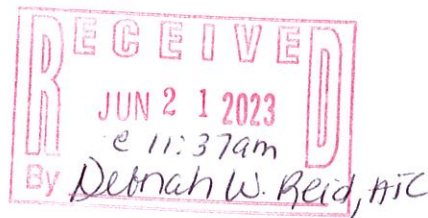


Park and Recreation Commission

Minutes of the Meeting

June 14, 2023



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

Commissioners in Attendance: Srinivasa Chalikonda, Genevieve Coursey, James Hennessey, Toby Lewis (Chairperson), Renee Powell, Miguel Proano, Beth Esstman (Liaison Board of Ed), Erica Evans (Liaison of the Town Council), Braden Migneault (Alternate)

Commissioners Absent: George Caye, Michael Kelly (Vice Chairperson), William Novak, Mitchell Marks

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

Approval of Minutes: Motion made by Chairperson Lewis and seconded by Commissioner Hennessey to approve minutes from the May 10 meeting. Motion passed unanimously.

Public Input: None present

Report of Council Liaison: Erica Evans

Council Liaison Evans reported on:

Strategic plan is in draft format and was presented to council at the last council meeting, it will be posted on the website soon. Council Liaison Evans noted useful information for the Commission, with regards to the master plan and facilities. The priorities of the survey and focus groups was quality of life for residents, growth management and excellence in school systems.

Evans also discusses that July will be Parks and Recreation month, the clerk of the council is working on a proclamation. That proclamation will be at the July 3rd meeting, and Evans invited all Commission members to attend.

Commissioner Hennessey asks if the Strategic Plan is being put together by the Planning and Zoning Commission and if the PARC wants to get involved, who would they contact? Councilor Evans shares that it is a committee that was formed through Town Council separate from Conservation and Development. As far as getting involved it is a community-based committee, with many experienced members. Evans says there were two surveys conducted and both are complete. The survey was completed by about 2600 participants (per Commissioner Coursey), which is great participation compared to past years.

Report of the BOE Liaison: Beth Esstman

Council Liaison Esstman reported:

The last day of school, which is 6/15/2023. Graduation is also 6/15/2023 at Dunkin Donuts Park, last day of school for teachers is Monday 6/19/2023, giving them two days to pack up classrooms.

The budget has since been approved unanimously by town council.

Still getting communications from families about 4th R and expanding the program. Esstman asks for data so they can provide it to interested families. The data would include how many seats are available now and how many will be available next year.

Special Reports: None

Open Space Task Force: Commissioner Caye not present at meeting. Nothing to report.

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

Walk and Wheel Ways continues with 4th grade bike program. Volunteers are needed, as our current members are retirees and ultimately looking for a succession plan.

Parks and Recreation continues to work with the teens who started the teen cycle club. The club completed their first, 28-mile, ride last week and look forward to another, 16 miles, ride next week. The teen cycle club is also looking for volunteers

4th R currently has no waitlist. Director Keays will put together a list of vacancies to provide to the families as requested by BOE Liaison Esstman. In addition to those vacancies, Parks and Recreation has secured some alternative high quality childcare programs for next school year, should the need for more care arise. Director Keays also notes that recruiting and training has already begun for the 2023/2024 school year. Not only are they seeking counselors, but also one on ones, and registered nurses. SWPRD's 4th R program prides itself on quality care and inclusion. Additionally, there will be additional training this year to deal with difficult behaviors that schools have seen an increase in. This training will ensure that all individuals coming through the program are understood and that they have a safe and fun place to go to before and after school

4th R had a family night June 1 at VMP, over 375 people attended. The family night was a great kick off for the VMP season.

June 13th was the last day of preschool at the Wapping School location. To celebrate the end of the preschool year, there was a family pool party at VMP on June 2, which was well attended! The 2023/2024 year will be at our new location.

Badminton had 45 youth and adult participants for open play and lessons, these current programs will run through August. After August Parks and Recreation is hoping to have open gym for badminton one day a week through the month of November. Director Keays discusses with the very limited gym space and such a wide range of sports and interests it will be hard to accommodate all sports/interests without interruption. No possibility of year-round accommodations for any sport, because of limited gym space.

