

RECREATION & PARKS COMMITTEE

Minutes

Wednesday, August 10, 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, Ms. Willis and Mr. Yass.

Absent: Ms. Das

II. Minutes of Preceding Meeting – May 10, 2022

Dr. Sondheimer made a motion to approve the minutes of the May 10, 2022 meeting. Keri Willis seconded that motion which passed unanimously.

III. Public Comment

Mr. Justin Srb, 43 Oakengates, Avon, CT came to the committee regarding Avon Boys and Girls Travel basketball program. He is here to appeal to the committee in terms of the overall process that they follow each year and to understand if there is a way that we can work and collaborate better together as their program represents 100% Avon families. He said they have been submitting many Building Use Requests over the years to the Board of Education and they have been struggling a bit to get gym time and he wanted to see if there was a better way to work together and collaborate on this. Mr. Yass thanked Mr. Srb for attending and said that because this is a Special Meeting of the Committee that we are limited to the items on the agenda but the committee takes note of his observations. Mr. Yass said the best next step would be to have Ms. Checko pull together some information on this issue and speak with Mr. Srb further and then we can present this for further discussion at the next meeting of the committee on September 13, 2022. Mr. Yass informed Mr. Srb that he or any other interested parties could speak at the regular scheduled meeting and see if we can bring this to a better place. Mr. Yass said we cannot take any action on this issue today. Mr. Yass said the committee is responsive to his concerns and will put it as an agenda item for next month's meeting.

Ms. Anne Zybowski, 53 Brian Lane, Avon CT stated that she would also like to meet with Ms. Checko prior to the September meeting so that they can be ready for the season and she was wondering about the commitment for the season since tryouts are in early October. Mr. Yass said Mr. Srb would work with anyone interested in meeting with Ms. Checko prior to the September meeting and if possible he would like to discuss this issue at that meeting.

Dr. Bridget Carnemolla said that this issue has also come to her recently and she asked Ms. Checko if she or someone from the Board of Education could meet with her also. Ms. Checko said that would be fine.

Town Council member Barbara Ausiello said this has also been brought to her attention and she also has a daughter that plays travel basketball she has noticed that the scheduling issues are pretty cumbersome. She said if she would also like to attend the meeting prior to the September meeting. Ms. Checko said that was fine.

IV. New Business

A. Approval of nonconforming use; Avon High School Crew Team request to practice at Fisher Meadows on Spring Lake

Mr. Yass asked Ms. Checko to give an overview of the documents regarding this issue that was previously sent to committee members concerning the approval of nonconforming use and the Avon High School Crew Teams request to practice at Fisher Meadows on Spring Lake. Ms. Checko said she provided committee members with a packet with a bit of history on this request. Ms. Checko said the Avon Board of Education has requested that the high school crew teams practice at Fisher Meadows in Spring Lake. Ms. Checko said the Town liked the idea but knew that there would be some hurdles. Spring Lake at Fisher Meadows is not only in a flood zone but it is also in a flood way so the Town has to be careful with what activities are allowed there because of Regulations with regards to Planning and Zoning and Wetlands. Ms. Checko said she met with representatives of the Board of Education, the Town Engineer Larry Baril and they have come up with a plan that will not disturb the wetlands and will not violate any Regulations in regards to an activity being done in the flood way.

Ms. Checko said the Crew team would be bussed to Fisher Meadows, the shells would be secured on their trailers to a tree with cables and the coach's boats would also be secured. Ms. Checko said the Crew team is going to forego any type of dock at this point because this would need to be pinned into the lake and into the ground and this would disturb the wetlands. There isn't time now to proceed with a Wetlands application.

While all of the arrangements have been worked out, there is still the issue of the Public Place Regulations use of motorized boats as a non-conforming use in Spring Lake and the coach's boats have motors. Ms. Checko said the non-conforming use can be approved by the Recreation and Parks Committee. Ms. Checko said it is her recommendation that the committee discuss and approve the non-conforming use.

Mr. Yass asked if there were any members of the public that would like to address this issue. Seeing none, Mr. Yass asked members of the committee for discussion. M McNeill asked if the committee approves the non-conforming use is it limited to this group or does it open it up for everyone. Ms. Checko said she has an Application for Public Use from the Board of Education and the committee's approval for this use would be strictly for them. They would like to use the area in the fall and in the spring so we would need to bring this issue back again at our regular meeting for the spring use to be approved.

Dr. Gurtman asked when it was deemed originally that motor boats were not appropriate, what the thinking was at that time. Ms. Checko said the Town went back in to the archives and found a letter from Stanley Fisher when the family was originally considering donating the property to the Town. Mr. Fisher had conditions and he also had suggestions. One of the suggestions was no snowmobiles, no motorboats, no ATV's. He clearly stated in the letter that these were not conditions, but suggestions and the Town believes that is where the non-conforming use came from in the regulations. Dr. Gurtman asked if there were any concerns with the Department of Energy and Environmental Protection Regulations. Ms. Checko said no there are none as far as DEEP is concerned. Dr. Gurtman asked if the motors are electric motors. Ms. Checko said they are gas powered motors. Dr. Gurtman asked if electric motors were an option. Ms. Checko said it would be very expensive for the Board of Education to convert over to electric motors

because the electric motors would not fit on the existing boats so they would have to purchase new boats as well as new motors.

