

# **RECREATION & PARKS COMMITTEE**

## **Meeting**

Minutes

Tuesday, January 10, 2023  
7:30 am

Via Zoom Meeting

### **I. Call to Order:**

Mr. Yass, Committee Chair, called the meeting to order at 7:31 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.

### **II. Minutes of Preceding Meeting – November 15, 2022**

M. McNeill made a motion to approve the minutes of the November 15, 2022, meeting as presented. Dr. Sondheimer seconded that motion which passed unanimously.

### **III. Public Comment - None**

### **IV. Director's Report**

Ms. Checko reported that the Countryside building project is moving along. The interior is still in the demolition phase. The front entryway is complete, and the new windows are installed. The piers for the back deck are installed and the roof has been replaced.

The Sycamore Hills tennis court renovation project has begun. The property line has been marked and the trees to be removed have been tagged. The abutting neighbors on Haynes Road have been notified via mail about the project starting. The plan is to remove and re-use the mesh of the chain link fence, if possible. Next will be getting the equipment in to remove all the pine trees that line the back fence, then demo the asphalt. Work will continue if the winter weather allows.

Ms. Checko said the department has posted employment opportunities for 2 Camp Director positions for the summer camps: one for Adventure Camp and one for Summer Fun Camp. She said these are important positions and we have not had vacancies in them for several years. We are hoping to fill them sometime in February. The Assistant Aquatics Director position has also been posted. She is hoping to get some strong applicants for these positions, and we have a strong recruitment going on with deadlines in February or until filled. We would use the Assistant Aquatics Director from last year as a backup if we were not able to fill the position. We do have a strong recruitment plan in process with sandwich board signs, flyers, Facebook posts and email blasts.

This past month several department heads met with members of the Clean Energy Commission to help them implement a pollinator gardening program. She thinks they are going to use a site that was recommended at Fisher Meadows which is currently an

overgrown rain garden, and this would be a great location for the pollinator garden. Ms. Checko said this is also a teaching setting to encourage residents and students to do some type of pollinator garden at their homes.

She is also part of a team on a Public Works project that will improve the work order system with regards to field maintenance for buildings and grounds and provide historical data on workloads/man hours. This is basically overhauling the current work order system for Buildings and Grounds Division, which is called Asset Essentials and will allow for a more efficient process for field maintenance and preparation.

The department will also start the spring field use permitting process this month and letters will go out to the larger sports leagues.

Mr. Yass asked Ms. Checko if the pollinator garden was being worked on Town wide with department heads. She said it was Assistant Town Manager Grace Tiezzi, the staff for energy control, Bruce Williams, Director of Public Works, and herself.

#### V. Program Specialist Report

Ms. Roccapriore reported that winter programs were off to a good start. We have added some new programs including a Youth Fitness program being held at F45 in Avon, more eScout Academy classes which are virtual coding programs for children. An additional adult Pickleball program was added which has already filled so we now have a beginner Pickleball level and an Advanced Pickleball level for adults. She said two spring clinics for middle school girls Volleyball have been added, and these are separated by level.

The youth running program in the past has been divided by MPower Running for Boys and Girls in Stride for the girls. In the past year, Girls in Stride has been struggling to find coaches', so we were only able to run the boys running program. This spring, MPower Running has agreed to combine the boys and girls and run a co-ed program. This is at least until Girls in Stride can get coaches.

We were able to hire another instructor for our K-1 Little Folks Basketball program which allowed us to add an additional two classes and both of those have filled. The Food Explorers program is full, and the Skyhawks Mini Hawks classes are full and had a wait list which we were able to add classes to accommodate the wait list. She said we had to cancel our Winter Fun Camp this year due to a conflict with the custodial schedule. We also had to cancel the ski bus on Tuesday and Thursday last week due to Ski Sundown being closed due to weather. The make-up dates were added on at the end of the program so there will not be any missed sessions and the program will start this evening.