Softball off to great start, 12 highly competitive teams. The teams are excited about new LED lights on the fields. Rain delays have been the only complaint.

Pickleball has started lessons and has 16 participants. The lessons will continue through spring and summer. Fall will bring additional lessons for youth and adults. The pickle ball league has 48 participants, which has maxed out the program. Hoping to run a tournament in the fall.

Cornhole on its second season, beginning Thursday, June 1. 11 teams are participating, still some spaces available if there is any interest.

VMP is open for the season. Moved opening to the weekend after Memorial Day, June 3, and subsequently will keep the pool opening a week later in September. Pool will close on September 4, 2023.

Farmers' Market kick off June 3, 35 vendors and live entertainment. Market will continue through October.

Meet me at the park. A new initiative Parks and Recreation has begun as way to bring the community together in active and healthy ways. Next, "Meet Me at the Park" will be June 21st at 1:00 p.m. at Nevers Park, we have partnered with Dairy Queen to hand out free ice cream.

Facility updates -

Getting facility ready for summer camp, this includes deep cleaning, painting, moving in camp equipment, building signage, air conditioning and safe play areas. Precamp will start June 19 and the regular camp season starts June 26. The camp season will see 300 plus kids. Commissioner Hennessey asks Director Keays about the challenges Parks and Recreation has faced in getting the building ready for summer camp. Director Keays shares a few of these challenges, which include making the space functional in terms of ADA compliance, plumbing, no show cleaning companies and parking issues. The Parks Dept has worked hard to help us problem solve, but the issues keep arising. Director Keays notes that although challenging the building will be safe and the summer camp program successful and Parks and Recreation will use whatever resources necessary to ensure this. Chairperson Lewis suggests using these negatives and flip it as to why there is a need for a new facility, publicize it. Commissioner Hennessey asks about the cost of the "band aids" to fix up the Old Orchard Hill School. Director Keays states that \$70,000 has been moved for improvements and that fund has been depleted, used namely for IT infrastructure, ADA entrances, air conditioning and small cosmetics.

Commissioner Proano asks about camp directors for this year. Director Keays shares that the camp directors are all returning seasonal employees, including Lauren, Alex, Marisa and Abby. Camps did see a waitlist this year, but due to return of seasoned directors and plenty of additional camp staff, Parks and Rec was able to reintroduce Camp Trailblazer to accommodate those waitlists. Trailblazers will accommodate children ages 5-11.

New operating hours, as of June 5, open late Wednesday until 7:00 p.m. and close early Fridays at 1:00 p.m. When the office closes early on Friday it doesn't mean we don't have programs running. The programs will remain in effect.

Director Keays shares a list of upcoming special events:

- Meet me at the park, June 21 at 1 p.m. at Nevers Parks Playground
- Concerts start on Thursday June 29 through August 17 at evergreen walk 7- 9 p.m.
- Free Friday Flicks beginning June 23, July 14, and August 4
- Dive in Movie July 19 at VMP, showing Parties of the Caribbean
- Celebrate Veterans Pool Party on July 23. There will be veteran recognition, contests, and resources for Veterans
- Parks and Rec in conjunction with the South Windsor Police Department is working to bring back the haunted torch walk on October 21. Parks needs volunteers for this event, and local business to host some of the haunted scenes

Chairperson Lewis asks about revenue from events. Director Keays states the department has been able to recoup some of the costs that were lost during COVID. Parks is in a much better position this fiscal year.

Message from John Caldwell, Superintendent of Parks:

Superintendent Caldwell discusses how the crews got the Veterans Memorial ready for the Memorial Day parade. Additionally, the crews have been working on plantings on the Buckland islands, they have refurbished abandoned irrigation system, and have lined soccer and lacrosse fields.

The crews have done mountains of work moving Wapping to the Old Orchard Hill (New Recreation). In addition to the move, crews have also been making improvements inside and outside of the Old Orchard Hill (New Recreation). Superintendent Caldwell details how crews have fixed and installed new gates, taken down deteriorating trees, sheds, and removed old playground equipment. Additionally, they will be installing a new fenced in playground, that is safe for the children.

