

RECREATION & PARKS COMMITTEE

Special Meeting

Minutes

Tuesday, November 15, 2022
7:30 am

Via Zoom Meeting

I. Call to Order:

Mr. Yass, Committee Chair, called the meeting to order at 7:30 a.m.

- A. Attendance – In attendance were Mr. Beaudoin, Ms. Checko, Ms. Das, Dr. Gurtman, M. McNeill, Ms. Roccapriore, Dr. Sondheimer, and Mr. Yass.

Absent: Ms. Willis

II. Minutes of Preceding Meeting – September 13, 2022

Dr. Sondheimer made a motion to approve the minutes of the September 13, 2022, meeting as presented. Dr. Gurtman seconded that motion which passed unanimously.

III. Public Comment - None

IV. Director's Report

Ms. Checko told committee members that the General Fund Budget for 2024 has been submitted to the Town Manager. She said the Personnel Services which is wages, FICA, Medicare, etc., came to about \$700,000 which is a little more than last year. Professional Development was increased now that traveling is easier and COVID is better. The Recreation Department has joined the American Camping Association which puts on fantastic Professional Development conferences. Ms. Checko said minimum wage increases to \$15.00 per hour effective June 1, 2023, and this increase is reflected in the budget. She said the total budget across all the divisions is approximately \$1.2 million dollars. The only other areas where increases were needed was the Swim Programs and the Parks Division because of goods and services costs.

Ms. Checko said revenues were up in all divisions for Fiscal year 2022; total revenue to the General Fund was approximately \$100,000. Special Revenues, which are the accounts that must be self-supporting, had a surplus of \$99,026. She said this surplus will go to an unassigned fund balance and accumulates each year; however, it is not money that is readily accessible. Ms. Checko said the total credit card revenue was up almost \$100,000 from 2021

and based on the revenues being up this year, the department will not need to increase program fees very much for 2023. She said even with the minimum wage increase, she feels that our pricing is adequate.

Fall sports have wrapped up. We did have some problems with baseball fields being prepped properly. We are working on improving that for the spring season. Avon Youth Lacrosse asked Recreation to take over purchasing and storing lacrosse goals that are placed on fields throughout town. Historically, the town has taken care of the soccer goals in the parks, but not the lacrosse equipment. Ms. Checko said Matt Woods approached her and asked if the town could help them out. The lacrosse cages will be stored in a storage area at the Transfer Station beginning this fall. Ms. Checko has also budgeted to help them replace lacrosse goals as needed.

Ms. Checko reported that the Flag Football League wrapped up this month and we had 380 players this season, which is the most we have had. This program is run by volunteers, and we pay for referees and equipment, and it is a hugely successful program for the department. We are now preparing for the upcoming youth basketball season, and we have 259 players for grades 2-8. Ms. Checko said the girls' volleyball program has been revamped this year and we had 40 players in our grade 7/8 league. The Field Hockey league wrapped up and had 31 girls this season. We will be running an After School Ski program with one bus running from Thompson Brook School and one from Avon Middle School. She said the Avon Middle School bus was a bit more of a challenge with reaching the minimum and securing chaperones. Ms. Roccapriore will be the Group Leader each night and we did secure volunteer chaperones to assist her.

Ms. Checko said she and Ms. Roccapriore will be attending the state conference next week at Mohegan Sun for the Connecticut Recreation and Parks Association.

Ms. Checko said Countryside building is being worked on. The concrete footing and walls are poured, the windows have arrived but are not installed and we were finally able to locate a steel supplier so the deck work should be started soon.

Ms. Checko informed committee members that she presented the department's Capital Improvement plan to the Town Council at their last meeting. Most of the discussion was around the Master Plan, the Softball projects and potential pickleball courts. She said she also served on a panel to review and interview firms that submitted a Request for Proposal for the Pedestrian Biking Master Plan. There 5 firms and 4 firms were interviewed and 2 that were called back. The panel made a recommendation to the Town Manager that the firm SLR be awarded the project. That recommendation will go to the Town Council for the December meeting.

