

**Minutes of the  
Parks and Recreation Commission  
March 16, 2010**

**In Attendance:**

Barbara Dobbin, Chairwoman

Phil Kearns, Vice Chairman

Evie Bottali

Wayne Tinker, Secretary

Gina Carey

David Thaxter

Jon Chase

Paul J. Roche, Director

Robin Matthews, Asst. Director

Eileen Cipolla, Accountant

Robert Schneider, Asst. Director

Jane Byrnes, Comm. Secty.

Meeting called to order by the Chairwoman at 8:05 p.m.

**Guests:**

Mr. George Hefferon, 58 Hobby Drive, Ridgefield, CT

Mr. Ed Gabbianelli, 87 New Street, Ridgefield, CT – Ridgefield Volunteer Fire Department (RVFD)

Mr. Storm Heidinger, 614 Main Street, Ridgefield, CT – Scout Presentation

The Chairwoman introduced and welcomed the guests.

**Approval of Agenda:**

The Chairwoman asked that both “New Business-Volunteer Fire Department and Old Business-Scout Presentation” be moved up on the agenda. The agenda as amended was approved.

The Commission asked Strom Heidinger for his presentation on Richardson Park. Mr. Heidinger reviewed his Eagle Scout project inventorying the trees in Richardson Park. The Commission had some questions for Storm regarding the project. The Commission was impressed with the work he had put into the cataloging of the trees in the Park. The Director mentioned that with Storm’s help, Parks and Recreation was able to obtain a grant from the Anne S. Richardson Fund to plant several specimen trees on the property.

The Commission thanked Mr. Heidinger for his presentation and the great work he did on this project.

The Chairwoman asked Mr. Hefferon if he had any comments regarding the Star Park. Mr. Hefferon updated the Commission on activities and mentioned that in the future he would like to see more programs at the Park. Mr. Hefferon invited the Commission to participate in the Park’s activities.

The Commission welcomed Mr. Gabbianelli. Mr. Gabbianelli is again requesting permission for the RVFD to hold its annual carnival at the East Ridge Middle School - south field.

The Commission stated that it is in full support of the RVFD's carnival and will continue to support this community event. However, the Commission reiterated its concern about the condition of the field after the carnival for the remaining spring and summer seasons. The Commission stated its request to have the field brought back to its current state with the use of sod. There was much discussion regarding field conditions from past carnivals and the future sites. Mr. Gabbianelli stated that the RVFD will try its best to bring the field back to its original condition, as they have always done in the past. He also mentioned that the RVFD has always used seed and fertilizer to cover and replace damaged very large areas, sod may be too expensive to use for large areas. Mr. Gabbianelli mentioned that the RVFD will be using mats which will be taken up every night to help reduce damage to the field.

The Commission voted, subject to the approval of all provisions requested from the Commission, to approve the request from the RVFD for use of the ERMS- south field.

The following is a list of the Commission's provisions:

- The Commission will obtain a copy from the RVFD of the Carnival's Certificate of Insurance outlining the policy and coverage.
- The RVFD will have use of the ERMS – south field for the week of June 20-26, 2010.
- The RVFD will make every effort to return the ERMS - south field in the condition it was prior to the carnival, within one week of the close of the carnival. Both the Commission and the RVFD understand this to mean reasonably close.
- The use of sod, for small repairs was agreed to by both the Commission and the RVFD. Larger repairs will be negotiated.
- The RVFD will roll up/remove mats every night after the carnival.
- All work and materials to be provided by Carnival Company or RVFD with approval from the Director or Assistant Director-Parks.

Following the discussion; the Chairwoman motioned:

**“APPROVE** the Ridgefield Volunteer Fire Department's request to use the East Ridge Middle School – South Field for its annual carnival given all provisions reflected in the Parks and Recreation Commission's minutes of March 16, 2010 stated above.”

The motion was seconded by Wayne Tinker and unanimously passed.

The Chairwoman requested that the wording in the minutes reflect the “handshake conversation” between the Commission and the RVFD in terms of what the Commission expects from the RVFD in exchange for use of the field

Mr. Gabbianelli again mentioned that the field will be left in the same condition as it was at the time of their use.

The Commission stated that it will forward to Mr. Gabbianelli a copy of March 16, 2010 minutes stating the requested provisions prior to the acceptance of the minutes to assure mutual understanding of the terms.

The Commission thanked Mr. Gabbianelli for his presentation and again mentioned its support for this community event.

**Minutes:**

The minutes of the February 23, 2010 and February 25, 2010 Commission meetings were approved as distributed.