Dr. Gurtman asked how much time the crew team would be at Spring Lake. Athletic Director Tim Filon said they practice Monday – Friday after school from 3:00 – approximately 5:30-6:00 p.m. starting the week after Labor Day through the first week of November. Once the time changes, they would be out by 5:00 p.m. Mr. Filon said most of their races and regatta's are on Saturdays and Sundays so they don't practice on the weekends. Mr. Yass asked if they would be hosting any races and Mr. Filon said no, this would strictly be practices.

Dr. Gurtman asked if there was going to be a sign put up saying that only the Crew team would be allowed to use Spring Lake. Ms. Checko said she is working with the Assistant Town Manager to come to a consensus of what should be posted not only at Fisher Meadows, but there would also be some type of announcement made that this is a special activity that is taking place. Dr. Gurtman asked if other motor boats would still not be allowed on to the lake. Ms. Checko said that was correct and if other motor boats were launched on to the lake, it would then become a police matter to stop the use.

Ms. Willis asked where the crew team practice now. Mr. Filon said they were practicing at Batterson Lake which is owned by the City of Hartford and they have a renovation project starting. Mr. Filon said during that project it would be impossible to practice there and he is being told that project could take two years. Mr. Filon said they finished the season last year at Winding Trails and they had to split their team up to two different places and they were also using Riverfront in Hartford and it was getting difficult to do. He said they had to split time with another high school at Winding Trails. Mr. Filon said that is why they looked at using Spring Lake and he was very grateful that Mr. Checko and the Town would consider letting the Crew team use it because this would keep the team all together. Mr. Filon said the team would be split in to two parts and one part would be practicing at Spring Lake while the other part was working out at the High school and then they would switch.

Dr. Sondheimer said that the people that use the lake like the fisherman and is there some way we could post that this is a limited use activity. Ms. Checko said she is working with the Assistant Town Manager on some language not only do physical signs at the location but on the Town's website as well.

Ms. Das asked Mr. Filon if the Crew team was traveling to Riverfront in Hartford to practice. Mr. Filon said they did this in the spring for about a week and a half just to finish the season. He said they worked out an arrangement with Riverfront that half the team could go there to practice but he said it was very crowded and they would have to split the program up. Ms. Das also asked what size the motor were on the boats. Mr. Filon said they are 10-15 horsepower outboard motors on a 12-14 foot boat.

Dr. Carnemolla wanted to publicly thank Ms. Checko and the Town Engineer and the Assistant Town Manager for working with the Board of Education to help make this happen so quickly because this is a pressing issue for the Crew team and for the schools. Dr. Carnemolla said it has not been easy to find a space that would work for the students and this is a huge program at Avon High school with between 70-100 students on the Crew team. She said she really appreciates all the help the Town has given them.

Mr. Yass said he was glad we had this opportunity to collaborate with the Board of Education and the professionals there and allow the students to use the Avon Recreational facilities for the greater good.

Mr. Yass asked for a motion to approve the non-conforming use. Ms. Das made the motion to approve the non-conforming use. M. McNeill seconded the motion, which passed unanimously.

B. Recommendation to amend Public Place Regulations, Section II., Application Procedure, Part B

Mr. Yass asked Ms. Checko to explain this matter to the Committee. Ms. Checko said in the Town's Public Place Regulations, Section II in the Application Procedures there is a paragraph in that section that has deadlines for Applications for Public Use. She said specifically we are looking at is the second paragraph where applications made by athletic leagues have certain deadlines. Ms. Checko said the Town would like to add a third deadline. She said currently the deadlines are August 1st for the fall season and February 1st for the spring season. Ms. Checko said they would like to add April 1st for requests for the summer season. She said this would only apply to the sports leagues. All other deadlines in the regulations would remain the same. Ms. Checko said it is her recommendation that the Committee approve the addition of the third deadline.

Ms. Das said it made sense to approve adding the third deadline and she was wondering if there was something that precipitated this. Ms. Checko said she and the Assistant Town Manager recommended some changes to the Regulations about two years ago and during that project they added on the area of deadlines for athletic leagues and didn't have any issues with it until this spring. Ms. Checko said a group came forward very late in the spring and wanted to use the Buckingham baseball field. She said we didn't have the capacity. Had we known earlier, we probably could have gotten them on the schedule and been able to prepare the field for them. She said with such short notice, the Public Works Department did not have the capacity to accommodate them. Ms. Checko said she worked with the Town Manager's office to recommend adding a third deadline.

Mr. Yass asked for a motion to make the recommended change to the Public Place Regulations to add a third deadline of April 1st for summer use. Ms. Checko said the Committee's recommendation will go to the Town Council for approval at their September meeting. Dr. Sondheimer made the motion, seconded by Ms. Das. Being no further discussion, the motion passed unanimously.

C. Sperry Park Baseball Field Construction Project

Ms. Checko said adding a baseball field to Sperry Park has been in the Capital Improvement Plan for many years and it has come closer to the top of the list but then falls back down. Avon Little League enrollment numbers are growing every year and they have been lobbying and actively working with the Town to make this third baseball field at Sperry Park come to fruition. Ms. Checko said she is working with the Town Engineering Department to draw up the plans. The third baseball field would be located where the Towpath school used to be. Ms. Checko said they are also working with a contractor to get an estimate on a budget for the project. She said once the budget is done, it will be presented to Town Council at their September meeting. It will also go to Planning and Zoning. The funding for the project would be done by Avon Little League fundraising and the Town may have some interest in supplementing those efforts.

V. Adjournment

Being no further items to discuss Dr. Sondheimer made a motion to adjourn the meeting

at 7:54 a.m. Ms. Das seconded the motion, which passed unanimously.

Respectfully submitted by

Sharon Henry

Sharon Henry
Clerk