

Park and Recreation Commission

Minutes of the Meeting

October 4, 2023

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

Commissioners in Attendance: George Caye, Genevieve Coursey, James Hennessey, Toby Lewis, William Nowak, Renee Powell, Mitchell Marks, Beth Esstman

Commissioners Absent: Srinivasa Chalikonda, Michael Kelly, Miguel Proano, Kristen Kozikowski, Braden Migneault, Erica Evans

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

Approval of Minutes: Motion made by Commissioner Hennessey and seconded by Commissioner Marks to approve minutes from the September 13, 2023 meeting. Motion passed unanimously.

Public Input: No public input

Report of Council Liaison: Erica Evans not present, no report.

Report of the BOE Liaison: Councilor Liasson Esstman, shares that the graduation date for the South Windsor High School seniors is set for Friday, June 7, 2023 at the Dunkin Donuts Park. Councilor Liasson Esstman also gives the new staff member report for the town. There are 4 new administrators, 45 new teachers and 43 new noncertified staff.

Special Reports: None

Open Space Task Force: Commissioner Caye reports on the evaluation of the property at 561 Strong Rd. South Windsor, CT. The task force has found that it is a good piece of property that separates that town garage and composting area. The Open Space Task Force is sending a letter to the town council, and they will decide from there.

Report of Parks and Rec. Director: Director of Parks and Recreation, Molly Keays provides updates on the fall programs that are well underway, and the winter programs the parks and recreation are preparing to run.

- The first fall cornhole league has begun and there are 8 teams. The last game session of the season will be 10/12/2023.
- Adult pickleball league is underway, with the last game being 10/25/2023. This season there were 18 teams playing on Wednesday and Thursday nights.
- Softball is over for the season. Director Keays thanks Recreation Supervisor Jordan Giroux for being so accommodating with negotiations of field space to finish out the season.
- Thursday September 14, 2023 the recreation department held it's first concert in the park at the Farmers' Market site on Nevers Rd. The Savage brothers performed and it was the largest attended concert this summer. Director Keays mentions that the market site has great potential for future summer concert series.
- Wellness programs are all back in progress at the New Recreation Facility.
- Food Explorers began in September. These programs will be held in the cafeteria and making good use of the kitchen space at parks and recreation.
- Preschool programs began on September 18 and there are 207 enrolled preschoolers this year. There are parent/caregiver, 2-3- and 3-5-year-old classes available.
- 4th R and half day Wednesdays are running. This year in addition we are offering an afterschool program with iCode. These are technology-based programs held right in the student's school.

- Volleyball has just begun, and we have 20 new teams for both the men's and woman's league. Open gym for volleyball has started and is being held at the New Recreation Facility in the gym. Other open gym activities will include throwball, basketball and eventually pickleball.
- Basketball registration opened 9/28/2023 and the divisions are mostly full! The program is still in need of more volunteer coaches.
- Ski and snowboard club registration also opened up 9/28/2023, and there are 135 kids registered for the club.

Director Molly Keays also touches upon upcoming activities this fall:

- Movie at Evergreen Walk on 10/14/2023. Scoob will be shown at 6:45 p.m. and costumes are encouraged.
- The Pumpkin Roll is on 10/14/2023 and will begin at 3:30 p.m. this year on Porters Hill.
- The haunted torch walk is back this year and will take place on 10/21/2023. This will take place in Nevers Park. There is still a need for volunteers.

Commissioner Marks asks how many basketball volunteers are still needed. Director Keays states we have 28 currently committed but in order to clear waitlists we would need as many additional as possible. Director Keays shares that there is training available for anybody who is apprehensive about the process. Commissioner Hennessey shares that he coached his son's team for the first time last year and found the "Wins for Life" coaching clinic was very helpful.

Chairperson Lewis asks Director Keays about 4th R waitlist and Director Keays shares that the program is well underway but is also in need of staff for the program. Currently the 4th R program is using full time recreation staff as extra help during the week.