**Financial Status**

**Report/Budget Summary**

Ms. Cipolla reported that budget revenue is down; however, the Department is closely monitoring expenses to cover the deficit. The budget subcommittee will be meeting next week to discuss projected year-end revenue and expense numbers.

**Chairwoman's Report:**

Ms. Dobbin mentioned that the Sturges Park agreement has been signed by both parties and it will be forwarded to the courts.

The Chairwoman thanked the budget subcommittee and the Department for the hard work they put in to presenting the proposed budget to the Board of Selectmen (BOS). Ms. Dobbin felt that P&R was well represented at the meeting.

There was a question regarding one of the Town's sport leagues in regards to team issues. Mr. Schneider summarized for the Commission the joint resolution between the Rebels Softball League and Parks and Recreation regarding field issues. The Commission thanked Mr. Schneider for his assistance in the development of the resolution.

**Director's Report:**

Mr. Roche reported that he is working on the following projects:

**Barlow Mountain Fund Raising**

The Director stated that the committee is busy working on fundraising, brochures, letters, and mailings. Mr. Roche stated that he had sent a request for funding to the Anne S. Richardson Fund Grant.

Mr. Kearns mentioned that there may be an Athletic Advisory Committee Grant available through Ridgefield High School. Mr. Kearns stated that each team at RHS can apply. Mr. Kearns will forward the information to the Director.

**Building Access**

The Director stated that the committee is working toward making all Parks and Recreation facilities accessible and with that, the Director has met with Scout representatives to develop a plan for Sturges Park.

#### Outdoor Fitness Program

Mr. Roche stated that funding for the outdoor fitness program will come from two donors and will total approximately \$24,000. This amount will cover expenses to build the area and will be donated directly to the Town for this project. If the budget is approved, P&R will be responsible for only the surfacing. The Director would like to install ten pieces of equipment. Mr. Roche stated that he is very happy with the results of the project.

#### Spray Ground

Mr. Roche reported that he has met with the Rotary Club regarding fundraising for the proposed Rec Center spray ground. The Rotary Club has formed a subcommittee to discuss the feasibility of raising funds for this project. Mr. Roche will be meeting with the group again in the near future.

#### Ciuccoli Field

The Director reported that he and Bob Schneider have met with Mr. Bob Alicia regarding the Ciuccoli Field improvement project. It was decided that fundraising would go through the Friends of Parks and Recreation. Mr. Roche mentioned that the project will not affect the softball fields in anyway. The installation of new dugouts and an alignment of the baseball field were in the plans.

#### Rec Center Spa

The Director stated that the Maintenance Supervisor had reported that there is a leak in the Rec Center spa and that the repairs may be quite extensive. He will continue to monitor this situation.

#### Skate Park

Mr. Roche reported that the Skate Park is completed and that the P&R crews did the work on the back stops and other outstanding issues. However, we do not have a final opening date as yet.

#### **Assistant Director-Recreation:**

Ms. Matthews reported that she is working on the following projects:

- The Annual Egg Scramble is scheduled for March 27 at 11 a.m. with a rain date of the 28.
- Sign-ups for summer camp and spring programs began March 1<sup>st</sup> and registrations numbers will be available at next meeting.

Ms. Matthews wanted to mention that P&R will have a high rate of returning summer staff and that the Department is still keeping within the “hiring pinch” again this year.

- The Asst. Director reviewed an article regarding residents who attended the Valentines Day at the Rec Center.

- A new comedy theatre class for children was held today; however, there was a low attendance. The teacher is a past student of the Rec Center's old Spotlight Theatre. Ms. Matthews will be monitoring this new program.
- In effort to gain information regarding the proposed all-day kindergarten program, Ms. Telesco, the Youth & Teen Supervisor, attended a parent coffee held at the Rec Center.
- A copy of the summer brochure will be going out shortly.
- Ms. Alicia Williams who runs the Special Olympic program sponsored a "penguin plunge-fundraiser" for the group. The group raised over \$25,000.
- Ms. Towers had attended a camp fair at the Community Center and 70-75 people stopped by the Rec Center table. Ms. Towers had flyers and other information regarding our summer camps.

Ms. Dobbin asked for timing on when the Commission would have an estimate of the impact all-day kindergarten would have on the Rec Center revenue and what changes does the Department have planned. Ms. Matthews stated that Ms Cipolla, Ms. Telesco and Mr. Roche met today to discuss the issue and they are working on this daily. Ms. Matthews stated that she will give the Chairwoman an update on the numbers within the next few days. The Commission would like these numbers to the subcommittee by its meeting on the 23<sup>rd</sup>.

