

# BILLERICA RECREATION COMMISSION

## ANNUAL REPORT

FY 2017

As Presented to Town Meeting

### CREATING COMMUNITY THROUGH PEOPLE, PARKS & PROGRAMS

Billerica's Recreation Department continues to play a central role in defining the Town's quality of life. Recreation has become the common ground upon which people of all ages, backgrounds, interests and abilities gather to play and participate in the life of the community. The primary directive of the Recreation Department is to offer low cost recreational programs, services, trips and special events to the citizens of Billerica. Our recreational, educational and cultural programming reflects the interest and diversity of our community. We are committed to improving parks and recreation facilities to ensure a safe and pleasant experience for visitors.

The Recreation Department offers programs, trips, and special events year round. Major program offerings are published electronically and posted on the town's website. Additional programs are added throughout the year. Program information is distributed to residents and friends of the town through inserts in quarterly town bills, e-newsletters, flyers distributed in the public schools, listings on BATV (local access) and on the internet; mailings to residents upon request; local area newspapers and social media including Facebook and Twitter. Through the use of electronic media, we have been able to keep notifications current while keeping costs low.

The Department offers more than 200 programs, classes, trips and special events each year. These recreational offerings range from pre-school to senior, and everything in between. Our Neighborhood Parks, drama and science workshops, sports programs and Superstars program continue to be great successes serving over 700 children during the summer with many families selecting repeat weeks of involvement. The Friday night ski/snowboard program at Wachusett Mountain provided a positive experience for teens.

As the "old Ditson School" was determined to no longer be safe for use, the PAL Floor Hockey program was moved to the Hajjar Elementary School. While the move did not have an effect on the attendance, the size of the gymnasium proved to be a detriment to the program and made it difficult for parents to stay for viewing.

Some key program highlights included: the growth of multiple yoga opportunities that have been very popular. The Adapted Zumba gives special needs teens and adults a non-competitive avenue for fitness. Our Tai-Chi Long Form program continues to attract many seniors and others looking for a low impact fitness routine. Throughout the year science and engineering programs provide avenues for youth to engage in STEM activities. This year's First Lego League team participated in the area event located in Lawrence and took two trophies for their work. We continue to have members of past teams acting as student mentors. On-line registration and payment is available for most programs.

Volunteers play a critical role in enabling the department to achieve its goals. They provide direct and indirect opportunities and support to participants in our programs. The Recreation

Department has received support from the business community allowing us to offer specialized programs and activities for the continuous enjoyment of our citizens, businesses and visitors. We are looking to continue our public/private partnerships in order to maintain and improve the rich diversity of recreation programming and our parks which help to make our community special. Highlights of this can be seen in the following:

1. The Recreation Department coordinates the Police Athletic League Recreation programs with the support of the Police Chief and Department including street and floor hockey. The total rebuild of the PAL Hockey Rink at the Marshall Middle School was a collaborative effort with other businesses as well as the Valley Collaborative. The project was completed in the summer of 2016 and used for programs in that fall.
2. Two special concerts were offered this fiscal year courtesy of grants from the Billerica Arts Council. One sponsored concert featured the 50+ members of the Chelmsford Community Band playing a variety of “Pops” style tunes, and a second a “young” performers line up of 3 performance groups/soloists featured hip hop and rock.
3. The Middlesex Sheriff’s Dept. provided Work Release crews for numerous projects during the year. Some of these included spring/fall park and beach cleanup throughout the town’s parks, playgrounds and Micozzi Beach. The crew also assisted preparing Manning Park for the “Haunting of the Manning” and with the cleanup of the Town Hall after the Billerica Family New Year.
4. Yankee Doodle Homecoming Weekend celebration continues to be an exciting and enjoyable weekend for the citizens of Billerica.
5. The 2016 Family New Year’s Eve Celebration encouraged families to welcome the new year while celebrating 100 years of our National Parks. This event featured music, games, crafts and a hay ride. A wood carver created a 3 foot squirrel that is on display at the Manning State Park.
6. The town’s youth sports groups have continued to provide manpower and financial support needed to keep the town’s fields maintained and upgraded. These groups continued going above and beyond to make sure the town’s fields are playable.
7. Billerica’s Green-up/Clean-up was held in May. Volunteers picked up trash, raked leaves and planted flowers at parks, playgrounds, COA, Billerica Library, and public places all over town. Many community groups and area companies were involved in making this year’s Clean Up Green Up efforts. A community grant from EMD Serono provided funds for promotional signage. Among the companies/groups participating with the Billerica Recreation Department were: Pepsi, BATV, Starbucks, Grigg’s Farm, Council on Aging, O’Connor Hardware, Waste Management, EMD Serono, Cabot Corp, and Lexia Learning, Greater Billerica Horseman’s Association, Billerica Community Alliance, Billerica Neighborhood Brigade, Billerica Bionics Robotics Team, Bay State Baptist Church, Shawsheen River Watershed Association, Billerica HS Varsity Baseball, Troop 30 of the Boy

