeting, they were requesting support from the Town of Old Lyme. We only approved \$10,000 in the FY 2017 budget for the playground.

Members of LYPC continued to meet with the Park & Rec Commission and with the Zoning Officer to secure the required permits for the playground, in the hopes that they would raise more money and have town funding support, as previously discussed.

Minutes from the April 7, 2016 Park & Rec Commission meeting include these excerpts:

The Committee collected bids for a new playground from four companies and has selected Columbia Cascade Company to design and build the new playground. Anna and Melanie gave a presentation of the proposed changes to the Town Woods Park playground and for the proposed playground at Cross Lane Park. This presentation included the budget summary and fundraising summary.

The Parks and Recreation Commission members expressed their appreciation for such a great job and were in full support of these projects. Bob Dunn suggested that if they cannot raise all the needed funds, the project could be done in two phases. The Committee was in agreement.

In the Fall of 2016, the Parks & Rec Dept. requested \$150,000 for the PLANNED playground at Cross Lane Park based on the presentations of the LYPC. With some concerns for the location, the Town even had a soil specialist work with us on the location to be sure that it was not problematic. Some areas, as expected, were too wet, so the location of specific equipment was relocated to avoid the areas of concern.

At the March 21, 2017 Board of Finance Meeting, the subject of the Cross Lane Playground was discussed, and I was an advocate for taking this project to a town meeting. This would give us the opportunity to present all the information gathered by the LYPC Committee to the residents, and clearly articulate the plan and the cost. In the end, the Board of Finance felt strongly that it should be a part of the budget process, and kept it in the Capital P&R budget, noting that it had been discussed for some time and P&R was clearly supportive since they had submitted the request. Subsequently it was approved as part of the FY 2018 budget in May of 2017. Clearly, they do not approve this kind of expenditure without a well thought out plan – in 2016 when our EMD requested \$5k for education purposes, the Board of Finance asked for a plan before considering approval.

Once the playground funds were approved, I met with Anna Reiter to further discuss their plan, particularly the final location. As early as June 2017, they were asking that the equipment be ordered so that installation could be completed before winter set in. I shared with her the suggestion that we form a committee through the town to get this going, and further had a discussion with our Finance Director about ordering the equipment. At first, the FD felt it was okay to place the order for the equipment, but after further discussion, felt that with BOS approval, the equipment could be ordered. We both agreed that the documentation provided by the LYPC was adequate to show a process had been completed, and several bids were solicited and received. In the end, the equipment is sole source, as it was chosen based on quality, anticipated life span, low maintenance costs, etc. After considerable pressure from the LYPC, and discussion about forming a town committee (basically from the LYPC committee members, since they were very familiar with the plan and process) I brought this to the Board of Selectmen on August 7, 2017 for approval to order the equipment based on all the approvals received already.

In addition, Anna Reiter, LYPC chair, Dave Catalano (rep from Columbia Cascade Playground Equipment), Don Bugbee, Bob Dunn and Missy Garvin met on August 10, 2017 at Cross Lane Park to review the chosen equipment, the layout plan, the installation process and the location, and to have an opportunity to ask questions. Don Bugbee reported back that the meeting went very well, and everyone was very satisfied with the plan and the process. He felt it was time well spent, and everyone was on the same page to move forward.

In the past, we have approved funding for capital expenditures for other organizations, and just issued a check for them to complete their project. As this project will be on Town Property, and will become the property and responsibility of the Town of Old Lyme, I recommended the formation of a town committee to resume where the LYPC group left off. So far, the only applications to be appointed to this committee are four members of the original LYP Committee, one who is also on P&R Commission. We all agreed that we should include Don Bugbee as Director of P&R to the committee as well. I have advertised for volunteers on News and Announcements with no response.

I believe that the research and planning for this project was done very well, and to think that we would go out to bid when the equipment purchase can be considered sole source is redundant at best, and, at worst, insulting to those who worked so hard to make this playground plan one that is perfect for the citizens of Old Lyme.