

# **RECREATION & PARKS COMMITTEE**

## **Special Meeting**

Minutes

Tuesday, July 11, 2023  
7:30 am

Via Zoom Meeting

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

Mr. Yass, Committee Chair, called the meeting to order at 7:32 a.m.

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

Absent: Ms. Das, Dr. Gurtman

### **II. Minutes of Preceding Meeting – March 7, 2023**

Mr. Beaudoin made a motion to approve the minutes of the March 7, 2023. M. McNeill seconded that motion which passed unanimously.

- III. Public Comment – Jarred Parker, 7 Camden Way, Avon, said he understands the Town was given some grant money and he was here to support moving forward with a softball field for Little League and trying to improve the fields for the girls. As a parent/coach he would be happy to give any information that the Town may be interested in.

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

Ms. Checko informed committee members that the Town Council approved the scope of work for the RFP (Request for Proposals), for the Recreation Master Plan Update. The Request for Proposals was posted on June 14, and they are due on July 12. Firms will most likely be interviewed in August and if we stick to our 3-meeting plan, we hope to be able to present a recommendation to Town Council at their September meeting. If we feel that we want another public meeting, that would be negotiated with the firm and that would push out the contract awarding to the October Town Council meeting to award the contract.

Committee members were informed that the Town was awarded a Bronze Bike Friendly Community designation. This was something that the department heads as well as Dr. Gurtman and Dr. Sondheimer contributed to.

The pool has opened and is running smoothly. All camps and programs are running. Countryside Park is still under construction, and we do not have a completion date yet. Ms. Checko said the interpretive signs at Fisher Meadows are at the design company and they are currently behind on production.

Ms. Checko said for special events this summer, the Recreation Department is having 3 Family Movie Nights and we have brought back the Family Fun Night. New this year will be

a concert in August.

Mr. Yass asked Ms. Checko about the RFP. Ms. Checko said any input she gets from anyone she will make sure to go over the input with the firm that is chosen. She said the committee could give their input if needed at the public meetings as well as the stakeholder meetings. Ms. McNeill asked if it would be this September or next September. Ms. Checko said it would be this September. After that, it goes to Board of Finance for the appropriation for the funding. Dr. Sondheimer said he has a series of questions, and he would be happy to speak to Ms. Checko privately about this. He asked Ms. Checko to explain what the process will be. Ms. Checko said between now and awarding the contract, this will be a staff level process. They will read proposals from companies that submit an RFP, make a short list and interview some of the firms and then narrow it down. The firm chosen will be determined based on the firm's presentation and approach to the project, and this will determine the process and the tools that the firm uses to collect information. She said one of the things the firm for the Bike/Pedestrian Master Plan used was a series of short, quick survey questions instead of sending out 10 questions once during the process, they did monthly questions. The firm would also do a lot of footwork around town and may have Ms. Checko escort them to the various parks around town to see what is in place for the inventory, and then the public meetings would be conducted. After that the firm would present to Town Council and from there Town Council would adopt it. Ms. Checko said the Recreation and Parks Committee would have the opportunity to see it before the Town Council. Dr. Sondheimer asked how we would direct them with respect to the scope of what is within this small case Recreation and Parks study they are going to do. Ms. Checko said the most important thing is to plan for the next 10 years but plan it in such a way that recommendations are doable and feasible. She said the way we guide them is by directing them towards our Plan of Conservation and Development, and our Forestry Management Plan. These encompass every area of the Town in different ways. She said this is their businesses area of expertise, and they will learn the community and the culture and find out what the Town residents want and can accept. Dr. Sondheimer said everything is fair game for discussion and then we would determine what is feasible going forward and that results in the final Master Plan.

Dr. Sondheimer said he is an active member of the Historical Society and the downtown center of Avon at the intersection of Old Farms Road and Albany Road could be developed as a tourist destination like Simsbury is. He said the local businesses in that area would love to see more attention to that area and he asked Ms. Checko if this is something that might be considered. She said she thinks it could be. Dr. Sondheimer asked if the Chamber of Commerce and the Historical Society want to make a statement about that and get it to the people, this would be their responsibility and the Recreation Committee, and the Recreation Department are here to facilitate that. Ms. Checko said that is correct.