Mr. Yass asked Ms. Checko what the timeline is for Town Council to act on both the General Fund Budget and the Capital Improvement now that she has presented both budgets to them and how does that work going forward in terms of adoption. Ms. Checko said not all the department heads have presented their plans. There will be another Town Council meeting allowing those department heads to present. After that, the Town Manager will look at the

entire Annual Budget and then it will go to Town Council and Board of Finance. It will then go to a referendum. Mr. Yass asked if there is a separate timeline for the Operating Budget. Ms. Checko said she does not present her budget for General Fund to the Town Council. She will sit with the Town Manager and Assistant Town Manager in mid-December and then she won't hear anything unless the Town Manager has to make cuts or once it goes to the Board of Finance. Mr. Yass asked if there were any new items in the Operating Budget such as new programs or is it basically carrying the existing programs forward recognizing that we are more open for business now and is there anything new or anything cut from the prior years budget. Ms. Checko said the only thing we are doing that affects the budget is we are appropriately classifying employees. In the past we had employees that were paid on a contract, and we are slowly taking that option off the table and making them regular employees. This means in the Special Revenues accounts there is an increase in salaries for employees that are hired as Program instructors. She said we started with 2 positions last year and next year we are budgeting for 12. Mr. Yass asked Ms. Checko if the committee could get a copy of what she submitted to the Town Council, and he thought it would be good to have for reference purposes what she proposed for the budget. Ms. Checko said she can provide committee members with a copy; however, it will not give them a complete picture at this stage because not all Personnel Services are in there. At this point it is just materials, equipment, and supplies, so the bottom line that is currently there is not the total yet because that comes from the HR Department. Committee members agreed that they would like to have a copy of the General Fund Budget that was submitted. Ms. Checko will get this to them.

Dr. Gurtman asked Ms. Checko what the anticipated date is that Countryside Park will be open again. Ms. Checko said it is unknown at this time and it will be under construction for most of the winter. She feels it will continue to be challenging to get materials and contractors. She said Mr. Williams, Public Works Director is acting as the General Contractor and is overseeing the construction.

Dr. Gurtman asked Ms. Checko if she has a readily available spreadsheet of participation for programs. Ms. Checko said we could generate one. Mr. Yass said the would be helpful to see how it compares year to year.

Ms. Das asked Ms. Checko what the impetus behind moving employees from contractor to employee. Ms. Checko said we are classifying employees properly according to labor laws. Ms. Das clarified that doing this doesn't change anything other than we were calling them contractors vs. employees. Ms. Checko said as we add programs, the instructors will be added as employees, not contractors.

V. Program Specialist Report

Ms. Roccapiore told committee members that Trunk or Treat was held on October 29, and we had great weather for it. She had volunteers from the National Honor Society helping that day and there were volunteers from the community as Trunk Hosts. She did have one of the volunteers counting and we had over 600 people in attendance. She said we had back up candy and we ended up using all of that because of the large number of people. She said in

addition to the Trunks that they had, Pickin Patch in Avon donated their hayride trailer for the day, volunteers did facepainting, we had crafts for the children and there was also an inflatable obstacle course. The feedback that she has gotten is positive and people want it to expand. She is thinking about moving it to Avon High School next year which would allow for more parking and more places to put Trunks.

Ms. Roccapriore said coming up we have Ski Bus, a new functional fitness program that we are going to try in partnership with F45 in Avon and they will be doing two youth fitness programs on Saturdays. She said we will also add more of the programs with a company called eScout Academy which offers a coding class, and we will run those again in the spring. Ms. Roccapriore said a program that we started last winter has been picking up and that is our Food Explorers program. This is a cooking program that also talks about healthy eating, and they have been reaching their maximums with people on the wait list. She said we are also bringing back the WAVE class which is a women's self-defense class which was popular last year.

