

**Minutes of the  
Parks and Recreation Commission**  
February 24, 2009

In Attendance:

Phil Kearns, Chairman  
Wayne Tinker, Secretary  
Evie Bottali  
David Thaxter  
Gina Carey

Paul J. Roche, Director  
Robin Matthews, Asst. Director  
Robert J. Schneider, Asst. Director  
Eileen Cipolla, Accountant

Jane Byrnes, Recording Secty.

Guests:

List attached.

Meeting called to order by the Chairman at 8:04 p.m.

**Recognition of Guests:**

Mr. Kearns introduced and welcomed guests.

**Approval of Agenda:**

Mr. Kearns asked that item (a) under old business: Presentation from the Rebels, be moved up on the agenda. The agenda as amended was approved.

Mr. Kearns introduced Mr. Cary Nadel from the Ridgefield Rebels. Mr. Nadel thanked the Commission for letting the Rebel Organization participate in the meeting. Mr. Nadel stated that he had some comments and questions for the Commission.

The Chairman asked that the Rebels keep to the half-hour requested, as the Commission has several agenda items to cover; however, they are welcome to come back to another meeting. The Rebels thanked the Commission for their time.

Mr. Nadel gave a background summary of the Rebels organization and some events the Rebels were doing to support the community and benefit the girls of Ridgefield. Mr. Nadel stated that the main reason the Rebels had attended the Commission meeting was to talk about changes in the Parks and Recreation Field Use Criteria and have the Commission answer some of their questions. The change in the Criteria would negatively impact youth sports, but impact no other organization to the degree it is going to impact the Rebels Organization at all levels. The Rebels feel that the change will eliminate the "good neighbor" policy allowing players from other towns to play in Ridgefield. Mr. Nadel made the following points:

- a) All Ridgefield sports organizations based in Ridgefield have equal rights to use their respective fields. No one organization has primacy over Ridgefield fields and attracting players.
- b) If the Parks and Recreation Commission does not reverse its Criteria, the Ridgefield Rebels girls 14U and 16U will have no other Ridgefield team to play on.
- c) The Rebels feel that the Town's softball fields are not overused and softball participant enrollments are down.
- d) The Rebels maintain, clean, rake, etc. all fields they utilize.
- e) The Rebels are supporters of the high school softball programs.
- f) If the Field Use Criteria goes into effect 8/1/09, what are they to do with the girls currently playing on their fall teams that would also play in the spring and summer.

The Rebels are asking P&R the following questions:

- 1) Who on the Building & Grounds Sub-Committee first brought up the rule change?
- 2) What was the Subcommittee vote? If not unanimous, who voted how?
- 3) What is the rationale for the revised Field Use Criteria for youth sports only?
- 4) Why do these criteria only apply to youth sports and not adult sports?
- 5) Why don't the Men's and Women's softball teams abide by the criteria?
- 6) What impact, if any does the participation of girls from other towns have on Ridgefield girls playing in town?
- 7) What impact if any, does the participation of girls from other town have on the fields in Ridgefield?
- 8) What are the youth enrollment figures on other teams in Ridgefield?
- 9) What is P&R evaluation of the trend of softball in Ridgefield over the past years?
- 10) Why do some Commissioners elude to the overuse of softballs fields with no factual support?
- 11) Why does Ridgefield want to stop being a good neighbor with its surrounding towns?

Some discussion ensued regarding the Rebels first question. The Commission mentioned that for approximately four years the Fields Use Criteria has been under a state of evaluation and modifications had been made throughout that time. There was also some discussion regarding the Town's Men's and Women's softball teams' criteria obligations.

Mr. Tinker of the Commission stated that due to the complexity of these questions, the Commission would like to have time to review point by point at the Sub-Committee level.

The Commission asked that the questions be forwarded in writing and that the Commission be allowed time to review before another meeting with the Rebels. The Chairman asked that any Commission member may attend the Sub-Committee meeting just advise the Secretary.

