

RECREATION & PARKS COMMITTEE

Minutes

Tuesday, January 25, 2022

7:30 am

Special Meeting

Via Zoom Meeting

I. Swearing in of Members – Nick Hogan, Assistant Town Clerk

Nick Hogan, Assistant Town Clerk swore in new members of the Recreation and Parks Committee; Messrs. Yass, Beaudoin and Dr. Sondheimer and Mmes Das, McNeill, Willis and Dr. Gurtman.

II. Call to Order:

Ms. Checko, Director of Recreation and Parks 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. Roccapiore, Dr. Sondheimer, Ms. Willis and Mr. Yass.

III. Nomination and Election of Committee Chair

Dr. Sondheimer made a motion to nominate Mr. Yass as Committee Chairperson. Ms. Willis seconded that motion which passed unanimously.

IV. Nomination and Election of Committee Vice-Chair

Mr. Yass made a motion to nominate Dr. Gurtman as Committee Vice-Chairperson. M. McNeill seconded the motion which passed unanimously.

V. Minutes of Preceding Meeting – November 17, 2021

After review of the minutes of the November 17, 2021 meeting, Mr. Yass motioned to approve the minutes as presented. Ms. Das seconded the motion which passed unanimously.

VI. Correspondence

- A. Email exchange regarding problems when trash cans were in parks.

Ms. Checko, Director of Recreation and Parks gave a brief overview of the Carry In Carry Out policy for the parks pertaining to trash. Ms. Checko said the Recreation office receives 2-4 phone calls a year from people asking to have trash barrels put in the parks. Ms. Checko told committee members that the information sent to them in their correspondence was the history of how this policy came about. Ms. Checko wanted to make committee members aware of it in hopes that they would continue to support the policy. Removing the trash barrels from the parks was done because it was too labor intensive for the Public Works Department and they lobbied the former Recreation Director to implement this policy. Although not perfect, it is more efficient than having trash barrels in the parks. Mr. Yass asked how far this policy goes back. Ms. Checko said it goes back to 2013. Mr. Yass also asked if signs were posted as people enter the parks so they are aware of the policy. Ms. Checko yes the Farmington Valley Watershed Association provided the Town with signs in 2015. Mr. Yass asked if there has been written communications or comments other

than what people have made. Ms. Checko said yes, emails have been received. M. McNeill asked how the trash that is left there is picked up. Ms. Checko said the Public Works staff will remove the trash. The Recreation Department does public services announcements as well as email blasts to remind people to carry out what they carry in, as well as reminding the Athletic Director and the organized leagues to remind their coaches and teams. Ms. Willis asked if the issue is limited to one particular park or is it spread out throughout the Town. Ms. Checko said it is everywhere, the soccer fields, the playscapes, the tennis courts, etc. Ms. Das said she didn't feel that it was asking too much for people to carry out what they carry in and it is not worth having pictures like these of the parks all over town as well as the wildlife that the trash attracts. Ms. Checko said the State implemented the same policy around the same time. Mr. Yass asked Ms. Checko if she wanted the committee to restate the policy. Ms. Checko said as an advisory board that the committee members are going to hear things about the policy in the public and she just wanted to make the committee aware of the appropriate information. Ms. Checko said committee members can be the eyes and ears in the community with accurate information. Mr. Beaudoin told committee members that as a soccer coach the carry in carry out policy has worked for him. He said the coaches and parents are good about picking up the trash. Mr. Yass told Ms. Checko that the committee agrees to continue with the current policy.

VII. Old Business

A. Proposed American Rescue Plan Act/Capital Improvement Plan Projects

Ms. Checko shared a Power Point presentation with committee members on the Recreation and Parks Departments Capital Improvement Program for FY 2022/2023 that was presented to the Town Council in November. Ms. Checko said that the American Rescue Plan Act money has come to fruition, Mr. Robertson, Town Manager, asked Department Heads to come up with some suggested projects. Ms. Checko said since there were new committee members she wanted to present her Capital Improvement Plan and she has also included the departments suggested ARPA projects.