Scouts, O'Sullivan Installs, Boys & Girls Club, Pack 54 of the Cub Scouts, Black Walnut Meadows, Sons of Italy, and even Batman himself!

8. A Community Grant sponsored by EMD Serono provided the last monies needed for the purchase of an outdoor cinema system. This allowed the department to schedule and offer 3 family movie nights at the Peggy Hannon Rizza Complex in August. The plan is to include family movie nights as a monthly event in years to come. A second grant provided funding for a mobile kitchen with convection ovens, induction cooking tops, pots, pans, and a cart that will be used for informal cooking classes in the future.
9. Micozzi Beach had another banner summer with many more families purchasing season passes and an increase in day visitors. The beach continues to be a great place to escape from the heat for many families. The area has a playground, sand volleyball court, canoe/kayak/SUP rentals, picnic area and swimming beach. The fishing pier (a floating dock) is popular with fishermen. At the start of summer 2016, with a grant from the Billerica Alliance and generous match by one of its members, the Department acquired 2 kayaks and Stand Up Paddle Boards. These quickly became favorites for beach visitors. A series of treatments to control both invasive species and algae blooms was implemented August 2016 with visible results in June and throughout the summer of 2017. Additional small capital work done at Micozzi Beach allowed for a permanent outdoor rinsing station, a patio with barbeque grill for group use, renewal of sand with additional tables and benches.

The Warren Manning State Park water-playground experienced increased interest. Our annual fall event, "The Haunting of Manning Park", designed and led by volunteers attracted many area families for a fun and "scary" evening at the park in October. We continue to request meetings to work on an agreement with the Commonwealth of Massachusetts – Department of Conservation and Recreation that authorizes the Department the management of the Manning State Park.

The Department received word in December 2016 that it had been awarded the PARC Grant of \$400,000 matching reimbursement for the Peggy Hannon-Rizza Recreational Complex. The firm of Weston & Sampson was hired to create the design for the project based on the general description that was submitted with the grant. The major design elements include lights for the tennis courts and parking lots, a wheelchair accessible shade shelter with 8 accessible picnic tables, a stone dust perimeter trail with cut outs for both abutting ponds and a wheelchair accessible fishing platform.

At the Peggy Hannon-Rizza Complex, the 8 tennis courts were resurfaced as part of our small capital projects. New Pickleball courts were installed by making two of the tennis courts adaptable with lines and special adjustable net anchors. Using the Playlocal.com website, players have the ability to make free reservations for the courts. Instructional and recreational play opportunities were offered over the spring and summer. Additional Pickleball lines were painted on the Ditson School basketball courts for those who provide their own nets.

The six town wide playgrounds are available for children to enjoy. A netting extension between the Kids Konnection Playground and the Pollard baseball field that suffered damage over the

prior winter was replaced. A contract has been established with an area company specializing in playground inspections with repairs to be done on a semi-annual basis.

