

**Minutes of the
Parks and Recreation Commission**
March 18, 2008

In Attendance:

Phil Kearns, Chairman
Jon Chase
David Thaxter
Wayne Tinker, Secretary
Barbara Dobbin, Vice Chairman

Paul J. Roche, Director
Robin Matthews, Asst. Director-Rec
Bob Schneider, Asst. Director-Parks
Jane Byrnes, Recording Secretary

Meeting called to order by the Chairman at 8:00 p.m.

Approval of Agenda:

Approval of Minutes:

The agenda and the minutes as submitted were approved.

Financial Status

Revenue Report

In Ms. Cipolla's absence, Mr. Roche reported that year-to-date revenue was down slightly due to outstanding payments.

There was some discussion regarding the possibility of budget overages which may include; fuel, utilities for the new garage, program expansion and the addition of the leased loader for the outdoor maintenance. It was the suggestion of the Commission that the Department not wait until June to request a transfer and to notify the Controller of these overages.

Operating and Capital Budget Requests

Mr. Roche reviewed the operating budget cuts as suggested by the BOS and the budget subcommittee. Mr. Kearns stated that he was pleased with the negotiations with the BOS and that the budget is one the department can work with. The Commission was submitting at 4.5% increase as suggested.

Mr. Chase asked about the cuts made to the department's capital budget. Mr. Kearns stated that the subcommittee and department were also pleased with this request. There was some additional discussion regarding the Barlow Mountain pool capital requests.

Mr. Thaxter stated that Mr. Kearns and the subcommittee had a very polished and effective program to submit to the BOS regarding the operating and capital budget requests. Mr. Thaxter also mentioned that the negotiations went well and Mr. Kearns did a very strategic job with the presentation. The Commission thanked the subcommittee for their support.

Mr. Roche stated that the BOF kick-off meeting for Town budgets is scheduled for March 31, 2008. Mr. Roche mentioned that this meeting is a general overall presentation.

Membership Report

In Ms. Cipolla's absence, Mr. Roche reported that Ms. Towers, Ms. Cipolla and Ms. Bottali have been working on the development of a new membership report. Mr. Roche stated that the report is in the early stages; however, he reviewed it with the Commission. The report stated:

- Recreation memberships were down slightly.
- Wellness memberships were also down slightly.
- Lap memberships continue to rise.

The Commission stated that this report showed a more straightforward approach to reporting the membership numbers.

Chairman's Report:

Mr. Kearns stated that his report had been covered above.

Ms. Dobbin asked Mr. Kearns for the status on the Sturges Park issue. Mr. Kearns stated that to date, neither he nor Mr. Roche had gotten in touch with the First Selectman. Mr. Kearns stated that he will touch base with the First Selectman regarding this issue before the next meeting.

Director's Report:

Mr. Roche reported on the following:

- The Rec Center parking expansion is underway and nine new spaces by Founders Hall will be available by April 1. Mr. Roche stated that the Highway Department did a great job with this project. It was suggested that Mr. Kearns write a "thank you" note to them for their help with this project.
- Mr. Roche has been working with the Town's 300th Anniversary Committee for the July 5, 2008 activities.
- The Trails Grant has been completed and returned to the State for disbursement. P&R is waiting for Planning & Zoning approval and the project should go to bid in April.
- Mr. Roche has been involved with the First Selectman regarding the development of the new Arts District. The Skate Park relocation plans are currently underway.
- The Director reported that the maintenance staff has been busy with cleaning and painting the Wellness Center area. The new card swipe equipment has also been installed which has corrected our swipe challenges. The new system has been working well.

There was much discussion regarding the additional responsibility for maintenance of this area by P&R, along with the proposed parking and field plans.

Assistant Director/Recreation- Robin Matthews

- Ms. Matthews reported that the spring swim registration was successful. 14% of overall registrations were done on-line. Ms. Matthews is hoping to increase that number for the fall registration. The department got several positive responses for the on-line registrations and participants were able to get requested classes.

Ms. Dobbin suggested additional advertising for on-line registrations and possible incentives that would entice participants to use the system. Ms Matthews will look into these suggestions.

- The Aquatic Department is busy with Martin Park Beach set-up. Cleanup is underway at the beach and staff hiring has also begun. Opening day is set for Memorial Day weekend. The beach now has storage for the kayaks and paddle boats and programs are being developed for this summer. Several Town groups have requested beach time for their programs. Some events that are currently scheduled include:
 - Senior Luau
 - 300th Anniversary Free Swim Day
 - Discovery Center projects

Ms. Dobbin also suggested that during the “free days” such as opening weekend, 300th, etc. the department should have available registration forms and attendants so that memberships can be taken right then.