Ms. Roccapriore said the Program Input survey was put out and the deadline was last Friday. She said she is still computing the survey program ideas, but she shared the first part of the survey with committee members. This part of the survey was about which age groups people are looking for more programming for. Over 300 people participated in the survey. The first part of the survey asked what age groups people would like to see more programming for and the second part of the survey asked what types of programs they want. She said she is still in the process of working on the second part of the survey and she will have a graphic to present at the next meeting. For the first part of the survey, the largest request for more programming was in the 5-10 age group with 37.2%. Next was ages 60+ with 33.2%, then ages 2-5 with 27.2%, ages 18+ was 26.6%, ages 10-12 was 20.9%, ages 12-14 was 20.6%, ages 14-16 was 12% and ages 16-18 was 8%. Mr. Yass asked if these numbers summed to 100% or did we get multiple responses for this question. Ms. Roccapriore said yes it did and people could select as many age groups as they wanted. Dr. Sondheimer said the percentages are the percentages of the 301 responses so the 100 responses for the ages 60+ is one third of the 301 people that responded. Ms. Roccapriore said there were a few people that selected more than one age group but not many. Mr. Yass asked her to email committee members a copy of the original survey so they can have it for reference. He asked her if there were any responses on the survey that surprised her and did anyone take an opportunity to provide input on activities or items they were interested in seeing offered. Ms. Roccapriore said she just finished coding for the middle part of the survey and there was a question on the survey that allowed for any other comments that people wanted to share, and she said those comments were varied and she hasn't gotten to coding those yet. In the second section, she has been coding the program types and she has also been keeping notes for things that aren't necessarily programs or things that require facilities to run the programs. She said a lot of people are asking for indoor swim lessons which is a great idea, but we don't have a facility to do that. Mr. Yass said this was an opportunity to get beyond the boundaries of strict programming and he is glad people took the opportunity to provide their input on that general question and he would be interested in hearing what she learns from that. M. McNeill asked Ms. Roccapriore if this survey just went to people who have utilized Parks and Rec at some point and we had their emails. Ms. Roccapriore said it was also sent out through the Town Manager's database as

well as the Recreation Department's database and it was put out through Facebook. M. McNeill asked if 300 responses were good data wise. Ms. Checko said they were thrilled to receive 300 responses and she doesn't think that we have ever conducted a survey here that had that many responses.

VI. Correspondence

a. 2023 Recreation and Parks Committee meeting dates

Mr. Yass asked about the January 2023 meeting and since it was approved with the 2022 meeting dates, it doesn't get noted in the proposed dates for 2023 because it has already been set. Ms. Checko said that is correct, the committee already approved it.

Mr. Yass said his sense is that it is going to become a more active year for the Recreation Department especially since we will start moving forward with updating the planning document and working with the consultant. He was thinking that the pace of the Recreation and Parks Committee meetings might benefit going to a 6 meeting cycle, having a July meeting on the calendar and we should start planning on an "every other month" meeting. He suggested doing a meeting on July 11, 2023. Mr. Yass opened the floor for committee consideration. Dr. Gurtman thought it was a good idea to go to a 6-cycle meeting schedule since there is a lot going on. Dr. Sondheimer pointed out that the November 2023 is scheduled for Election Day. The November meeting will be changed to November 14. Dr. Sondheimer said that they seem to have a hard time getting a sense of Capital Budget Investment and being able to get their arms around it and give Ms. Checko good advice so he feels that extra meetings would be a great idea. Mr. Yass said we always have the option of holding a Special Meeting of the committee, but he thought adding a regular meeting would be beneficial as well. M. McNeill concurs on the need to meet more often, and she feels like there is a lot of time in between meetings and a lot of catching up happens at each meeting. Ms. Checko said historically it is difficult to get a quorum for a July meeting due to summer vacations. She recommended scheduling a meeting in June instead of July and go toward the end of June and not the beginning so perhaps we schedule a meeting on June 20 since we have one scheduled for May 9. Ms. Das made a motion to adopt the meeting calendar commencing in March with the dates indicating revising the November meeting to November 14 and adding a meeting on June 20. Mr. Beaudoin seconded the motion which passed unanimously. Since the Proposed 2023 meeting dates with revisions was adopted by the committee, Ms. Checko told Mr. Yass that Mrs. Henry will update the Proposed Meeting dates document and send it to him to sign and once he returns the signed copy, it will be filed in the Town Clerks office.