M. McNeill said it would be incumbent upon the committee members and their connections to make sure that we have the various groups participate. Committee members would then work with Ruth to make sure that the firm selected knows to meet with the Historical Society as well as other groups in town and not limit it to who comes out to the public forums. She said there are certain groups that need to be talked to, and we as a committee, need to make sure that happens. Mr. Yass said we need to discuss how we can be as proactive as possible in making sure the word gets out both through these meetings as well as formal and informal channels. He asked if people were not able to attend a meeting, would they be able to submit written comments to the vendor. Ms. Checko said that is correct.

Ms. Yass said Dr. Gurtman raised the question to him on how we can build into the budget a specific item for trail maintenance. Ms. Checko said in the operating budget, for the past 3

years, there has had money for clearing trails. In this current Fiscal year there is \$20,000 in the Parks division and this will be used to clear trails. She said the river trail at Fisher Farm has recently been cleared and she will keep chipping away at the trails. Last fiscal year there was \$15,000 in that line item and she transferred \$4,000 more into it to get done what we wanted to get done. There has also been some progress on replacing some foot bridges. Ms. Checko said she met with Dr. Sondheimer, Dr. Gurtman, Assistant Town Manager Grace Tiezzi, and Town Engineer, Larry Baril and the Public Works Department sees what they want to do as maintenance, and they see no problem moving forward to fix the bridges. She said the good news is that it will only cost about \$2,000, and not \$20,000 like the Lower Farmington Watershed group thought. Dr. Sondheimer said the Lower Farmington Watershed group as well as the public, have been incredibly supportive of maintaining the physical facilities and he encourages the committee to think of ways to take advantage of the National Park Service money because the river has been declared wild and scenic. Ms. Checko said the biggest problem in that area is the invasive species. Dr. Sondheimer said maybe we could produce a plan that would help, and he thinks this group would be very sensitive to doing exactly the right thing. Ms. Checko agreed, and said they are also very knowledgeable.

V. Committee Communication - None

VI. Old Business

a. ARPA Projects Update

Ms. Checko said the Sycamore Hills Playscape was installed in May. The bathhouse floors were painted, and they look beautiful. The interior walls of the bathhouse have been painted. The expansion joint was replaced. She said this is the caulking between the coping and the concrete decks. She said if this is caulking is not maintained, water seeps underneath and it lifts the coping. She was only able to do the main pool this year, but she will put money in capital to do around the wading pool and all the decking. It is about \$45,000, just to caulk all the cracks.

She didn't have any updates on the projects at the Senior Center. Jennifer Bennett, the Senior Center Coordinator and Assistant Town Manager Grace Tiezzi have taken the lead on these projects because they are seeking State funding instead of using ARPA funding. Once they go through the State funding, they would then use ARPA money if time allowed.

Dr. Sondheimer told committee members that the Town was able to secure a \$4.3-million-dollar grant and he asked Ms. Checko to describe that. Ms. Checko said this is for County Club Road, however this is not yet finalized. It would be for sidewalks on Country Club Road. Dr. Sondheimer said Ms. Tiezzi told him and Dr. Gurtman that it would be for road improvements and a bike connect from the library down to the bike path. Ms. Checko said that is correct, it would connect to the trailhead on Old Farms Road.

Ms. Checko referred back to the Master Plan and said that M. McNeill's point is well taken regarding the Historical Society and those types of groups, and she would consider them stakeholders. She believes there will be some effort to bring them together separately from the public. Mr. Yass said he would presume that the Chamber of Commerce would be considered stakeholders as well.

