

**Minutes of the  
Parks and Recreation Commission**  
September 22, 2009

In Attendance:

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

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 8:03 p.m.

Approval of Agenda:

The Director made additions and changes to the agenda; under Old Business, add “Star Park Discussion” as item (a), and under New Business, add “Discussion of Community Sign Board” as item (b). The Chairwoman asked that the “Star Park” under Old Business, be moved up on the agenda. The agenda as amended was approved.

Recognition of Guests:

Ms. Dobbin introduced and welcomed Mr. George Hefferon, Ridgefield Star Park and Mr. James Rafferty, P&R Front Desk employee.

Old Business - Star Park

Mr. Hefferon gave a brief talk including upcoming activities, watering of area, users, site requests, programs, and other information regarding the new Ridgefield Star Park located at the Diniz Field.

Mr. Roche stated that the light poles are installed and the Highway Department is working on the requested signage by the road. Mr. Roche stated that the ramp has been completed and that P&R has asked the First Selectman to repave it in the future.

The Chairwoman thanked Mr. Hefferon for his presentation.

Minutes:

The minutes were approved as submitted.

Financial Status

Report/Budget Summary

Ms. Cipolla reported that year-to-date revenue is down; however, there was equal savings in expenses. There was a discussion regarding revenue, memberships, and future budget requests.

Mr. Kearns asked for the final revenue numbers for Martin Park Beach. Ms. Cipolla will forward them to Mr. Kearns upon completion.

**Chairwoman's Report:**

Sturges Park

Ms. Dobbin stated that, at this time, there was nothing further to report regarding the Sturges Park issue. Ms. Dobbin has spoken with the Town Attorney who stated that they are in the final stages and that they will keep us updated.

**Director's Report:**

Great Pond Study

Mr. Roche reviewed with the Commission the "Great Pond Aquatic Plant Survey" submitted to the First Selectman and the Commission by Priscilla Baillie of the Ridgefield Triathlon group.

Skate Park

The Director reported that the new Park is almost completed and the remaining safety equipment should be installed shortly. Mr. Roche reported that the Friends of Parks and Recreation, along with the SPIRIT group had donated funds for the purchase of new equipment. Mr. Roche described details of the new equipment and the Park's new site. The Commission also discussed the possibilities of having loaner equipment and a small concession for parts, skates and skating supplies. Mr. Chase stated that he had strong reservations against loaning equipment due to the potential liability issues. Mr. Roche stated that he would be in touch with the Town's safety director to discuss the issue and report back to the Commission next month.

Mr. Roche stated that the Park is officially closed, signs are posted, and that there is no one skating in the Park.

Barlow Mountain Pool

The Director is working with Ridgefield Aquatics, Peter Keeler, Jerry Gay, Purchasing Agent for the Town, and an architect in developing an RFP for the Barlow Mountain Pool repairs. The Committee will be meeting again this week to discuss the RFP.

Rec Center Trail

The Director encouraged the Commission to take a walk on the new Rec Center trail which will be completed by the end of the week. Mr. Roche stated that the trail has been very busy with people of all ages using the site. Mr. Kearns asked about the opening events and the naming of the Trail. There was much discussion regarding the event. Mr. Roche will keep the Commission informed as the plans materialize.

Strategic Plan

The Director reported that he will be meeting with the staff this week to discuss staff goals in accordance with the Department's Strategic Plan.

Naming of Town Tennis Courts

The Director requested the Commission's consideration in the naming of the Old High School tennis court located near the Yanity Gymnasium site. Mr. Roche gave a summary

of the history of Justine Butler's accomplishments in Ridgefield. Justine was the first tennis instructor at P&R and she has had a great deal of influence on the tennis programs in Ridgefield. Justine has been recognized with tennis awards by various organizations.

After much discussion regarding P&R naming policies, the following motion was made by Phil Kearns;

**“MOVE that the Parks and Recreation Commission approves naming the tennis courts located at the Old High School area “The Justine H. Butler Courts.”**

The motion was seconded by Ms. Evie Bottali and passed unanimously. The Director thanked the Commission for its support.

Mr. Chase questioned if there were any means or plans to have the Rec Center Trail connected to Route 35. Mr. Roche stated that it is part of the P&R Master Plan. There was much discussion regarding the trail development and future ideas.

Barbara Dobbins suggested that there be some promotions and advertising regarding several up-coming Rec Center events and activities. (Naming of the OHS tennis courts, the Rec Center Trail, Star Park, etc.) Ms. Matthews will follow up on this item.

**Assistant Director-Recreation:**

Ms. Matthews reported:

- The fall sessions are in full swing and programs seem to be consistent with the current trends.
- Memberships were down across the board, but numbers were not “diving.”

Ms. Matthews read the membership trends report to the Commission, comparing years 2008 to 2009. The report included summer camp, swim lessons and other programs. There was some discussion regarding the up-keep of the equipment in the Wellness Center and the importance this has on future membership and revenue. The Director stated that routine maintenance is scheduled for the equipment and to-date, we have not received any complaints from members; however, he will research the issue and report back to the Commission next month.