Dr. Sondheimer asked if there was a difference in criteria for the CIP and the ARPA projects. Ms. Checko said yes, the ARPA requirements are based on areas, almost in sectors where groups were most impacted by COVID such as senior citizens, Recreation, and school children. The Finance Director, Tom DiStasio gave departments heads a breakdown of eligible projects. Ms. Checko said most of Recreation's projects are construction but some of them have design and it is included in the cost. Ms. Checko said Capital Improvement Plans are funded by tax dollars and suggested projects are from one fiscal year up to ten fiscal years out. Ms. Checko said that most of these projects are somewhere in Capital and the Town feels they are important and it was eligible for the ARPA funding.

Ms. Checko said that one of the things that she and Mr. Yass discussed was providing committee members with the department's Mission Statement and some of the goals of the department. Ms. Checko shared those items with committee members. She said that with the ARPA money becoming available, basically in the next 5 years, the goal is to assist in these projects. Ms. Checko said the department also has a new Program Specialist, Sara Roccapriore and Ms. Checko introduced her to the committee and Ms. Checko said she thinks Ms. Roccapriore is going to do a great job in expanding programs and also preparing us and putting the department in a good place for when these projects come to fruition.

Ms. Checko presented the first project which is an addition of a multipurpose room at the Avon Senior Center. Ms. Checko said this is a priority project and it would be attached to the Senior Center and located to the west of the building. The addition would be about 1700 square feet with a capacity of 75 people. Ms. Checko said because it is important to have the seniors have their own space, the multipurpose room would have designated entrances, bathrooms and storage for equipment. Ms. Checko said she envisions an open space with a remote divider, and the amenities would include a parents viewing room, and lightweight furniture and equipment that can be easily

used as uses of the room change.

Mr. Yass asked with the expansion of the building that is referred to as the Avon Senior Center, the Council might consider re-designating the building to Avon Community and Senior Center to make it clear to the Town that this building has more purposes than just a senior center if this project gets undertaken. Ms. Checko said they would have to think about that. Ms. Checko said that she does think it is important for the seniors to have their own space because they were so hard hit with the pandemic that presenting this as a recreation space is important to recreation as it is to the seniors. Ms. Checko said one of the reasons it is felt that this is an important project is because from a program perspective, this room would allow us to expand areas that are not being fully served such as pre-school, young adult, and adult programming for evenings. Ms. Checko told the committee that during COVID because we could not get in to the schools, and because the senior center was closed, we were able to utilize that space for programs. Once the senior center re-opened in June of 2021, we found ourselves shut out again with limited space. Ms. Checko said this room would not be sports oriented. The Project Estimate is \$50,000 for design and \$500,000 for construction.

Dr. Gurtman inquired about the room at the library and if this would be a bigger space than the Community Room at the Library. Ms. Checko said she didn't know the dimensions of the Community room at the Library. Dr. Gurtman asked Ms. Checko if the department uses the space at the Library. Ms. Checko said because of Library Policies and the By-Laws on usage of the Library spaces only allows outside entities to use rooms once every X weeks. Recreation can't book a room for a 6 week program for a specific night each week, because then the Library would get shut out to run their programs. The Library has been very accommodating if we need the room occasionally. Ms. Das said the capacity on the Library Community room is 50 according to their website. Dr. Sondheimer said the Library Community room seats 180 people so the 50 person capacity must be due to COVID. Ms. Checko said the addition at the senior center would have a capacity of 75. Mr. Yass asked Ms. Checko if these are projects that are coming up from Recreation and Parks but ultimately the Town Council has to sort through these and other projects before them, is that correct? Ms. Checko said the next step for the ARPA projects is a presentation at the February Town Council meeting of the multipurpose room and the senior center improvement projects for ARPA that she is suggesting and then the Town Manager and Assistant Town Manager will present the other projects. Mr. Yass said then the Town Council would sort through all of the projects to see what comes in and what goes out. Ms. Checko said that is correct.

Ms. Checko told committee members that another project at the Avon Senior Center is the HVAC Replacement which would replace 6 condensers and air handlers. The HVAC system is original to the building which was built in 1988 or 1989 and the life expectancy of the condensers and air handlers is 15 years so they are well past their life expectancy. This old system is also not circulating air as well and with COVID, adequate air handling is important for people's health so this is an important project. The existing system also uses R22 refrigerant which is obsolete. The new system would also be better for the environment. The Project estimate is \$121,600.