- b. Ms. Checko informed committee members that there has been a lot of interest to put a new playscape in the northeast corner of Avon, specifically around Sperry Park. She said this will not be included on the agenda next month. She is going to proceed with putting it in her capital budget. She has worked with Terri Wilson, and she will work with the Avon Little League representatives to make sure whatever is planned won't take away too much parking and will be put in a place that is safe for children to get to and from the playground. She said she can fund for it in the capital budget. She said it would be presented to Town Manager Brandon Robertson, and then his recommendations would go to Town Council.

## VII. New Business

### a. State of CT Grants Update

Ms. Checko said Jennifer Bennett and Grace Tiezzi have taken the lead on the grants at the Senior Center and this money will be used prior to using any ARPA funds for those projects.

The Town of Avon has preliminarily been awarded \$200,000 to make improvements to softball fields and we are looking at the options of what would be the best project for that money. Ms. Checko said improvements to Fisher Meadows are in the capital budget as well as improvements to Sperry Park. She said it is up to the Town Council as to what the best project would be for that money. Mr. Yass asked if as an advisory group the committee could weigh in on this. Ms. Checko said that is correct.

Mr. Yass open the meeting up to members of the public for their comments.

Mark Massaro, 91 Westland Road, Avon spoke as the former president of Avon Little League said he was very happy to see that conversations with State Representatives were listened to regarding the needs that this league has. He said the league has been growing at an extremely high rate with over 500 kids in town playing baseball and softball. He said the league has outgrown the capacity that the fields have by at least two-fold. He said they are stepping on top of each other constantly trying to accommodate all types of things. He said with this grant, the ability to build a field at Sperry would do wonders for their softball program and hopefully not put them back where they were shrinking in numbers. They have continually been growing in numbers to the point where they have had their major softball team play in the State sectional and they won the district. They also had a 10-U team for the first time play in the State Tournament. He said that program is growing, and they are doing very well, and it would be great to create an equal playing field for the girls. He said he has for many years been trying to create some equity for the girls to have them included in the community of Little League at Sperry. Ms. Checko said she considers Little League a stakeholder in that Master Plan process as well.

Stephanie Holmes, 22 Briar Hill Road, Avon spoke and said one of her daughters was on the sectional championship and she felt it was important that the committee understand how important these fields and this league is to these girls. Her daughter has played since she was young, and she is not going to benefit from these fields in the long term, but the number of girls that come and play form relationships, form leadership skills, and they go all around the state and our facilities are so much worse than everyone else's facilities. It's almost to the point where she is concerned about injury, she is concerned about people coming to our facilities and wondering what is going on here. The girls notice that

there is an inequity between the boys' fields and the girls' fields. She said the coaches have to clean one field so the girls can practice, and she said we need to level the playing field. This need to be put in place now so that the girls of the future have an opportunity.

Rayna Banks, 10 Mountain Ledge Road, Avon, the Vice-President of Softball with Avon Little League spoke and said she has been involved with the program for 7-8 years. She has two daughters and both she and her husband manage teams and they have also been leading both all-star teams this year. She said she is grateful for all the work Ms. Checko has done, and Mark Massaro has done in helping them get to where they are today. She said however, there is still a long way to go to be able to be equitable with what our baseball program offers here in town, but also to have an opportunity to host a tournament or to host all-stars. She said we don't have any electricity at Fisher Meadows so we can't have a working scoreboard. Luckily, we now have a fence and a partial cage but has been damaged by the weather and the conditions down there, but we don't have a permanent structure, we don't have lights, and there are a lot of inequities down there. Often, they tend to try to play on the road because the facilities are nicer and it's safer, it's easier, and it's unfortunate because the girls notice it now. She said it has almost become a running joke that we are not as up to speed as all the other towns in the district. She hopes that we can continue growing the program. There is a lot of excitement, they have a great relationship with the high school coach and there is a lot of buy in now in the lower levels. She said they were able to keep their Farm Team in town this year, which is the 4- 5-year old's and they had 4-5 teams and all the way up to the high school level. We are able to hand off a bunch of girls that have played together since they were young. These girls want to continue playing through high school and seeing the attitude of these girls who have played together all these years and knowing it has helped them emotionally, socially, and physically is great. She really hopes this team sport and this program continues to grow. Being able to bring a new field to Sperry Park where they can be a part of the community, and they can feel that they are just as equal as everybody else, could go a long way and continuing to see the numbers grow.

