

Park and Recreation Commission

Minutes of the Meeting

July 12, 2023

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

Commissioners in Attendance: George Caye, Srinivasa Chalikonda, Genevieve Coursey, James Hennessey, Michael Kelly, Toby Lewis, William Nowak, Renee Powell, Mitchell Marks, Kristen Kozikowski, Braden Migneault

Commissioners Absent: Miguel Proano, Erica Evans, Beth Esstman

Also in Attendance: Molly Keays, Director of Parks and Recreation, John Caldwell, Superintendent of Parks, and Sofia Kopp

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: Nothing reported. Erica Evans not present at the meeting.

Report of the BOE Liaison: Nothing reported. Beth Esstman not present at the meeting.

Special Reports: None

Open Space Task Force: Commissioner Caye has thing to report, the commission did not meet.

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

Veterans Memorial Park/Pool: The warm weather has brought crowds to the pool. The bridge construction has posed some issues with parking and traffic. Director Keays shares that with the addition of some new signage it has helped with the parking lot confusion. Otherwise, the VMP staff has been working hard and the feedback has been great. Swim lessons and swim team are well underway and going great. July 19th VMP is hosting a “dive in movie” night, they will be showing Pirates of the Caribbean and have activities for the children. July 23 VMP is also hosting a Veteran’s event. This event is for Veterans and their families, they get free admission to the pool, fun activities, food and an optional resource information for Veterans.

Camp is already 3 weeks in and serving over 680 kids and their families. They have had field trips to the zoo, beach, movies, bowling and VMP. Director Keays acknowledges the hard work of camp staff.

Softball (12 teams), cornhole, pickleball (50 participants), badminton (45 participants), open gym throw ball and, Jukido (12 participants) are also well underway. There have been several cancellations due to rain and weather conditions but overall going great. September 9th and 10th will be Parks and Recreations first pickleball tournament at Rye Street Park. This is the same weekend as our annual Poker Ryed.

Meet Me at the Park events continue, June 21 Parks and Recreation partnered with Dairy Queen for Ice Cream in the Park and 170 ice creams were handed out to families. Parks and Recreation is looking forward to partnering with Dairy Queen again in the future for National Ice Cream Day and other various events. Yesterday, July 11, the Meet Me at the Park event was one in conjunction with the police department. The event saw a decent crowd and was introduced to the police departments drone and the kids were given the opportunity to fly the drones, make their own paper airplanes to take home.

The Farmers’ Market is still going strong and runs through October 7.

The Summer Concert Series started Thursday, June 29. Opening day at the concert was also a celebration of the newly proclaimed “National Parks and Recreation Month”. Director Keays was given the proclamation at a ceremony before the first concert began. Director Keays appreciated that and acknowledged the importance of recognizing that Parks and Rec is a vital part of community with regards to providing essential services and fostering growth.

Commissioner Hennessey thanks Director Keays for the great job that parks and rec does and then asks how the building is working out now that summer camp is underway. Director Keays shares that while building is still has its fair share of issues most of the immediate concerns have been addressed. An example would be the new custodial company has started and are doing a fantastic keeping up with camp. The bathroom issues have been repaired. The lack of air condition has been rough with the hot weather, but slowly there have been the addition of a few free standing air conditioning units.

Message from John Caldwell, Parks Superintendent

Facility Update:

The heat has caused some issues at the various fields, like grass fungus, which the parks crew is treating. There was work done at the Nevers Rotary Pavilion, including new plantings, and removing some overgrown ground cover.

The farmers’ market has a brand-new pavilion at the market site. It was purchased from Lowes and is working out well.

Lawrence Rd. Park continues to be cleared of invasive plants and unhealthy or fallen trees. The plan is to keep the grassy trails and then plant a meadow grass in the other areas that will be maintained once or twice a year. The state DEEP is pushing for hard meadow grasses as it benefits the habitat and allows it to thrive.

The splash pad work continues. The drains are installed, waterlines have also been installed but not buried yet. The water discharge line is all hooked up, the large stainless-steel cabinet that houses the controls is up. There will be a small wooden shed built at the site and it will house a small electrical service. The issues with splash pad have been getting the materials, there have been many delays.

Moving on to the work the crews have done on the New Recreation facility, the parks department has put approximately 2500–3000-man hours into the New Recreation facility and the facility is far from being finished. Commission Nowak asks Superintendent Caldwell what his mindset is with regards to the work left to be done on the New Recreation facility. Superintendent Caldwell shares that it is a struggle and working on the New Recreation takes away from other necessary parks tasks. Superintendent Caldwell goes to share that everything is suffering just a little bit in an effort to get everything done.

Commission Nowak reminds Superintendent Caldwell of the same struggles they had when Parks and Recreation occupied the Old Wapping School Building. He notes the diligent work that the parks crew put into the building only to have the Board of Ed take the building back. Commission Nowak goes on to say it is of concern that this is happening all over again with the New Recreation Facility.

Commissioner Hennessey agrees with Commission Nowak and thinks it is time to make a concrete action plan with regards to a new facility. Commission Nowak ask Director Keays for her guidance as far as next step in this process. Chairperson Lewis reminds the commission that a plan needs to be made to present to the town council first. Commissioner Kaye reminds the council that the building committee did have drawings done for a rec department (drawn up by Colliers), but the ultimate cost was where the discussion of a new facility ended. Director Keays is hopeful that we can revisit and utilize materials, data and plans already laid out for Parks and Recreation.

Commissioner Nowak asks about the possibility of corporate donors in town. He references the football field that was to be built in town and the local corporations that were willing to donate money and he imagines they would be willing to help with the new facility project as well. Director Keays agrees that private/public partnerships are huge in the success of funding several recreation facilities across the

country. Director Keays is looking at those plans from other recreation departments and thinks this is a possibility for the South Windsor Parks and Recreation department as well. Director Keays says that is a conversation that can be had after we have a directive in place. Commissioner Coursey says that the Town Council needs to be on board to get directive rolling. It is something that is on the agenda for the July 17, 2023, Town Council meeting. Commissioner Coursey references the plans she has seen that were drawn up by Colliers and it is her opinion that the Priest property is the most feasible choice. Commissioner Nowak bring the conversation back to the point of funding, finding a place and designing it is one thing, but without funding there is nothing.

With regards to getting funding for the project Chairperson Lewis and Commissioner Coursey want a to design a “package” that Parks and Recreation can sell. A package that will get both council members and community members on board. A solid package would be one that is attractive to the masses, something for everyone. Commissioner Hennessey adds that it is important that the community knows that they will get their money back by way of benefits that the New Recreation Facility can offer.

Chairperson Lewis wants to know if there are any funds available currently, and Director Keays says the Parks and Recreation Commission does have a “nominal” amount available.

Chairperson Lewis asks how they can help Director Keays get the ball rolling. Director Keays says that the commissions presence at the Town Council meeting on 7/17/2023 would be helpful. Commissioner Caye suggests a letter of support from the PARC commission to read at the town council meeting and Commissioner Coursey states she is happy to take that on.

Chairperson Lewis makes a motion for written statement of support for a new facility to be submitted to the Town Council at the 7/17/2023 Town Council Meeting. Commissioner Migneault seconds the motion. Motion passed unanimously.

Superintendent John Caldwell thinks it is important that the PARC commission gets seats at the table when it comes time to discuss the new facility. The PARC commission is passionate about the project and has put a lot of time and effort into getting public feedback. Superintendent Caldwell acknowledges the importance of that feedback in putting together a solid referendum. and how important that input will be in getting a solid referendum.

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

Next Meeting: September 13, 2023

Respectfully Submitted,

Sofia Kopp