

Park and Recreation Commission

Minutes of the Meeting

May 10, 2023



Meeting called to order: Chairman Lewis called the meeting to order at 7:30 P.M.

Commissioners in Attendance: Toby Lewis, George Caye, Genevieve Coursey, James Hennessey, Mitchell Marks, Michael Kelly, Bill Nowak, Beth Esstman (Liaison Board of Ed)

Commissioners Absent: Miguel Proano, Erica Evans, Srinivasa Chalikonda, Renee Powell

Also in Attendance: Molly Keays, Director of Parks and Recreation, John Caldwell, Superintendent of Parks and Jennie Tetreault

Approval of Minutes: Motion made by Chairman Lewis and seconded by Commissioner Kelly to approve minutes from the April 10th meeting as corrected. Commissioner Powell noted that it was Commissioner Marks, not Commissioner Proano who asked about the Christian based events in the Recreation Department. Motion passed by majority.

Public Input: None present

Report of Council Liaison: Council Liaison Evans was absent but wrote a report to be read on her behalf. Report was read by Jennie Tetreault, Administrative Secretary, South Windsor Parks and Recreation.

Council Liaison Evans reported on:

- A nice opening event of the COVID Memorial at Major Michael Donnelly. She thanked park staff, town staff and both Perry Stone and Home Depot for their generous donations.
- If commission wishes to change meeting locations in the near future, they will need to hold their meetings as "special meetings" going forward until the next time the commission schedule is set in September 2024, when the next schedule is completed.
- Budget season continues, PARC projects were included in the Capital Projects budget.
- Work continues with Parks and Recreation Director, Molly Keays, Commissioner Coursey and town staff on Park and Rec Month Proclamation. Council Liaison Evans wondered of the possibility of a flag flying during that period. If that is something that can be done, there is a form that would need to be completed by commission.

Report of the BOE Liaison: Beth Esstman is the new Council Liaison for The Board of Education and tonight was her first PARC meeting. Council Liaison Esstman reported:

- The Board of Education is in the middle of budget season. This year is the highest percent budget increase proposal under Dr. Carter's administration, driven mainly by the rise in enrollment.
- The number of school days has moved from 182 days to 180 days for students, and this is due to all the movement and reorganization within the district. Teachers will stay on for the full 182 days. The extra two days are for the teachers to move without disrupting classroom time when kids are there. Council Liaison Esstman noted that Pleasant Valley is moving to their new location, POP is moving from Timothy Edwards to the new Pleasant Valley School location and South Windsor High School is making some moves into the high school annex.
- The proposed change in start times for 2023-2024 elementary school year has received a lot of pushbacks from the public by way of emails to the Board of Ed and public input at Board of Ed meetings. The change in start times were done proactively for budget purposes and to address transportation shortages. The schools used to alternate on a 2 and 2 schedule, 2 early start and 2 late start. When the new Orchard Hill opened BOE switched to 3 on the early start and 1 on the late start. Council Liaison Esstman stated that parents are upset about this and the main concern with new start times is sufficient before and after care. Chairman Lewis asked if Council Liaison Esstman had numbers on enrollment, while Council Liaison Esstman did not have exact numbers she stated that they get calls daily about new enrollments. Chairman Lewis stated that with those numbers comes an increase in the need for special education. Council Liaison Esstman reports that South Windsor public schools fall in category DRG B, with the highest percentage of English learners in their group and that does come with additional costs.

Special Reports/Task: No special reports/tasks.

Open Space Task Force: Commissioner Caye reported that there was no meeting this month.

Report of Parks and Rec. Director: Director of Parks and Recreation, Molly Keays provides updates on the following:

- Parks and Recreation moved to the new location at 350 Foster Street, South Windsor, CT. The parks crew has worked the last 6 months to renovate the new space with limited time and funding. Director Keays states that the parks crew has done a fantastic job making it a functional space for Parks and Recreation's immediate needs, but as the population and Parks and Recreation programming continues to grow the space may prove inadequate in the future.
- Summer camp will be the first programs run at the new Parks and Recreation location at 350 Foster Street South Windsor, CT. Camp will begin 6/26/2023.
- Open gyms are done for the year, Parks and Recreation is transitioning to outdoor activities for the season.
- Pickle ball lessons and leagues have begun and are extremely popular. Classes are full and Parks and Recreation is working towards offering more classes to the public.
- Softball has started and has 13 teams, which is up from 11 teams last year, running Tuesday evenings through mid-August.
- Corn hole will begin soon as well.