- Ms. Matthews is working with the Town on the triathlon program which is scheduled for June 1, 2008.
- The department has hired a new Wellness Supervisor; Joyce Dynia has joined the department this month. Ms. Dynia brings a great deal of excitement and experience to the position.
- The Littleville program has already begun to take fall, 2008 registrations. Summer specialty camps have been showing a high number of registrations and this program should help with revenue. Registrations for Adventure Camp are coming in slowly and the department will have to track these numbers. Summer camp staff orientation is scheduled for June 14, 2008.
- Ms. Matthews reported that the Egg Scramble held this past weekend was a great success. Several hundred children came to Ballard Park for the annual cosponsored event.
- The Skate Park opened last weekend and continues to be very busy. Ms. Caponetti has been working with the SPIRIT committee on the planning and preparing for the move of the Park. Summer camp registrations are currently being made and the numbers seem high this season.

Mr. Chase asked for the timing on the move of the Skate Park and the proposed plans. Mr. Roche summarized the proposal for the Commission. Mr. Chase would like the Director to suggest that the Skate Park be built first so that we can move the present equipment into the new area. Mr. Roche will ask the architect.

Ms. Matthews stated that Ms. Towers and she have been working on the marketing strategies and program development. The department continues to work on the marketing of the facility with various special events, corporate memberships, newsletters, tagline, outreach programs and on-line announcements. Two new waves of renewal notifications have been developed for membership retention. The department is also working on fine tuning the member services at the front desk and ways to better utilize current staff positions.

- The spring/summer brochure went out to residents on time, and the staff did a good job getting it out.
- The elementary school family fun nights have been very successful and some schools have reserved dates for next year.
- Ms. Matthews mentioned that she has seen several people utilizing the trails around the Recreation Center.

Mr. Thaxter asked if the new chess program had been successful. Ms. Matthews reported that the program did very well and the instructor was well liked by both staff and participants. Ms. Dobbin questioned whether the department had felt any effects from the Boys & Girls Club new summer camps or activities. Ms. Matthews stated that P&R will have a better sense of summer camp registrations by the April Commission meeting. A discussion ensued regarding publicity for our new specialty camps and getting a jump start on registrations.

- The Asst. Director-Recreation mentioned that the Special Olympics had thanked Parks and Recreation in their annual report for our support of their program.

Assistant Director/Parks – Bob Schneider

- Mr. Schneider reported that he has been working with his staff on preparations for the removal of the glass from the Town's Fountain.
- The crews have been busy with school cleanup, along with parks and other Town property.
- The department held its annual spring fields meeting this month, and all teams seem satisfied with the schedules.
- Mr. Schneider reported that he has a meeting with the Veterans Park School PTA regarding equipment for their playground.
- The crews have been working with Little League regarding work on the Windwing, Aldrich and Shadow Lake fields. Work on all baseball diamonds is also currently underway.
- The lights will be installed in Ballard Park this spring.
- The crews have been working with the high school maintenance staff to get the tennis court nets up.

Mr. Roche mentioned that P&R has partnered with RACE to help support the environment.

Sub-Committee Reports:

Buildings and Grounds – Wayne Tinker:

Mr. Tinker stated that the subcommittee had met and they discussed the proposal submitted for the Ciuccoli field. A lengthy discussion ensued regarding the Commission's feelings about approving this proposal. The subcommittee submitted several issues that they felt needed to be addressed by Mr. Alicia prior to voting on this proposal. The Commission decided to have Mr. Kearns advise Mr. Alicia by letter, of their concerns regarding this project. The following was submitted:

1. Plans should not diminish or eliminate the current use or scheduling of the softball field or the football practice season.
2. Lighting should be constructed to handle both the softball field and baseball field.
3. Maintenance costs for the pavilion facility should be funded by the user groups and not part of the Parks and Recreation budget.
4. Internal building facilities should only be open during planned activities and events.
5. An in-depth study be done on the potential for parking problems.

Long Range Planning, ADA Issues:

No current issues on these committees.

Rec Center Issues:

Ms. Bottali was not present to give her report.

Budget and Policy:

Covered above.

Aquatics - David Thaxter:

Mr. Thaxter reported that the Aquatic subcommittee had met last month and discussed the following:

- A plan for developing an emergency phone system.
- A study underway on lap memberships.
- New class proposed for the Barlow Mountain pool which will help staffing and revenue.
- The Town's triathlon will again use Martin Park Beach for the event.
- Several activities are planned for the beach this season; including luau, boating, sandcastle contest, free beach days, use of beach by other camps and organizations, etc.

Mr. Thaxter mentioned that Ms. Gregory has done a great job and has a good handle on and great insight into the Aquatic Department Ms. Gregory was a good selection for this position.

Old Business:

Ciuccoli Field

Covered under Buildings and Grounds.

With no further business, the Commission adjourned at 9:40pm.

Minutes Approved: _____

Wayne H. Tinker, Secretary