The Rebels stated that one question they will ask is that if the “good neighbor” is not reinstated into the Field Use Criteria, that an exemption be granted to the Rebels to continue to allow non-residents (when girls and families from other towns contact the Rebels) who have no town program of their own sport and age level, be allowed to participate with the Rebels. The Rebels have asked that if the “good neighbor” policy or the exemption is not allowed that the following be done:

All youth sports teams be accountable to the Criteria with 4 teams and 50 players with no more than 2 non-residents per team.

The non-resident players be grandfathered in with the Rebels until they age out of program.

Youth and adult sports teams must be required to abide by exactly the same rules.

The Commission extended their appreciation to the Town’s sport teams for their support and mentioned that the Commission will continue to be up front and will continue to work together. Ms. Cary asked the Rebels to highlight and be clear as to their issues so that if this policy is not changed, what effects would it have on the Rebels program. This would help the Commission to understand why this change is an issue to the Rebels and to the girls of Ridgefield.

Again, the Commission thanked the Rebels for their input.

#### **Approval of Minutes:**

Mr. Tinker made the following corrections to the minutes of the January, 2009 meeting: on Page 2, first paragraph should read: “Scotts Ridge Middle School will be used as a primary Shelter in major disasters running for long periods of time.” On Page 4, under Budget & Policy, should read: “Following these discussions, Mr. Chase made the following motion:.....” Ms. Bottali also made a correction to the minutes, on Page 2, second paragraph, Strategic Plan, should read: “The Department will present the draft to the Marketing Committee for input. The comprehensive list of outdoor facilities covered in the Strategic Plan will also be incorporated into the Town’s GIS mapping system.”

The minutes as amended were approved.

#### **Financial Status**

##### **Revenue/Expense Report/Budget Summary**

Ms. Cipolla reported that year-to-date revenue is down slightly but the Department is showing a savings in expenses.

The Accountant reported that memberships for January met budgeted numbers and that wellness were down just slightly, details would be covered under Ms. Matthews report.

Ms. Cipolla reported that the Department is scheduled for meet with the BOS on March 3 at 7pm regarding the budget discussions. All the Commissioners are welcome to attend.

The Director reported that the Skate Park revenue was down the last two seasons. Mr. Roche gave a summary regarding the current status on the relocation and opening of the Park. The Director stated that the opening will be late this season pending the project’s

timeline. Ms. Matthews stated that P&R is waiting for a decision on the construction period before hiring staff. Mr. Kearns suggested that when we open we do with great fan fair, give notice to the public and try to negate expenses.

**Chairman's Report:**

Mr. Kearns reported that he and the Budget Sub-Committee have met with First Selectman regarding the upcoming capital and operating budgets. Mr. Kearns stated that his budget report would be covered under the Sub-Committees summaries.

**Director's Report:**

The Director reported on the following:

**Strategic Plan**

The first draft of the Strategic Plan is just about ready for review by the Marketing Sub-Committee and Mr. Roche reported that the Department is ready to go forward with the next step. Mr. Roche stated that Ms. Towers did a great job facilitating the plan and it should be completed within the next month.

**Community Events**

Mr. Roche reported that the Valentine's Dance was a great success again this year. We hosted over 138 seniors to a great luncheon, dancing, and prizes. Mr. Kearns questioned the funding for this event. Mr. Roche stated that participants paid \$5.00/per person and remaining funding is supported by the Town's SPIF program.

**State Legislative**

Mr. Roche reported on some of the projects he is working on with the State Legislative program. One of which is corresponding with State Rep. Joseph Liebermann to obtain some American Recovery funding for the Parks.

The Director is also working with the State on a study regarding the safety of turf fields. Mr. Roche stated that the Department would be part of the State survey. For future use, it was suggested that Mr. Schneider keep a record/summary of findings on the report.

