

**Minutes of the  
Parks and Recreation Commission  
October 21, 2008**

In Attendance:

Phil Kearns, Chairman

Barbara Dobbin, Vice Chairperson

Evie Bottali

Wayne Tinker, Secretary

Gina Carey

Jon Chase

David Thaxter

Paul J. Roche, Director

Jane Byrnes, Recording Secty.

Eileen Cipolla, Accountant

Robert Schneider, Asst. Director

Robin Matthews, Asst. Director

Meredith Towers, Rec. Supervisor

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

The Chairman welcomed Ms. Towers, Recreation Supervisor Program Development.

**Approval of Agenda:**

The agenda was approved as submitted.

**Approval of Minutes:**

Ms. Bottali made a correction to the minutes; on page 3, under Rec Center Issues, should read: "The committee is also working on a new strategic plan for the next year." The minutes as amended were approved.

**Financial Status**

Revenue/Expense Report/Budget Summary

Ms. Cipolla stated that the 2009/2010 capital budget would be covered under the sub-committee reports.

Ms. Cipolla reported that year-to-date revenue is down from projected budget. The Accountant stated that programs were only down slightly from year to date.

Ms. Towers stated that fall program revenue was down approximately 8% from year to date. Ms. Towers suggested that this decline was due largely to the pre-school programs including dance and Littleville. Ms. Towers mentioned that she had spoken with other organizations that were also experiencing a drop in these class areas. Ms. Carey mentioned coincidentally, her private company has also experienced an 8% decrease. Ms. Dobbin agreed, stating that she was aware of a decline in pre-school programs outside of the Rec Center.

Ms. Towers stated that she is working on ways to attract participants for next semester.

Ms. Towers also mentioned that she had attended the Newcomers pre-school fair and brought members of the Littleville team to assist with distribution of program information.

Mr. Kearns inquired as to whether Mr. Roche had met with the First Selectman regarding P&R revenue numbers. Mr. Roche mentioned that he had met with the First Selectman and we feel we will meet our projected revenue numbers and that we are also monitoring our expenses.

Ms. Cipolla reported that she had received the expense numbers from the Town; and she will be working with the new Town Controller on developing the Department's reports.

**Chairman's Report:**

Mr. Kearns stated that his report would be covered under the sub-committees.

**Director's Report:**

Spray Ground

Mr. Roche reported that he had met with the Parks and Rec Director of Danbury to review their spray ground sites. Mr. Roche circulated pictures to explain the dimensions of Danbury spray parks. The Director gave a report on the Department's plans for future fundraising and budget issues regarding the possibilities of installing a spray ground at the Rec Center.

Ballard Park

The Director summarized the final plans for the completion of the Ballard Park project. Some of these included:

- Rebuilding of the entrance and walkway
- New fencing for playground
- New roof, repainting and repairs to bandstand
- Repairs to main gates
- New benches
- New lighting
- New trash receptacles

The Commission noted that the Committee did a wonderful job with this project, one that can be enjoyed for years to come. Mr. Roche stated that the Committee had raised more than \$260,000 as a result of the generosity of the people and organizations that care about Ridgefield. There was also an additional amount of in-kind donations.

The Commission stated that as a result of these renovations, the Park has been utilized by residents and neighbors of all ages.

Pool Drainage

Mr. Roche reported that due to recent Federal requirements, Mr. Keeler of our Maintenance Department has been working with the State to install upgrades to the pool and spas drain to conform to legislation. The cost of this project is approximately \$4,000-\$6,000.

Mr. Roche reviewed a letter he had received from a neighbor thanking the Department for the quick response to his concerns regarding the installation of the trail. Mr. Healey wrote in his letter, that he was impressed with the staff's handling of the installation of additional screening and the timely manner in which it was done.

Star Park

Ms. Towers reviewed for the Commission a request the Department had to help provide a space for a "Star Park." Ms. Towers stated that Mr. George Hefferon has requested use of Onalfo Field for astronomy purposes. Since 2009 is the year of Astronomy, Ridgefield will be participating in several activities to help promote this event. Ms. Towers will be working with Mr. Hefferon on this project. Mr. Chase suggested that P&R may wish to involve the schools and use the school fields also for star gazing.