Superintendent Caldwell goes on to state that there are and will continue to be many challenges with the Old Orchard Hill (New Recreation), he brings up parking as an example. Superintendent Caldwell

stresses that with only enough parking for 50 cars, queuing 300 camp families for drop off and pick up will be a challenge. Commissioner Hennessey having toured the building, notes that the parks crew have done a fantastic job but agrees that only so much can be done with a 70-year-old building.

Director Keays again thanks parks crews and building staffs for all their hard work. It is her goal to give the community the healthy, active programs they are asking for but reiterates that to accomplish these goals Parks and Recreation needs more space and funding.

Commissioner Renee wants to recognize the grounds keeper, Jeff, that was planting flowers at Nevers Road Park. Commissioner Powell notes how nice it looked

Discussion Topics:

The Subcommittee:

Commissioner Coursey says the subcommittee is trying to figure out how to engage the community to raise awareness with regards to the need for a new building for Parks and Recreation. Commissioner Hennessey shares that he, Commissioner Coursey, and Chairperson Lewis were at the Farmers' Market on opening day to engage the community and ask questions. Commissioner Hennessey was impressed to learn that there was little to no awareness that the facility had moved to the Old Orchard Hill building. Commissioner Hennessey suggests a more formal action to move forward with a real facilities plan.

In addition to engaging with the community at the Farmers' Market, Commissioners also engaged with residents at the senior center, and spoke with them about their visions for a new Parks and Recreation facility. Commissioner Coursey also had the opportunity to speak with some of the recreation supervisors and of notable concern was the lack of space in the new building. The lack of space means moving events such as Dodge Ball to the high school, a smaller, adapted version of Grinchmas, and the family dance will likely not be able to happen. Further concerns were sports program losing two nights of gym time, less open gym space and there is no room for rescheduling.

To get the new facility project moving, Commissioner Coursey looked over minutes from a committee tasked by the town council to investigate a new facility, the last meeting of that committee was in November. The end result was the Old Orchard Hill (New Recreation) is the temporary space, but Commissioner Coursey sees no further information on the next step.

Chairperson Lewis agrees that we need a plan, wonders if this is a newsworthy report for the Journal Inquirer to raise awareness. Council Liaison Evans disagrees and thinks it would perhaps shed a negative light on Parks and Recreation. Commissioner Hennessey thinks right now awareness on a smaller scale. Director Keays suggests a tour for Commission and Town Council members and the Town Council to see the facility and eventually an open house for the public. Commissioner Coursey suggests that a survey at these tours/open houses would be valuable.

Commissioner Coursey notes that there needs to be a facility plan. The committee that was tasked by the Town Council had a few locations to consider including Nevers Park, Priest Property, and finally the land that is the Old Orchard Hill (New Recreation). Commissioner Coursey asks Chairperson Toby how to proceed. Commissioner Proano states that in the Strategic Plan there is a timeline that pertains to finding a new home for Parks and Recreation. Council Liaison Evans shares that part of the Strategic Plan, which is Objective A - provide recreation that supports active lifestyles for all residents and develop a plan to provide the Parks and Recreation department with a permanent home, measure committee formed by November 2023, committee report to council by July 2025.

Chairperson Lewis suggest a goal would be to present the town council with a sub plan of what the PARC Commission has to offer. Director Keays notes that we do not have to follow the exact timeline as set forth in the Strategic plan. Alternate Commissioner Braden Migneault asks if Old Orchard Hill (New Recreation) is suitable replacement for the next four or five years? Director Keays says that sooner is ideal, but it takes time to get a quality referendum out.

Chairperson Lewis asks that at the next PARC Commission meeting each Commissioner bring in a couple questions to put on a survey. Chairperson Lewis asks that this be added to the next meetings agenda. Director Keays will also bring a few dates for tours and open houses to the next PARC meeting. Superintendent Caldwell suggests with the influx of summer traffic at the Old Orchard Hill (New Recreation) it may be an opportune time to survey these customers.

Meeting adjourned at 8:45 P.M. A motion made by Commissioner Proano and seconded by Commissioner Hennessey. Motion passed unanimously.

Next Meeting: July 12, 2023

Respectfully Submitted,

Jennie Tetreault