VII. Committee Communication

Dr. Sondheimer informed committee members that he sent out a fan letter and the Town has reclaimed about 1/3 of a mile of trail at Fisher Meadows. He said it was on the maps as existing, but it was dense forest, and the Town went in and opened a beautiful new hiking trail.

VIII. Old Business

a. ARPA Projects Update Report

Ms. Checko gave an update on the ARPA projects. She said the Town Council, approved a transfer of appropriation in the amount of \$83,950 from Sycamore Hills Pool repairs to Sycamore Hills Recreation Area Improvements. She said two years ago in preparation for her CIP she got estimates for pool work and presented them as estimated. When it came time to get additional estimate's she found out that the work could be done for a fraction of the original estimates. She identified some additional improvements to be made to the buildings and the pools and the Town Council and the Board of Finance approved the transfer of appropriations. Senior Center Improvements are put on hold. The shade shelters at Sycamore have been installed and there is some grading and some seeding to be done. Ms. Checko said the RFP for the Senior Center's HVAC will be reviewed this week. Town Council did not move on the multi-purpose room at their October meeting. The old playscape is torn down and the new one will be delivered next spring.

M. McNeill asked Ms. Checko what it means that the senior projects are on hold. Ms. Checko said it is the bathroom improvements, ceiling tiles and carpeting that were recommended. The Town received another grant from the State from the Commission on Aging for \$100,000 so it was decided to put these ARPA projects on hold and consider utilizing the State money instead.

Dr. Gurtman asked what the status of the Multipurpose room is. Ms. Checko at the September Town Council meeting, she presented them with an update of ARPA projects, and they had several questions regarding the Multipurpose room and their questions were addressed in the form of a letter and they chose not to act on it at the October meeting. Dr. Gurtman asked what the next step is for this project and Ms. Checko said we are waiting to hear from the Town Council.

Ms. Das asked if there was a certain time that ARPA funds are supposed to be used by. Ms. Checko said yes, the money must be allocated by December 31, 2024, and the projects completed by the end of 2026. Ms. Das asked if there was anything the committee could do with the Town Council to move this along. Ms. Checko said she was disappointed and quite surprised that the steps were taken to have the architect provide plans and present them, only to have it tabled. Mr. Yass suggested keeping the ARPA Project Update on the committee's agenda. He said the committee members as individual Avon residents can communicate with the Town Council on their views and we'll see when we meet in January where this project stands. Ms. Checko said she will keep the committee informed.

IX. New Business

a. General Fund Budget Fiscal Year 2024

This item was covered in the Director's report. Mr. Yass asked how we would go about introducing an item that we would like to add to the agenda for future conversation. He asked

if we would do that as part of Committee Communication or as New Business or how would it be best to give Ms. Checko that communication. Ms. Checko said there are two ways this could happen. She said some items that come up in Committee Communication could proceed to the agenda for the next meeting, or committee members could contact Mr. Yass, as the chairperson, and if he feels it is something that should be on the next meeting agenda, Mr. Yass would communicate that to her. Dr. Gutman asked Mr. Yass if committee members should email him if they had a topic that they would like to discuss at the next meeting. Mr. Yass said he would try to send an email out to committee members prior to the next meeting to see if there was anything they would like to add to the agenda for discussion and he also said committee members could contact him as well.

X. Adjournment

The next meeting of the Recreation and Parks Committee is scheduled for January 10, 2023.

Being no further items to discuss Mr. Beaudoin made a motion to adjourn the meeting at 8:15 a.m. Ms. Das seconded the motion, which passed unanimously.

Respectfully submitted by

Sharon Henry

Sharon Henry
Clerk