Donations and grants allowed the building of the “Firefighter Dave’s Playground”, a fire truck themed area designed for pre-school youth, as part of the Kohlrausch Park facility. The majority of the funds raised came from the fundraising efforts of the Silva family, in memory of Dave, a Billerica firefighter who died in a snowmobile accident in 2015. A community build was held on the Saturday of Father’s Day weekend 2017 with an emotional dedication ceremony, complete with sparkling cider, was led by the Silva Family on Father’s Day.

Vietnam Veterans Park offered many recreational opportunities to visitors. The Middlesex Community Radio Control Flyers sponsored several special events and demonstrations. With the support of Lynnway Autos, lights were installed at the bocce courts allowing patrons to continue to use them after sunset, thus extending the bocce “season”. The Recreation Commission continues to work with citizens who are interested in developing a dog park. Many visitors enjoy walking the seven miles of trails in the park year round.

Summer Concerts on the Common continued to bring many families to the center of town each Tuesday in the summer. July and August of 2016 saw 8 concerts with bands that provided a range of music. A grant from the Billerica Arts Council allowed the department to sponsor a performance the Chelmsford Community Band and a “Schools Out” night featuring local young artists. While most of the regular band concerts were sponsored by the Friends of Billerica Recreation, a couple, including the music for National Night Out in August, were co-sponsored by area companies. The Friends continue to offer their very popular programs including Breakfast with the Easter Bunny, Breakfast with Santa and the Shamrock Ball “father-daughter” dance. The Friends provided recreational scholarships to many needy Billerica children and families.

The Department continues to provide an avenue for discounted group tickets for area venues including: Red Sox, Celtics, Bruins, Lowell Spinners, and Broadway in Boston. Our motor coach tours to points of interest from Baltimore to Maine and Toronto continue to be a popular outlet for many. Tours to the New York City 9/11 Museum and an annual holiday shopping trip were top choices for patrons.

The Department works to implement the goals and objectives outlined in the last Billerica’s Open Space and Recreation Plan (OSRP) and has been working with the Open Space Committee to develop a new Plan. An Environmental Engineering student from Merrimack College was recruited to assist with the ADA inventory of active recreation areas. The final version of the OSRP will need to be submitted before final payment for the PARC grant can be received in 2018.

Small Capital projects directed toward field and park improvements include work either in progress or completed at the old office/Pop Warner building and new security cameras at Peggy Hannon-Rizza Recreation Complex, reconstruction of the electrical shed; pavement and construction of a new multipurpose court at Locke Middle School, treatment for invasive vegetation and algae at Micozzi beach, refurbishment of the Dutile field and replacement of backstops at the Shea and Men’s softball fields along with the previously mentioned upgrades to Micozzi Beach.

Staff transitions were experienced in the Recreation Department. In July 2016, Director Joe Higgins announced his retirement effective July 2017. In May 2016 Program Coordinator Sandy Libby left the department with David Grubb hired as her replacement that August. In anticipation of a family move, he then resigned his position in January 2017 only to return as Acting Director in August 2017 when that position became vacant. (He has since been awarded the Director position status). In March 2017, Dan Jacobs was hired as the Program Coordinator.

The Recreation Department does not have its own adequate space for housing the services provided by a recreation department, so we continue depend on the cooperation of the Billerica School Department, area businesses and civic organizations. The School Department's increases in the cost of facility rentals continues to impact the cost of our programs, the time our programs can be scheduled and number of citizens that we can serve. While we have been working well with the School Department the best we can, our programs continue to feel the impact of these charges and the effects on services being offered to residents. The development of a Recreation or Community Center for the Town continues to be a major goal of the Recreation Commission.

The Recreation Commission would like to thank the employees and volunteers of the Recreation Department for their continuous commitment to improvements in the quality of programs and parks offered to the citizens of Billerica. Special thanks to Town Departments, Commissions, organizations, businesses and individuals in the community who volunteer their time and support to ensure that the programs, trips and special events are an unquestionable success and our parks and playgrounds are places of which we can all be proud .

Respectfully submitted,

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Chairman, Billerica Recreation Commission

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