Ms. Dobbins thanked the staff for their hard work, sacrifice, and creativity which allowed Parks and Recreation to more than meet our financial obligation to the Town.

Ms. Dobbins suggested that Ms. Matthews re-examine our strategies to determine where we stand if the current trends continue and to develop a plan and/or strategy to have in place to meet the challenges.

Ms. Matthews will see that a pricing structure is submitted by the November meeting.

Mr. Kearns suggested that the Department fully utilize the kiosk located at the beginning of the Rec Center field to help provide information to the public. Ms. Matthews will follow-up.

**Assistant Director-Parks:**

Mr. Schneider reported on the following:

- The Rec Center pool was closed for two weeks for its annual routine cleaning. All lights were replaced and Department is looking into energy saving fluorescents.
- Cleaning in the Wellness Center continues with dusting of the vents and ducts.
- SCOR had its annual soccer tournament over the Labor Day weekend with over 110 teams participating. The tournament was a great success. The Commission asked that P&R have advertising for these events. Brief discussion ensued regarding getting in touch with the Chamber for publicity for next year. The Commission feels that we should be taking advantage of every event and activity to get the word out to the public regarding our involvement.
- Diniz and Onalfo fields are closed and fall renovations are completed.
- The outdoor maintenance crews are busy with renovations of the baseball diamonds on all baseball fields along with working on 13 skinned infields.
- Ridgefield Little League has donated 3-4 sets of spectator bleachers for school fields.
- All school grounds maintenance work was completed prior to school opening.
- Tiger Hollow will be ready for the hosting of the high school's first football game this Friday.
- The new mower will be in before the end of the month and truck bids will be sent out shortly.
- The Town's Fountain will be covered for the season on October 4, 2009.
- Ballard Park will be hosting three major events within the next two weeks. Crews will complete fall renovations after the events.
- The crews have been busy with fall cleanup and maintenance work around the Rec Center; including brush work around the trail.

The Commission congratulated Mr. Schneider and his staff for the terrific job they have done in light of the decrease in staff. Discussion ensued regarding the reduction of responsibilities and any resident comments.

**Sub-Committee Reports:**

**Buildings and Grounds- Mr. Tinker**

Mr. Kearns reported that the sub-committee had met to discuss the upcoming renewal for the Athletic Fields Agreement between the BOE and the Town's Sports Groups.

Mr. Kearns gave a brief history regarding the Agreement.

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

- Ms. Bottali reported that the sub-committee had met to discuss the fee structure, length of season, staffing and other Park issues along with the Grand Opening festivities. Two “Grand Openings” will be run; a “soft” opening this fall, featuring a skate free day to introduce the new setup and features and a fully advertised Grand Opening next spring featuring an opening ceremony, free skate day, demonstrations and light refreshments.
- For study purposes, the sub-committee decided that a survey using a 30 mile radius of other skate park sites be developed covering fees, length of season, etc. It was also suggested that during the Grand Opening, Linda Caponetti and Meredith Towers capture e-mail addresses and get insight from participants regarding the options for the Park.

**Budget & Policy-Phil Kearns:**

Mr. Kearns stated that the P&R Capital Budget for 2010-2011 is due shortly. Mr. Kearns would like to set up a meeting with the sub-committee members as soon as possible. The secretary will handle the logistics.

**ADA-Gina Carey**

Mr. Roche reported that the Department is currently looking at all of the Town’s facilities and P&R buildings for ADA compliance.

**Aquatics-David Thaxter**

Mr. Thaxter stated that there are no current issues; however, he would like Collene Gregory to prepare a report, (as she had done in the past) comparing weather conditions and Martin Park Beach usage. Ms. Matthew will follow up with this and have the report sent to the sub-committee.

**Old Business**

Covered above.

**New Business – Paul Roche**

**911 Memorial**

Mr. Roche stated that he had been approached by Mr. Chris Curnar and the Town regarding a request to have a 911 Memorial placed in Ridgefield. Mr. Roche gave a summary of possible sites. Some sites included: Ballard Park, Community Center, Rec Center, Venus Building, etc. The Commission discussed the various locations and ideas. To date, there are no specific sites nor details on the memorial. Mr. Roche will report back to the Commission with information as he gets it.

**Community Center Sign Board**

The Director reported that he had also received a request from the Planning & Zoning Office regarding a suggestion from the Community Center to allow them to hang a banner on the fence, or a sandwich board on the north side of the driveway on Main Street, for large community events that would not to be held at the Community Center.

There was some discussion regarding commercial banners posted on public parks (as the Community Center is located in Veterans Park) along with other questions regarding jurisdiction and other issues.

The Commission suggested that Mr. Roche review this request and consult with various Town parties and that the Commission's Budget and Policies Sub-Committee meet to discuss it. Therefore, the request was tabled until further information is gathered and a proposal can be made and presented to the Commission at the October meeting. Mr. Roche will contact the Planning & Zoning Commission.

With no further business, the Commission adjourned at 8:51 pm.

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

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