

RECREATION & PARKS COMMITTEE

Minutes

Tuesday, September 14, 2021

7:30 am

Via Zoom Meeting

I. Call to Order –

Joe Weist made a motion to call the meeting to order at 7:32 a.m.

- A. Attendance – In attendance were Barbara Ausiello, Ruth Checko, Jennifer Das, Donald Droppo, Ravi Hanjan, Kelly Jackson, Joe Weist and Bob Yass.

II. Minutes of Preceding Meeting – March 10, 2020

After review of the minutes of March 10, 2020, Barbara Ausiello motioned to approve the minutes as presented. The motion was seconded by Kelly Jackson and passed unanimously.

III. Public Comment - None

III. Correspondence

1. Directors Report -

The Directors Report was previously sent to committee members. Ms. Checko said it has been an interesting and busy year since the last meeting. Kelly Jackson asked about the lifeguard situation and if there were any plans to expand and teach the class at Sycamore and then recruit from the lifeguard certification class. Ms. Checko said we currently don't have a certified lifeguard trainer on staff. Ms. Checko said we watch for American Red Cross Lifeguard classes that are being offered in the area and then we send email blasts out so people are aware of the classes. Joe Weist asked if we could contract someone to teach the lifeguard certification and Ms. Checko said it is easier to send staff to get certified at an indoor pool where classes can be run in April and then they will be ready for when the pool opens. She said by the time we are up and running there is a really small window of time to run the class at our pool. Ms. Checko informed committee members that the town did send and pay for 4 of the lifeguards to get Water Safety Instructor certified so we could run swim lessons.

Bob Yass said he was really happy to see the information that Ruth provided in the Director's report on the improvement on the trails. Ms. Checko said we received two grants from Farmington River Salmon Brook Scenic Wildlife committee. The two grants were \$3,000 each and it was to clear the river trail which is in Fisher Farm and runs from the new boat launch area toward Farmington. Ms. Checko said she also had \$20,000 in her operating budget that the Town Council approved to clear trails. Huckleberry Hill trails have been cleared and next will be Fisher Meadows because there are a lot of overgrown trails there and the Found land area would be done after that.

Barbara Ausiello asked about the Town Wide Lightning Detection project. Ms. Checko said the lightning detection system has a main computer that may be put at the Avon Middle school and then lightning detectors would be put at the various parks including Fisher Meadows and Sycamore Hills Park and then we would just build out from there. The main part of the computer would be paid for out of the Fisher Meadows expansion project because there are so many soccer

fields there. For any of the other parks it would be paid for out of Recreation's operating budget. The Board of Education would pay for theirs if they wanted them at their facilities.

Joe Weist asked Ms. Checko if she thought there were going to continue to be staffing struggles with the fall programs or does she think this was just a summer thing. Ms. Checko said we are in good shape for the fall programs because we mostly use vendors and volunteers. Flag Football and the Youth basketball leagues are staffed by volunteers and then vendors run the other programs in the fall. Mr. Weist asked how the staff team is holding up. Ms. Checko said it has been challenging but they are holding up quite well. Ms. Checko said we have a new Program Specialist, Sara Roccapiore and she is awesome.

2. 2022 Proposed Meeting Dates

Mr. Weist reviewed the 2022 Proposed Meeting Dates with the committee. Donald Droppo motioned to accept the dates as presented, seconded by Barbara Ausiello. The motion passed unanimously.

V. Committee Communication - None

VI. Old Business

Joe Weist said in the past there used to be some groups that use the facilities that would approach the town and he was wondering if anyone is unhappy these days. Ms. Checko said not that she can think of. She said she worked with Little League a little bit on field conditions this summer for their All Stars. She said when Fisher Meadows flooded, she reached out to lacrosse, soccer and baseball and they all shared fields that whole week at Buckingham and Thompson Brook School.

VII. New Business

1. 2023 Fiscal Year Capital Improvement Plan

The 2023 Fiscal Year Capital Improvement Plan was sent to committee members prior to the meeting. Ms. Checko gave some detail on the top 3 priorities as follows:

Sycamore Hills Pool Repairs

There are 2 or 3 areas that need to be addressed that are being watched, one being the stairs leading into the circle section of the pool. If tapped on with a hammer hollow spots can be heard and there are some spots of erosion so the stairs need to be redone.

The drains that are in the end of the lap lane should be capped because the pipe is cracked underneath. The drains are shut off and if they get capped permanently, then we would not ever have to worry about them again.

There is also a crack in the lap lane section of the pool that runs down one wall, across the ground floor and up another wall. The fear is that once it starts getting taken down then more issues are going to be found underneath.

Ms. Checko said the town would like to work on all of these needs but any time work is started on a pool, it could open up many more issues so there needs to be some reserve. She said she is requesting \$100,000 which is high so if it gets taken down in the Capital budget, she would be okay with that and would just go back for it next year. Joe Weist asked if this work would be something that would be done in the spring so it would be ready for the opening in June. Ms. Checko said no, it would be done in fall of 2022.