**Building Usage**

Mr. Roche reported that the building continues to be busy. The weekends are also seeing a great deal of activity with birthday parties, Town organizations' events and the Wellness Center.

The Director reported that the Department did get a significant reduction in personnel this past month, which included two part-time maintenance staff and one full-time front desk staff member. The Director gave a report on the impact now and in the future the loss of these positions would have on the operations of the Department. Mr. Kearns requested that the Director quantify the percent of hours the Department will lose with these cuts so it can be brought to the BOS. There was much discussion regarding the maintenance for the building and how the Department will keep up with its usage while the staff has been downsized. Mr. Kearns suggested some ways the core of the building and the locker rooms could be kept clean and running in spite of these cuts. There was some discussion

regarding charging an additional rental fee for those using the building for activities and events.

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

#### **Membership**

Ms. Matthews reported that she has been working on the upcoming spring/summer programs. Ms. Matthews had some concerns regarding the hiring of our seasonal employees. Ms. Matthews reported that the January membership numbers are continuing to follow the trends with Rec and Wellness reaching just below projected figures and Lap memberships continuing to rise. There was a discussion regarding the Wellness memberships. Ms. Cipolla reported that we are currently very close to meeting our February projections.

The Assistant Director stated that there will be additional specialty camps this year to attract new participants. Mr. Kearns suggested that the camp revenue be reported in total instead of broken down into specialty camp categories.

Ms. Matthews reviewed the aquatic schedules for the Barlow Mountain pool.

Ms. Matthews is also working on the finalization of the Strategic Plan with the staff.

Mr. Roche stated that the Department is currently working on the development of a new tumbling program which will help continue our Littleville programs. There was a discussion regarding the requirements for running this program.

### **Assistant Director-Parks:**

Mr. Schneider reported on the following:

Mr. Schneider reported that the tone of the Fields Use meeting went well with over 30 team representative attending. There were no objections to the increases in the annual fees. The Assistant Director submitted the annual schedule for the Commission to review.

The Assistant Director also discussed challenges with receiving revenue from the Town sports organization's summer camps.

The Parks crews are busy completing winter clean-up of the parks, schools and field grounds. The outside crews are also working on the irrigation system at the high school.

There are also three staff members working at the Rec Center on painting projects.

The Assistant Director has looked into working on some savings on the Department's outside vendors. He is also working on savings on overtime for snow removal. Mr. Kearns asked for a summary of the snow overtime.

The Assistant Director has developed an outdoor maintenance calendar which he will share with the Assistant Outdoor Supervisor. The Chairman questioned if the BOE has assisted with the installation of the high school tennis court nets. Mr. Schneider is working with the BOE.

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

#### **Buildings and Grounds- Mr. Tinker**

Covered above.

The Chairman had a question regarding the Rebels comments concerning non-committee members. It was discussed that the Rebels were not referring to any Parks and Recreation staff.

**Long Range Planning-Barbara Dobbin**

No report at this time.

**Rec Center Issues – Evie Bottali**

Covered above.

**Budget & Policy-Phil Kearns**

Mr. Kearns and Ms. Cipolla reviewed the 2009-2010 Capital and Operating budget changes with the Commission. Much discussion ensued regarding the capital budget items. Ms. Cipolla stated that the Operating budget came in with a decrease in net cost to the Town. Ms. Cipolla stated that the Commission will be going to the BOS next Tuesday at 7pm.

**ADA-Barbara Dobbin**

Mr. Roche reported that he is working on the Out and About program with regards to the transportation options for the participants of this program. Mr. Kearns asked that Mr. Roche research additional options on the current ADA fee structure through memberships.

**Aquatics-David Thaxter**

Mr. Roche stated that he had received a request from RAC (Ridgefield Aquatics Club) for a meeting to discuss upcoming budget. Mr. Thaxter mentioned that he has spoken briefly with Collene Gregory on this issue.

With no further business, the Commission adjourned at 9:55 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.**