Message from John Caldwell, Parks Superintendent

Facility Update:

- Parks is working on the fields at Nevers Park right now. The fields are being repaired because over time there has been settling and, in some areas up to 16". The town brought in 750 yards of topsoil and sand combined to remedy the problem. Superintendent Caldwell thanks ESI for donating two hundred yards of that material.
- Parks groundkeeper, Jeff has been working with high school students on Tuesdays and Thursday through a program at the high school. The kids help mulch, clean trails, and weed; their most recent project was work at Desmond's Pond. Superintendent Caldwell notes that the students are a great help.
- A contractor was sent out to the basketball courts at Rye Street Park to repair a crack.
- A new memorial tree was planted at Nevers Park near the memorial bench at Nevers Park.
- VMP is closed for the season, in the last couple of weeks the parks department has had to go out and repair 80 broken gromets on the pool cover.
- The parks crew is working on putting up fall decorations around town.

Commissioner Hennessey asks about the status of the splash pad. Superintendent Caldwell shares that the waterline has been installed and the next project is installing the sewer line. Commissioner Marks asks if the splash pad will be winterized, and Caldwell says when the water is turned on it will be winterized.

Discussion Topics:

Chairperson Lewis asks the council to bring forth the questions they came up with regarding the Colliers Report. He himself questions the Priest Property and information about the pros and cons of the Priest property. Commissioner Caye replies that the biggest issue (con) with the Priest property is with the electrical unit at the intersection of Ellington Rd and Sullivan Ave. The unit would need to be moved and the cost would large. Chairperson Lewis then asks for comments on the Nevers Park location. Director Keays says that the cons of that space include; taking up a large amount of open space in our largest park,

the proximity to neighborhoods and she also mentions the failed referendum for that property in the past. Director Keays goes onto share the cons of the Old Orchard Hill school space. The main con being lack of space. Once the building was built on the land, there would be little to no room for expansion or sports fields. Commissioner Caye adds that in his opinion the Orchard Hill property might be the best of the three options. His thoughts are that there would be the least amount of pushback from neighbors as it is already the site of parks and recreation.

Commissioner Powell asks about the potential for big companies like Coke to donate to the process. Commissioner Caye says before we can ask companies there has to be a hard plan in place, to show the companies what they are sponsoring.

The commission moves onto discussing the formation of a subcommittee to work with the Public Building Commission. Commissioner Marks suggests that if we do not make quorum one month the work on the referendum can continue if there is a subcommittee. Director Keays says that once we are invited to the Public Building Committee meetings, that not everyone would be required to attend so a subcommittee is a possibility. Director Keays also makes it clear that the Public Building Committee wants the commission to go to them with some consensus as to the best space for the facility. Chairperson Lewis then asks for volunteers to sit on the subcommittee that will go to the Public Building Commission. Commissioners Coursey, Caye and Chairperson Lewis offered to sit on the committee.

Director Keays suggests that to help the committee make decisions, the commission could sit down with the Parks and Recreation Department staff to talk about programmatically what the departments needs are.

Commissioner Coursey asks about the size of facility; director Keays states the proposed building will be between 70,000-80,000 square feet. That will include space for aquatics, gymnasium, wellness area, program rooms, and preschool. The conceptual designs will be adjusted depending on the property size. And the reports tend to show the Nevers and the Priest property are better suited to accommodate a building of that size. Commissioner Coursey asks about acquiring extra space at the old Orchard Hill, and Director Keays shares that is not a possibility because that would impact the board of education. Commissioner Coursey goes onto share that Nevers Park is out because we have seen that referendums fail in the past, the space at Priest property would be the best as far as space, with room to grow. Commissioner Caye shares that when the new schools were built in town we lost field space, but when they knock the old building down you rebuild fields.

Chairperson Lewis concludes with asking the commission if they are comfortable with Commissioner Caye, Commissioner Coursey and Chairperson Lewis representing the commission.

Meeting adjourned at 8:231 p.m. A motion made by Commissioner Caye and seconded by Commissioner Mitchell. Motion passed unanimously.

Next Meeting: November 1, 2023

Respectfully Submitted,

Jennie Tetreault