James Close, 28 Aspenwood, Avon currently Co-President of Avon Little League taking over the reins from Mark Massaro and all the great work that he has done spoke and said he has had conversations with both Ms. Checko and Mr. Robertson about this expansion project. He said as an ambassador of the league, and Little League is fully supportive of a new field at Sperry Park. He said he agrees with everything that everyone has said, and he agrees that the program has continued to grow, demonstrated success, is a key part of the development of these young ladies, and we want to make sure that we have equitable experience for them. He also said that they are willing to fundraise as a league across the community to help support this project or even a much large expansion that might take place with the RFP and the Master Plan that Ruth has talked about earlier. He said he is happy to attend any meetings that would help get this project moving along.

Mr. Yass asked Ms. Checko what the timeline would be for the discussion between her and other members of Town management, ultimately making a recommendation on having this State Grant money utilized. Ms. Checko said the timeline would depend on which project we choose. Mr. Yass asked what the timeline would be on making the decision on which project would be chosen. She said she did not know yet because we haven't gotten a formal executed contract from the State. She said she doesn't know where the budget numbers are as far as reality, so if we go to Sperry Park, the estimates that we got are two to three years old now, so all of that would need to be updated and this is a bigger project. If we went with the Fisher Meadows improvements, some of that would be Public Works, some of that would be contracted and that would probably

happen a little bit sooner. It really will ultimately depend on which project we choose. Mr. Yass said his sense is that there is a lot of interest in this, and he is suspecting that the committee will want to provide some advice on this going forward. Ms. Checko said the next meeting of the committee will be September 12. Mr. Yass said he would encourage Ms. Checko, to see if we can weave further discussion of this, particularly if she is at a point where a recommendation is ready to be made, to have the committee give advice and have it on the agenda so that members of the public can comment on this as well. Mr. Yass said if it looks like, timelines or the process is to be accelerated, he would be open to having a Special Meeting where we could discuss this and allow and so people could comment under the Public Comment part of the agenda.

Ms. Willis asked the members of the public if there was a preference of putting the fields at Fisher or putting them at Sperry. She said she has heard from parents that they like Fisher and the separation, but they also want to be included at Sperry so is there one way or the other that we should be leaning when we make a recommendation. Mr. Yass suggested when we are providing our advice to Ms. Checko on this, we should defer this to when we have a proposal in front of us. Ms. Checko said regardless of State Funding, she feels there needs to be improvements at Fisher Meadows to softball field #3, as well as a field in Sperry Park. Dr. Sondheimer asked Ms. Checko if this is the sort of thing that she wants to hold a public meeting on so that everyone has a chance to comment? She said she doesn't know if she would want to do a public meeting on this topic, she thinks this topic will be brought up in the public meetings for the RFP process. The public is very well aware that they have a voice, and the Town Council is interested in this, and we should just continue to lobby for the cause in these forums.

M. McNeill said this issue is something that we have discussed in the past and she gives due credit to everyone who has put in the request for additional money for moving this along. She wants people to understand that we as a committee have discussed this before and will continue to follow this subject closely and hopefully will get it straightened out. She said we are aware of it and appreciate everyone's participation.

Ms. Checko said in her capital improvement plan she had the homerun fence moved on field #4 at Fisher Meadows. She also has plans and funding requests for a full- size batting cage to go between the two fields, to renovate fencing issues and some safety issues with dugouts, and the infield. In addition to that, she has the additional field at Sperry Park addition as well.

#### VIII. Adjournment

The next meeting of the Recreation and Parks Committee is scheduled for September 12, 2023.

Being no further items to discuss Dr. Sondheimer made a motion to adjourn the meeting at 8:20 a.m. Mr. Beaudoin seconded the motion, which passed unanimously.

Respectfully submitted by

*Sharon Henry*

Sharon Henry  
Clerk