Recreation Master Plan

The next item of priority is the Recreation Master Plan. Ms. Checko said this item would be beneficial for planning in the future for the department and it would pick up where the 2007 Master Plan left off. It would update community needs, goals and objectives.

Renovations to Countryside Park

Ms. Checko said the third priority item is to renovate Countryside Park. She put in \$500,000 but she does not have the final number yet from the architect yet. She is expecting to have that number today or tomorrow. This would renovate the entire interior, make it ADA accessible, in the basement it would replace systems and mechanics so that everything is more efficient and up to date. For the exterior, it would be a new roof, windows, doors and the entire deck would have to be replaced. The handicapped ramp and the siding also has to be replaced. Mr. Droppo asked if it would be less expensive to do a knock down. Ms. Checko said that was discussed a while ago and at that time it was not less expensive. Ms. Ausiello said \$500,000 seems really high. Ms. Checko said yes, it is high but if it ends up being a prevailing wage job, that is most likely what the cost could end up being.

Ms. Checko said the other item that is a priority is the Sycamore Hills ADA playscape. She said it would be something very modest, but playscapes are expensive. She said the \$75,000 that she has in the Capital budget would pay for the playscape, the install and the surfacing. Ms. Das agreed that the Sycamore Hills playscape is definitely dated.

Ms. Das had a question regarding the allocation for a Dog Park in 2025/2026 and she said having come from a town where they put in a dog park there were some issues that came up that they didn't anticipate. She asked if Ms. Checko had reached out to other towns that have dog parks to see what worked and what didn't with regard to their issues. Ms. Das said the town where she came from put in a big beautiful dog park and what started happening is that people from other town started coming in and that caused overcrowding, people were not picking up after their dog, they came in with aggressive dogs, and it got so bad that a police officer had to be posted there to check dog licenses. This ended up being an extra resource because of the problems that came up and Ms. Das would like this to be taken into consideration when we start working on this project. Ms. Checko said she will take that into consideration. Mr. Weist said Simsbury and Canton both have dog parks and he hasn't heard of any issues in either of those towns.

Joe Weist said looking at the Capital Improvement Project overall, this is a big number and then it trails off. Mr. Weist asked Ms. Checko if she thought the town would allocate all of this money. Ms. Checko said most likely they will not. She said it will go to the Town manager and then he will ask her what her priorities are and she would say the pool and the Master plan. Mr. Weist said he is good with those two items being the priority.

He said over the years, the town has put in a decent amount of infrastructure and it is probably hitting renewal or replacement age on a lot of things over time. He was wondering if the Capital Improvement budget is sufficient to maintain what the Town has. He said there may need to be a discussion about not letting thing go completely in disrepair simply because we can't get the budget allocations approved to maintain things. Ms. Checko said a few years ago there was some discussion on doing a Recreation Bond and bonding all of the projects and she thinks part of the was the turf field at the high school along with other projects in her Capital budget. She said maybe it's time to revisit a Recreation Bond and see how the Town Manager feels about it. Mr. Droppo said a good example is the Countryside Park project and how long that is taking to get done. He said this is something that should have been done little by little over the years. Ms. Ausiello said she thought Avon would be receiving any money from the American Rescue Plan money for infrastructure. She thought she heard some conversation about it being used for roads but she didn't know if there was any wiggle room on that or if Ms. Checko has had any conversations with Brandon if any of that money was coming to the Town. Ms. Checko said she

has not but she will reach out to the Town Manager and ask.

Mr. Yass said that the Master Plan would be critical in making a case for any capital projects or any kind of funding and he agreed that this is a high priority. Ms. Checko said yes it is. She said a good example is the dog park. It became a priority by members of council and if we had had the Master Plan updated, and the dog park was in the Master Plan as a priority for the community then there would be justification and it would be in the planning documents and it probably would have been able to get funded and built. Ms. Checko said a few people have approached her about a skate park, but one person wanting a skate park doesn't justify building one. If during the Master planning process, you identify these as community priorities, wants and needs then you have a better chance at getting them funded. Mr. Weist asked if the Master Plan was funded how long would it take to get done. Ms. Checko said it is about a year long process.

Mr. Weist said the committee is behind Ms. Checko on the Capital Improvement Plan and the items identified in the plan are definitely needed. Mr. Weist asked for a motion to approve the Capital Improvement Plan. Ravi Hanjan motioned to approve the plan and Kelly Jackson seconded the motion which passed unanimously.

Mr. Droppo asked if any of the committee members knew if the Lights On Ribbon Cutting Ceremony had been rescheduled. Ms. Checko said she had not heard anything. Kelly Jackson asked if the high school was doing their spirit night this year. Ms. Checko said she had not heard anything on that either.

Barbara Ausiello commented that Fisher Meadows rebounded unbelievably well after the flooding.

VIII. Adjournment

Joe Weist adjourned the meeting at 7:57 a.m. The next meeting of the Recreation and Parks Committee is scheduled for January 11, 2022 at 7:30 a.m. It has not been determined if it will be a virtual meeting or held in person.

Respectfully submitted by

Sharon Henry

Sharon Henry
Clerk