Ms. Checko informed committee members that the Board of Education approached the Recreation Department and asked if we would be interested in taking over some of their After School programs. Traditionally the PTO's (Parent Teacher Organization) have run them at the individual schools, specifically Roaring Brook, Pine Grove, and Thompson Brook schools. Ms. Checko and Ms. Roccapriore met with the Business Manager and the Assistant Superintendents at the BOE, and they are going to gather some statistics, data, and enrollments and then they will meet again. Ms. Checko said this is something the PTO's have been talking to the Recreation Department about because they are having a hard time getting volunteers to do these activities. She said we are in a good position to start small and the times that these programs have been held are the times that we have not been able to program for because we are not able to get into the schools before 4:30 p.m. She said the only limiting

factor would be that the programs run at the school in that pre 4:30 p.m. time frame but would be exclusively offered to the students that attend that school. She said we would start with Pine Grove School with one or two programs next fall. Mr. Yass asked if these were recreational programs and she said they are more enrichment programs than recreational. Mr. Yass asked if we are transitioning from volunteer supported programs to more professional supported programs, do we have the bandwidth to take on these programs? Ms. Checko said that is why we would be starting small, and we would use contractors. Ms. Das asked how this fits in with the Flex Academy that the PTO's currently contract with. Ms. Checko said the BOE did talk about the contractor that was being used by the PTO and that is why we would be focusing on Pine Grove to start. Ms. Roccapriore said the BOE was going to talk with the PTO's at each of the schools and see what they wanted to do at their individual school because some of the schools were happy with their current contracted company, but some were not. Ms. Checko said we would not be touching the YMCA programs at all, and our focus would be looking at running programs at Pine Grove School and Thompson Brook School.

Ms. Willis said she is on the PTO Executive Board and Flex Academy is a new company for them in the started in the 2021-2022 school year and initially there were not a lot of participants but that has since picked up. They had previously used a company called Avon After school and prior to that it was volunteers, so it has taken a couple of different shapes over the years. She said the Roaring Brook PTO use to have a line item in the budget for proceeds from the After School programs and she was wondering if the Town would be keeping those profits and not donating those back to the PTO's. Ms. Checko said the Town would not be touching the Roaring Brook or the YMCA programs, we would be looking at Pine Grove first and then Thompson Brook and we would be keeping the profits and the PTO's would step out completely.

Dr. Gurtman asked Ms. Roccapriore to explain the running program a little more. She said the running programs were basically the same program run through two different companies that we contracted with. She said MPower does co-ed programs in other towns. We were previously working with MPower Boys Running and Girls in Stride. The programs are held at Roaring Brook School. Both programs would set up laps and wrist bands and stretching but there is nothing fundamentally different in the programs and the culmination is a 5K road race.

Dr. Gurtman also asked about the Bike Rodeo in the spring. Ms. Roccapriore said that is running and will be held on May 13<sup>th</sup>. She sent out a survey on this and people said they wouldn't do it again, but we are going to offer it so the people that missed out last year can attend. It will still be limited again to the waves. Dr. Gurtman suggested getting an LTI to help with the educational portion of the program. Ms. Checko said we want to keep it casual, recreational, and fun and she feels there is a lot to be learned from that as well, even if it is just encouraging kids to get back out on their bikes. Then the next step is the technical part of it.

Dr. Gurtman asked if there are any other one-time programs coming up this spring. Ms. Roccapriore said there is a Mommy, Daddy and Me Art program coming up and the same instructor is also planning on running a Family Tie Dye class, which hasn't been announced yet. Ms. Checko said we are also bringing a lot more special events programs back this summer.

Mr. Yass asked Ms. Checko about the main gym at the high school being out of commission and if this is impacting our recreation programs. Ms. Checko said it is not affecting us

because we don't use the high school gym. It has mostly affected Travel basketball.

VI. Correspondence

a. Program Participation Reports

Ms. Checko gave an overview of the Program Participation by Category Reports for 2020 and 2021 for comparison. She said these are broken out by category as they are set up in MyRec which is our registration software program. The reports give a comparison of registrations, waiting lists, what was available, and how many participants we had. There was quite an increase in 2021 from 2020.

VII. Committee Communication - None

VIII. Old Business

a. ARPA Projects Update Report

Ms. Checko reported there were not a lot of updates on ARPA since last month. She is still waiting on contractors to get estimates on pool and facility projects. She said as far as the HVAC system, there was a Request for Proposal that went out, a contractor was chosen, and Bruce Williams is working with them.

The bathrooms, lighting, ceiling tiles and carpet projects at the Senior Center have all been placed on hold. The Town Manager's office or Town Council decided to use State funds for these projects, instead of ARPA funds. The Town was ready to fund them with the money from the State however, we found out there is an application process. Assistant Town Manager Grace Tiezzi and Senior Center Coordinator, Jennifer Bennett are working on completing those applications and the projects may not take place until next fall or next winter.