Mr. Roche stated that he is working with the Connecticut Parks and Recreation Legislative Committee on several projects. Some issues include:

- Allow municipal police to perform background checks
- Support health and wellness
- Provide information and support for the program “No Child Left Inside”
- Extend date allowing IPM on school grounds

Mr. Roche reported that he had attended a Town staff meeting this week. The First Selectman has implemented an immediate budget freeze on the following:

- Non-essential travel and entertainment is cancelled.
- All purchases of any dollar amount must receive close scrutiny.
- Any arrangements for bottled water in Town buildings will be cancelled
- Until further notice, any vacant positions that exist in any Town Department are frozen and no new people are to be hired in these vacancies.
- All overtime must be pre-approved by First Selectman and the Director of Finance unless contractually required.

There was a discussion regarding the effects the freeze would have on the operations of the Recreation Center.

#### Membership

Mr. Roche referred the membership report to Ms. Towers. Ms. Towers reported that year to year memberships are down slightly this month. Lap, wellness and recreation memberships all reflected a slight raise in numbers. Ms. Towers stated that the retention rate is strong, showing approximately 59%. Ms. Carey asked for an explanation on the calculation for the retention formulas. Ms. Towers summarize the report for the Commission. Mr. Kearns suggested that the graph be redesigned in a line chart with dot form for better understanding and easier reading.

Mr. Chase also suggested that the Department revisit a monthly payment plan for memberships. Ms. Towers will look into this and report back to the Commission. Ms. Cipolla did state that currently, the Department has approximately 30 monthly payment plans on the books.

#### Assistant Director-Recreation:

Ms. Matthews reported that she and Ms. Towers have been working with the front desk staff for better packaging of the program information and working on the pre-school and general program development.

#### Assistant Director-Parks:

Mr. Schneider reported that he has been working with the Town’s Engineer on the dam project at Martin Park Beach. This project will help control the weed growth in the pond.

The outdoor crews are busy working on all the baseball diamonds and completing fall cleanup of all sites.

Mr. Chase questioned if there were any further developments on the Old High School project and the field renovations and relocation of the Skate Park. Mr. Roche stated that Mr. Marconi reported that the bids for the project came in very high and that the project is on hold.

Mr. Tinker questioned the status of the Department's garage with regards to the floor drainage, and ice builds up over the entranceway and gutters. Mr. Schneider reported that there will be some in-house building of an overhang to resolve the ice problems and work continues on the drainage.

Mr. Schneider also reported the closing of the high school lower field for resting proved to be very successful. After the installation of the irrigation system and resting, the field has come back in great shape for the upcoming spring season.

### **Sub-Committee Reports:**

#### **Buildings and Grounds – Wayne Tinker**

Mr. Tinker reported that the subcommittee had notified all the Town's sports groups of the "Criteria for Field Use" policy. Mr. Schneider mentioned that the Department has had several discrepancies with groups regarding non-resident use of the Town fields. Mr. Schneider stated that he has contacted all groups who may have an infraction of the policy and have asked them to contact the subcommittee to set up a meeting to discuss the policy.

The subcommittee also reminded the groups of the "no dogs in parks" policy.

Mr. Kearns reiterated that the Board of Selectmen has explicitly told the Commission to enforce our policy regarding non-residents on Town fields.

#### **Long Range Planning**

Nothing to report at this time.

#### **Rec Center Issues**

Covered above.

#### **Aquatics – David Thaxter**

Mr. Thaxter reported that Ms. Gregory had pulled data comparing year to year Martin Park Beach visits from August 1 through September 1 2007/2008. Mr. Thaxter reported that member visits were up, however drop-in numbers were low. A discussion ensued regarding the reasons behind the drop. Ms. Gregory's report provided information regarding weather statistics. It showed that this year, there were additional thunder and lightning storms, warmer temperatures and additional rainfall. The report mentioned that marketing had a big push last year promoting the kayaks and paddleboats. Mr. Thaxter stated that Ms. Gregory did a thorough job on this report.

#### **New Business: New Trail ADA Expense Request**

Ms. Dobbin reported that the Town had awarded the lowest bidder the trail paving project. The bid came in almost 50% lower than the next bid submitted. Ms. Dobbin stated that it was the intention of the bid, to pave over the existing base, and upon further inspection not all of the trails had the correct level of gravel base to install without additional fill. The awarded contractor came back to P&R and stated that they would need up to an additional \$17,000 for additional base on which to pave.