#### Membership Report

No report was given.

#### Assistant Director-Parks:

Mr. Schneider reported on the following:

- Mr. Schneider stated that his crews are finishing up work at the Skate Park including the back boards and finishing up the shed. We are planning a soft opening on the 27 of this month with the grand opening celebration late in the season.

The Commission had some questions regarding payment for the outside vendor who has done the work on the Park. Mr. Roche stated that he will follow up with Town Hall on this and let the Commission know of any issues.

- The crews are also busy preparing Ballard Park for the Egg Scramble, along with finishing up the handicapped accessible sidewalk.
  - Mr. Schneider is working with a resident on a paver project at the Bark Park.
  - Mr. Schneider met with the Athletic Director regarding the Tiger Hollow agreement.
  - The Asst. Director is busy ordering material for spring field maintenance.
  - Mr. Schneider is working with the Town's Purchasing Agent on auctioning old equipment per instructions from the First Selectman. The new trailers and new truck have arrived.
- Mr. Roche stated that the new trailers are designed to help provide additional space to load more equipment used throughout the day by the

crews. Mr. Roche stated that this is part of the Department's strategic plan to better minimize down time.

- Mr. Schneider is also working with the Town's sports groups on their field allocation schedules.

**Sub-Committee Reports:**

**Buildings and Grounds- Mr. Tinker**

No current issues.

**Programs & Long Range Planning-Evie Bottali**

Ms. Bottali reported that the Department has begun a telephone survey of members who have not renewed their wellness and lap memberships. The committee is also working on new packaging and pricing of memberships to develop new membership options. The committee will be meeting next week to review various package plans. The committee stated that one of its goals is to develop a hypothesis regarding how revenue might change if we change the packaging and simplify pricing of our memberships.

The Chairwoman mentioned that the subcommittee is working very hard on these issues. Ms. Dobbin also mentioned that she would like to propose that items be added into the Assistant Director-Recreation's monthly report. To stay focus on and to develop a picture of what we can and can't do to meet revenue, the Chairwoman is suggesting adding and continuing with the following items:

A revenue component that states "what did the department do this month that had an effect on revenue and what was the result." Also, what are the plans/goals for revenue improvement.

The current monthly membership report.

A community service report – listing the community events and activities in which Parks and Rec is actively involved.

Expenses would be included with parks, recreation and accounting reports.

The Commission would like to develop a "hit list" on particular targeted expenses. Ms. Cipolla will forward a general overview of the Department's expenses for the Chairwoman to review.

**Budget & Policy-Phil Kearns:**

The budget subcommittee will be meeting next week to talk about current year, year-to-date revenue and expenses.

The Chairwoman proposed offering the combined view of the Commission's budget proposal that was presented to the BOS and BOF to the P&R staff. Ms. Dobbin felt it would be beneficial to show the staff what a strong advocate the Commission is and to see how the Commission represents P&R to the Town. The Chairwoman felt that this would further help with communication. The Commission mentioned it would be a great idea; however, they must proceed with caution given the current environment. The Chairwoman and Mr. Roche will develop a plan for carrying this forward.

A lengthy discussion ensued, including a recent Ridgefield Press article regarding the BOS budget meeting.

**ADA-Gina Carey**

Covered above under Director's report.

**Aquatics-David Thaxter**

Mr. Thaxter reported that Ridgefield Parks and Recreation had been chosen to host the Annual Lifeguard Competition at Martin Park Beach this year. Mr. Thaxter felt that this event, along with the Triathlon, would be a great opportunity to market the Beach. The Beach will have to be closed for a time period; however, the Commission felt it would have a minimal impact on the Beach operations.

**Old Business**

Covered above.

**New Business**

**Commissioners Reinstatement**

The Chairwoman reported that three Commissioners' terms of service will come up for reinstatement as of April 1, 2010 and they are: Jon Chase, Phil Kearns, and herself, Barbara Dobbin.

After a lengthy discussion regarding terms, reinstatement issues and schedules, Mr. Roche took the meeting gavel from the Chairwoman and motioned to:

“**ACCEPT** the reinstatement of all three Commissioners for another term of service to the Parks and Recreation Commission.”

The Chairwoman will get in touch with the BOS regarding the length of term for the Commission members.

The motion was seconded and passed unanimously.

The Commission adjourned at 10:14pm.

Minutes Approved: \_\_\_\_\_  
Wayne H. Tinker, Secretary

**\*These minutes are a general summary of the meeting and are not intended to be a verbatim transcription.**