Dr. Sondheimer asked Ms. Checko to repeat what projects were on hold at the Senior Center. She said the bathroom renovations, ceiling tile replacement, the lighting upgrade, and the carpet replacement in the community room. Dr. Sondheimer confirmed that the HVAC system is being done and the Monday night Meals and Minds has been funded. He said the projects that have been placed on hold are about \$200,000 in improvements and Ms. Checko said that is correct.

Dr. Sondheimer told committee members that it was recently announced that the Fiber Optic Network that was budgeted at \$700,000 and listed among the possible projects, will now be largely funded by the State. Dr. Sondheimer said that means that the potential ARPA projects will not spend the remaining ARPA funds. There is almost \$300,000 that doesn't have a potential project to spend it on. He said other departments in the Town and other organizations in the Town may be proposing projects and he would like to encourage the committee to think about is what other projects we could bring forward that would enhance the Town's recreation and parks and fit within the constraints of the ARPA program. Mr. Yass asked Ms. Checko if this is something that other departments in the Town are considering or is this part of her consideration at this point. She said there is an item on today's agenda to discuss a new playscape and Dr. Sondheimer has expressed some interest in having that funded through ARPA. She said she is not sure if this would be a Town Council priority since they did fund one already at Sycamore Hills Recreation Area. She said she would love to see the multipurpose room put back in. Dr. Sondheimer said he was talking to Town Manager Brandon Robertson and he mentioned

that it would be nice to put some playgrounds in place. Mr. Robertson responded to Dr. Sondheimer "I like playgrounds." Dr. Sondheimer said we do have the old plan from 2007 and he believes that more work would need to be done to develop the areas at Buckingham and Sperry Park. He suggested a few of the committee members look at those plans outside the meeting and see if they could come up with something that would be able to move quickly enough and would fit within the ARPA program. Mr. Yass suggested bringing this to the next meeting and it could be presented under Committee Communications. Dr. Sondheimer said he will send a note out to committee members and see who would like to spend time reading the plan and identifying things that might fit with the ARPA program besides the playgrounds and playscapes. Ms. Checko said in the meantime she will meet with Grace Tiezzi and Brandon Robertson and find out what the plans are. Some things have been re-arranged, eliminated, or funded from other sources and she will see what the Town Council's priorities are and report back to the committee.

b. Program Survey Results

Ms. Roccapriore shared a Power Point presentation showing the results of the Program Input Survey. The survey included what age groups people wanted to see more programming in, and what types of programs people were interested in for the age groups. The categories included Aquatics, Creative Arts, Camp/Day programs, Educational, Movement, Nature/Outdoor, Play/Social, Events and Sports. Age groups included Pre-school age 2-5, Elementary School age 5-10, Junior Middle School age 10-12, Middle School ages 12-14, High School Freshman/Sophomore ages 14-16, High School Junior/Senior, Young/Middle adults ages 18+ and Older Adults ages 60+. The time frames for Preschool – Middle School were evening activities, right after school and weekends. Young /Middle adults would like to see more daytime and evening activities. For Facilities, people would like to see dedicated Pickleball courts, indoor Pickleball courts, repairs to Sycamore Pickleball courts and pickleball lines added to all 4 courts. They would also like to see more Nature trails, walking/biking paths and a pump track as well as an indoor pool and a splash pad.

Ms. Roccapriore said some constructive feedback included earlier notices and reminders of registration deadlines. More space in the programs, more programs for ages 5 and under and more programs for working adults as well as lower prices and more affordable options. She will email copies of the results to committee members.

Mr. Yass asked how many discreet responses she got. Ms. Roccapriore said we received 302 responses. Mr. Yass said this is important information in terms of decision making and he asked Ms. Checko if any consideration had been given to how this information can be further broken down and presented as information for Town Council so they understand what we've learned. Ms. Checko said she will meet with Brandon at the end of the month for her department head meeting, and she planned on bringing Sara with her and they will present this information to him. She said a lot of it is facility and a lot of it is space and exclusive use for recreational programs. She said the reason we don't program for 5-year old's is because we don't have space during the day.

Mr. Yass said one of the things people wanted to see is an indoor swimming facility and he feels like this is information that should be shared with the Town Council and not kept within our committee, and he would like to see this information shared with them. Ms. Checko said as a department head, she reports to the Town Manager and from there it is up to him where he wants that information to go.