The sub-committee feels that since the trails are partially used to enhance the outdoor experience for the disabled, they were proposing that the Department spend up to \$17,000 out of the ADA fund account, which is equal to the same amount of funds we used for the ADA playground last year.

Ms. Dobbin then motioned:

*“To approve up to \$17,000 from the ADA budget to be added to the budget to pave the Rec Center trails.”*

Before the motion was completed, Ms. Dobbin continued by saying the alternative to not doing the complete paving would be to pave only a portion of the trail. Ms. Dobbin stated that the added \$17,000 would not even bring the bid close to the other bids submitted to the Town. There is still a large dollar amount gap between bids.

Mr. Thaxter asked about the current numbers in the ADA budget and if this would have any impact on the budget.

Mr. Chase then seconded the motion and brought it back to the table. Before a final vote could be made, Mr. Kearns stated that Mr. Thaxter had raised an issue regarding the impact on the budget. Ms. Cipolla stated that due to previous years carry over, there would still leave a sufficient cushion. Ms. Cipolla felt comfortable with this request.

Mr. Roche also stated that he had met with Ms. Emma Lou Benedict, Chairman for the Commission for the Disabled, who was in total support of this issue and who actually requested additional “bump outs” and stations to be installed with resting areas.

Mr. Kearns asked if Ms. Benedict was still very strongly supportive of the trail installation. Mr. Roche stated yes. Ms. Benedict had brought the issue to her Commission and that her Commission was also very supportive. Mr. Kearns asked for a copy of the minutes and/or letter from them expressing their approval. Mr. Roche mentioned that he had also reviewed this with Mr. Marconi who has no issue due to the fact that the second bid was so much higher. The Director stated that this amount would go directly to cover the paving. Ms. Carey questioned whether this would be a final amount or would the contractor come back again with additional requests. Mr. Roche stated that the project will go very quickly and he doesn't see any problems.

Mr. Kearns requested that the minutes reflect the following:

The Director spoke directly with the Chairman of the Commission for the Disabled and it was brought up at their meeting and that they continue to be supportive of this to the point where they are comfortable enough to encourage us to allot these additional funds for this project. It is the opinion of the P&R Commission Chairman that \$17,000 is proportionate to the total budget to go forward and makes sense to use these funds. The Chairman wants to be sure there is a clear understanding as to why the Department is using these funds.

The motion was brought back to the table, seconded and passed unanimously.

### Old Business

#### Dogs in Parks

Mr. Roche summarized the Department's Operating Policy for Pets in Town Parks/Fields. The Commission had some questions regarding the policy for the Town's athletic fields and how the Department was planning to enforce the policy. Mr. Schneider mentioned that signs had been posted on all athletic fields and Town parks where the dogs are prohibited. It was suggested that Mr. Schneider bring this topic up at the 2009 Athletic Fields Meeting to notify all the sport teams. It was also suggested that

an article be placed in the Press listing specific parks, fields and beaches where this policy is in effect.

Budget and Policy

Proposed Capital Budget

Mr. Roche summarized for the Commission the proposed Parks and Recreation Capital Plan by Priority report to be submitted to the Selectmen. Ms. Dobbin mentioned that it had a fabulous format and thanked the subcommittee for their input. Mr. Thaxter questioned if Mr. Roche thought the First Selectman was going to give P&R the discretion to cut any items or if they would be chosen for us. Mr. Roche stated that we had the ability to choose last year, so it will probably be the same this year.

Ms. Carey summarized for the Commission the Grounds and Maintenance – Truck and Tractor Capital Asset Replacement Plan for the 2009-2010 Budget Submission, and how the effects of the replacement or non-replacement of these trucks will have on the future needs of the department. Ms. Dobbin also suggested that when developing future reports, the Department should also include the used vehicles we had received from the Highway Department.

After a line by line review of each item, Ms. Dobbin motioned:

*“To present the Parks and Recreation Proposed Capital Critical/Priority 1 Plan for the 2009-2010 year as amended.”*

The motion was seconded by Evie Bottali and passed unanimously.

With no further business, the Commission adjourned at 10:10pm.

Minutes Approved: \_\_\_\_\_

**Wayne H. Tinker, Secretary**