

# **Shelburne Recreation Committee Town Report 2023-2024**

The Recreation Committee has the following members: Diana Hardina, Mary Lou Gallup, Norman Beebe, and Stefan Topolski. We currently have one vacancy on the committee. If you are interested in joining, please email us at [cowellgymnasium@gmail.com](mailto:cowellgymnasium@gmail.com). Bill Buck left his position as the Cowell Gym Director in December. We want to thank Bill for his four plus years of service. John Walsh came on board in January and will serve as the Cowell Gym Director through at least June 30<sup>th</sup>. John served as the clerk of the works for the recent mini-split installation at the Cowell Gym and will be invaluable to both the committee and the town in his role as Cowell Gym Director.

The town's major recreational facilities, the Cowell Gymnasium and the outdoor courts at the Cowell, completed their second year of being fully open after two plus years of COVID restrictions and closure. The outdoor courts can be used at any time during daylight hours. Folks drop in to play basketball, pickleball, and tennis. The pickleball courts we had lined in 2022, have allowed folks to drop in and play pickleball using the tennis net, or with a personal net using one of the permanently lined courts. In addition, there are times set aside for pickleball. Pickleball continues to thrive both outdoors and indoors thanks to the efforts of recreation committee member Mary Lou Gallup and her husband, Jay Readinger. Generally, pickleball moves outdoors in April and heads back indoors in late November. If you have questions about pickleball, please email [shelburnefallspickleball@gmail.com](mailto:shelburnefallspickleball@gmail.com). For information on sessions available, please go to Shelburne Falls Pickleball at <https://bit.ly/3N3HgNb>.

In the Cowell Gym, in addition to offering pickleball six days a week, we offered basketball three nights a week (both competitive and relaxed), senior walk three mornings a week (during the winter), and the Cowell Youth Winter Program (formerly the Cowell Youth Basketball Program) four nights a week. This past winter it offered coed basketball for kindergarten, grades 1-2, and grades 3-4; and coed indoor soccer for grades 5-6. We want to give a shout out to the volunteers who coached these groups, and of course recreation committee member Diana Hardina who gets it going and helps with the coaching. All of these programs are open to the public on a drop-in basis, except for pickleball which requires preregistration. The recreation committee has set new gym use rates for these programs. They are as follows: Children under 16 are free. Shelburne residents 16 and over pay \$2, and non-Shelburne residents 16 and over pay \$5. The senior walk is free. Thanks to recreation committee member Stefan Topolski, we were able to offer open gym for children grade 6 and younger during Buckland-Shelburne Elementary School's February break. One final note: you'll notice volleyball did not happen this past year ☹️. If you would like to help bring volleyball back to the Cowell, please contact us at [cowellgymnasium@gmail.com](mailto:cowellgymnasium@gmail.com).

The Cowell Gym can also be rented by members of the community (\$65 for a two-hour block). This past year, individuals rented the gym for birthday parties, ping pong, end of season celebrations, and tai chi classes. We also have two schools, The Academy at Charlemont and Four Rivers, that rent it on an ongoing basis for their basketball programs. To rent the gym, please contact Cowell Gym Director John Walsh at (413) 775-3274. By the way, the Art Garden's popular Draw-around returns to the Cowell Gym in April, after a four-year absence!

For the sixth straight year, recreation committee member Stefan Topolski has provided public ice skating in his side yard at 111 Bridge Street. This past winter was not a good one for ice skating – the temperature simply did not stay cold enough long enough for ice to form. Skating was only

available for a few days. Still, 14 people did take advantage of this small window for skating. Stefan has again graciously agreed to continue to provide ice skating in his side yard next year. The recreation committee is looking for volunteers to assist Stefan next season in maintaining and clearing the ice. If you would like to help, please email us at [cowellgymnasium@gmail.com](mailto:cowellgymnasium@gmail.com).

The Recreation Committee collaborated with the Shelburne Open Space Committee to update our Open Space and Recreation Plan. Last year, the recreation committee wrote and received a grant for \$7,000 to help pay for assistance from the Franklin Regional Council of Governments. FRCOG's assistance, in particular the assistance of Andrea Donlon, has been indispensable. The completed Open Space and Recreation Plan was submitted to the state in December and has already received tentative approval. We expect final approval shortly.

The Recreation Committee also continued its collaboration with the Open Space Committee to expand hiking trails within the town of Shelburne. A hiking trail along the Deerfield River that would be accessible from town remains our top priority. This trail, as presently conceived, would start at the Deerfield Avenue parking lot and follow the Deerfield River for about six tenths of a mile. The town owns close to ten acres of land along the Deerfield River, and this trail would primarily be on that land.

Some improvements we've seen this year to our recreation facilities include the installation of the aforementioned mini-splits (thanks to a Massachusetts Green Communities grant), the outdoor courts now have a tennis/pickleball practice board set up on the fence (thank you Bill Buck), and we have transformed the large room in the basement of the Cowell Gym (on the Highland Avenue side of the building) into the future home of ping pong. The latter is thanks to the efforts of recreation committee member Diana Hardina. We are actively looking for folks to help proctor drop-in ping pong times. If you can help, please email Diana at [dianahardina@gmail.com](mailto:dianahardina@gmail.com).

Two projects we are hoping to complete in 2024 include improvements to Arms Field (reclaim the infield, and smooth and reseed the outfield), and the lining of additional pickleball courts. The latter will be accomplished by removing two small patches of grass and lining the additional courts parallel to the existing ones. This will allow for four painted pickleball courts without interfering with the basketball court.

The West County Emergency Food Pantry completed its ninth full year of operation in the basement of the Cowell Gym. This permanent presence allows the Food Pantry to be open every Wednesday from 11 am to 4 pm. The Food Pantry serves 25 to 35 individuals each Wednesday. This translates to support for 110 households, 60+ in Buckland and Shelburne alone. The Food Pantry recently received a USDA grant to upgrade a refrigerator and freezer, which will save on electricity. The Food Pantry can be reached at 413-773-5029. The Clothes Closet, run by Trinity Church, is located in the Cowell Gym basement adjacent to the Food Pantry. It is open the second and fourth Wednesday of each month from 11 am to 3:30 pm and generally sees 10 to 15 people each day it is open.

The Recreation Committee maintains a Facebook page and sends out programming updates via email. You can like us at <https://www.facebook.com/ShelburneRecreation>, and if you'd like to receive the updates, please email [cowellgymnasium@gmail.com](mailto:cowellgymnasium@gmail.com).

The Recreation Committee would like to thank the people of Shelburne, in particular the Selectboard, Town Administrator Terry Narkewicz, and Shelburne Highway Superintendent Mark Shippee for their ongoing support.