Dr. Sondheimer brought up again what should be advocated for with the ARPA funds. He asked Ms. Roccapriore if she had numbers on how many people from the survey wanted to see Pickleball courts added. She said she would have to go back across the categories because people put it in different categories, but she did say it was the highest consistent request. Dr. Sondheimer asked how many people wanted the indoor swimming facility. Ms. Checko said we used to partner with Farmington Farms for swim lessons and winter swim team. They were bought out by Big Sky, and we no longer had that partnership. Ms. Checko said when we meet with the consultants and re-do the Master Plan, we will provide the survey result information to them. Dr. Gurtman asked if we had ever approached Health Trax and Ms. Checko said we have, however, they were very expensive. Dr. Gurtman asked her to approach them again and see what they say.

Dr. Gurtman said she noticed in the survey results that people wanted more nature/outdoor activities, and this wouldn't need facilities and what thoughts did Ms. Checko have on this. Ms. Roccapriore said some of them were looking for programming and it was primarily the high school group that is looking for outdoor adventure programs, such as hiking, kayaking, rock climbing and things like that. For the preschool group they were looking more for nature exploration programs, animal programs and then as the age categories when up they were looking for walking groups, social events, nature programs and a gardening club. Dr. Gurtman asked Ms. Roccapriore if these were things that she foresees happening over the next six months. She said in the next six months this would not be what she would be focusing on because it seems the two groups, we are not hitting is young/middle adults and pre-school programs, so she is going to try to figure out programming for these age groups.

## IX. New Business

### a. New Playscape Discussion

Ms. Checko said she has been getting emails from people who are looking for a playscape in the northeast area of town. She said there are a couple of options for this. She said she would pursue ARPA funds for this with Mr. Robertson, and if that was not possible, she will put it in capital budget this fall. As for a location, the Carpiationto project, is giving the Town 20 acres of open space between Ensign Drive and Fisher Drive, during the development of this project. There are no specifics on it, but there are conceptual plans and tentatively the area would have walking paths, a water feature, and an area that would be graded for concerts. She reached out to the Director of Community Planning; Hiram Peck and he was receptive about talking to the Carpiationto's about including a playscape in the plan. If it can't be done with ARPA funds, she will put it in capital and see about having this to come to fruition. She said the other option, would be a much smaller playscape, at Sperry Park once the 4<sup>th</sup> field is built. There will be a small grassy area that it could go on. Dr. Gurtman had mentioned to Ruth that she was approached by approximately 15+ families that live mostly near the post office and they wanted to see a playscape in this end of town. She said she does find that the small playgrounds don't seem to attract as many families as the larger ones. Mr. Yass asked Ms. Checko if it would help if something more formal from this committee would help move this project along. She said she would recommend letting her speak to Mr. Peck see what would help his cause. She will draft something and bring it to the next committee meeting and see if committee members want to make a motion to recommend supporting the playscape. M. McNeill asked what the committee could do to be more knowledgeable about this project and how they can help to move it along. Ms. Checko said if we want to

recommend that ARPA funds fund a playscape, she recommends we could start with a small one at Sperry Park. The Carpionato project has been taking a long time, and we may run out of time to fund a playscape out of ARPA money on the 20 acres. If we pursue a smaller one at Sperry Park, funded out of ARPA if it is a priority of Town Council and then be prepared by having a large sum in capital and when Carpionato gives the town the 20 acres and starts the development, we will have the money to do the playscape.

She said a motion or recommendation could be made at this meeting that this is a topic that the committee is very interested in pursuing and seeing come to fruition in this end of town, should the opportunity for a space open.

Ms. Willis asked if there was a status report on the Sperry Park project. Ms. Checko said we are still in the design phase. The Public Works Director is going to be meeting with members of the Little League Board and getting some detailed information so we can come up with a more solid budget and that should happen this month. We will then take that number to the Town Manager, and it will be up to him whether the project will be done in house or contracted out.

Dr. Sondheimer made a motion that the committee endorse the further development of playgrounds in Avon. Ms. Willis seconded the motion.

After some discussion, it was recommended that the motion be amended to include a specific location of the playground to say in the northeast end of town.

Dr. Sondheimer accepted the amendment. Dr. Sondheimer motioned that the committee endorse the further development of playgrounds in the northeast end of Avon. Ms. Willis accepted the motion as amended, and after no further discussion, the motion passed unanimously.

#### X. Adjournment

The next meeting of the Recreation and Parks Committee is scheduled for March 7, 2023.

Being no further items to discuss Dr. Sondheimer made a motion to adjourn the meeting at 8:39 a.m. Dr. Gurtman seconded the motion, which passed unanimously.

Respectfully submitted by

*Sharon Henry*

Sharon Henry  
Clerk