- Preschool is full for session D and will wrap up for the year on June 13th. The preschool is still operating at the Wapping facility and transition to 350 Foster Street will begin at the conclusion of the preschool program.
- 4th R lottery was held May 6th. Director Keays says needs were assessed at that time for childcare and two of the four elementary schools did not have large waitlists. Director Keays stated that regardless of waitlists she would continue to look into alternative care and enrichment offerings for next year to help fulfill the need for before and after care. Director Keays is approaching this as a community issue, not just a parks and recreation issue by partnering with local childcare entities as well. These partnerships will be ones that are trusted within in the community and have adequate staffing and transportation. This information should be made public in the next month or so.
- Summer camp is also full for the summer season and like 4th R has a waitlist. To address waitlist, Parks and Recreation has worked to secure additional space and staff to accommodate more children and shorten the waitlist.
- Veteran's Memorial Pools (VMP) pool covers have come off and the pool looks great. The pool is opening to the public on Saturday, June 3. Parks and Recreation has extended the season until September 4, as requested by the public.
- Aquatics training begins May 20th. Director Keays states that VMP and Camp staff positions are mostly full which is fantastic given the shortages that many other communities are facing with regards to finding seasonal help.
- Monday Night Social Club raised about \$2,000 in Dan Rezende's memory. Parks and Recreation will be in touch with Rezende's family as to how they best see fit to use the money raised in Dan's honor.
- Walk and Wheel Ways is starting a teen bike program. The safety portion was done in April and Rides will begin in May. Also, the 4th grade bike program continues but needs more volunteers to help with both programs.

Message from John Caldwell, Superintendent of Parks:

- The parks crew did a fantastic job getting the baseball fields ready for 2023 opening day and the lacrosse fields lined for the tournaments earlier this month.
- New trees have been planted in the following locations
 - 3 at Major Michael Donnelly
 - 2 at Nevers Rd. Park
 - 3 at Rye Street Park with the help of the South Windsor Environmental club
 - Eversource for earth day planted 3 more trees that were needed on the towns island
- COVID memorial, thanks to Home Depot for supplies, Perry Granite for supplies and installation. The parks crew also helped with installation and additionally installed two benches and 2 magnolia trees.

- Pool opened successfully. Adding chlorine through the winter helps with algae. The aging pool cover does not adequately shelter the pool from elements during the winter.
- Avery and Deming Street gardens are all set and ready to be planted.
- Rye Street has new LED lighting system.
- Installed two new cricket pitches at the John J. Mitchell fairgrounds at Rye Street, bringing the total to four.
- Irrigation systems are turned on and fields fertilized.
- The parks crew and some of the public works crew were able to move Parks and Recreation from Wapping School to the old Orchard Hill in one day. Some small things still need to be moved. This helped to alleviate the additional expense of a moving company.
- Our two annual dam inspections were done this spring. The Avery and Beelzebub dams are both in great shape. South Windsor is one of the few towns that mows our own dams, most other towns are done by the state.
- The Old Orchard Hill will now be called referred to as “New Recreation”.
- Director Keays added that the South Windsor Farmers’ Market will open June 3rd with over 35 vendors this year. Director Keays also states that Wednesday, June 21st @ 1:00 p.m. Recreation is kicking off the summer with “Meet me at the Park”. Recreation team invites commissioners to help kick off this event.
- Superintendent Caldwell also shares that permanent structure for the Farmers’ Market has been purchased. It is a 16’ x 20’ pavilion. This hard structure was necessary because our event tents are not suitable for all season at the market.
- Director Keays also shared that in the market space at 220 Nevers Rd. South Windsor, CT we are partnering with a community group to have a Holli festival this weekend. Director Keays states she is looking forward to partnering with them more in the upcoming year.
- Chairman Lewis asked if we still do the Memorial Day parade. Director Keays reported that it is the Patriotic Commission that handles the parade, and we assist them with their efforts, but yes, we will have a Memorial Day parade. The Patriotic Commission also handles Armed Forces Day on May 20. Chairman Lewis also asks about working with local businesses for sponsorships. Director Keays let him know that Parks and Recreation has put together an entire sponsorship packet that has been distributed to both large and small local businesses. This year park’s goal is 50% sponsorship for all our events. Chairman Lewis asks how the response has been, Director Keays states that it is going very well, headed in the right direction.

Discussion Topics:

The Subcommittee:

Director Keays has stated that they already have four commissioners signed up for the community events. Additionally, she reports that there are graphics, including thought bubble/social engagement forms to be put out to prompt conversation with the community at said events. The takeaway from these events is

that Parks and Recreation is essential and to make the community aware of what we offer and to learn more about what the community would like to see offered.

Chairman Lewis states it is important that PARCs is seen as part of Parks and Recreation.

Commissioner Hennessey wants to discuss liaisioning with various community groups that we know exist and thinks the commission should work on divvying up the contact lists and have commission members reach out to these groups. Commissioner Coursey suggests that we pick a meeting date over the summer and send out invitations to these groups to let them know we want their input.

Parks Superintendent Caldwell wants to thank the Girl Scouts for planting willow trees at the base of the Barber Hill sledding hill. Superintendent Caldwell did not have their troop number but will have that information for the next meeting so we can acknowledge that troop.

Commissioner Coursey wanted to discuss scheduling another subcommittee meeting, Director Keays agrees.

Commissioner Hennessey wants to know if subcommittee should be expanded to entire commission, Director Keays agrees. There is discussion as to when the meeting and work session should be.

Commissioner Coursey would like to know if the work session needs to be made public. Director Keays says she will reach out to the town hall and get clarification on that.

Meeting adjourned at 8:12 P.M. A motion made by Commissioner Kelly and seconded by Commissioner Hennessey. Motion passed unanimously.

Next Meeting: June 14, 2023

Respectfully Submitted

Jennie Tetreault