Ms. Checko said the next item on the list is renovations to the Community Room bathrooms. Ms. Checko said many cosmetic improvements have been done at the Senior Center but there have not been any renovations since she has been here. There is money in the Capital Plan to renovate the kitchen. Ms. Checko said the Community Room bathrooms are not ADA accessible and they are original to the building. Ms. Checko said the bathrooms on the senior center side also need renovations to make them handicap accessible. The Project estimate for the Community Room bathrooms is \$5,400 for design and \$100,000 for construction. The Project Estimate for the Senior Center bathrooms is \$3,600 for design and \$100,000 for construction.

Ms. Checko said the other project that she is suggesting is to renovate the Sycamore Hills Tennis Courts. There is \$225,000 in the fiscal year 2022 Capital to do this. Ms. Checko is proposing under ARPA add stand-alone pickle ball courts outside of the tennis courts and renovate the existing basketball courts. The estimate was if Public Works did this project, and the contractors estimate to do this project is \$630,000; \$405,000 would be needed from ARPA in addition to the Capital

money. The addition of athletic lighting is \$193,000. Ms. Das asked exactly where these courts would be located at Sycamore. Ms. Checko said they would be located between the Senior Center and the pool. Ms. Das asked Ms. Checko if it would be taking over any of the playscape or would it be included in the open space that is there. Ms. Checko said it would not affect the playscape and would be included in the open space that is there. The existing tennis and basketball courts would be demolished and the expansion would only be the width and length of two pickle ball courts. Mr. Yass said the tennis courts are heavily utilized. Ms. Checko said yes they are. Ms. Checko told the committee that when the State instructed the Town to close the tennis courts during COVID, the residents were upset because they felt the tennis courts could be used safely. When the tennis courts were re-opened, they were very heavily used and Sycamore Hills was busy every afternoon and weekend. M. McNeill asked where the other pickle ball courts are located. Ms. Checko said there are pickle ball lines painted on two of the existing tennis courts. Mr. Yass asked about the proposed lighting and if this would expand the authorized open hours of the facility and is there a concern that fellow residents of Avon abutting the property would be concerned about noise and later hours than people are used to. Ms. Checko said those residents would have an opportunity to have say in the project, but when lights were added to Avon Middle School tennis courts there were not any concerns. Those lights are controlled remotely and automatically go off at 10:00 p.m. The lights at Sycamore would be the same.

Ms. Checko said there is money to renovate the Buckingham Baseball field which is a regulation baseball field for Avon Little League, American Legion and High School teams. It has issues with drainage, and it has lips built up. This project would renovate the entire infield, all of the clay would be removed and reconstructed so it will properly drain. Ms. Checko said the price is \$83,400 if it goes out to bid, \$40,000 is in the 2022 fiscal year CIP and \$43,400 would come from ARPA money.

Ms. Checko said another project that is being proposed is a band shell at the Sycamore Hills Recreation Area. This band shell would allow events to be held outside. Ms. Checko said outdoor concerts have not been held for many years. This project estimate is \$114,200 for materials, \$1,500 for Engineering and \$6,500 for shipping.

The next project Ms. Checko presented was additional sun shades at Sycamore Hills Pool. Ms. Checko said a limited schedule was run at the pool with social distancing during COVID and there were not enough sun shades. The Project estimate is \$30,000.

Ms. Checko presented the next project which is Fisher Meadows Pavilion Replacements. The Project estimate is \$175,000 to renovate the 2 existing pavilions.

Ms. Checko said the next item is at new playscape in Sycamore Hills. The existing play scape is 26 years old which is beyond its life expectancy. This project would remove the existing components and replace them with a modest sized new ADA accessible playscape. Ms. Checko said there is a \$60,000 award from the State of CT Bonding Commission, and \$15,000 of ARPA money would be used for a total of \$75,000. This would include the structure, the install and the surfacing.

Ms. Checko said she and the Public Works Director have been researching a Town wide Lightning Protection System and have made a recommendation to the Town Manager. The cost would be \$65,000. The base would be at the Avon Middle School and all of the school grounds and parks would have a strobe and/or an alarm and would detect lightning up to intervals of 5 miles then there is an "all safe" alarm once the lightning is no longer detected. Mr. Yass said this system has been discussed at the meeting and this is proven, well established technology.

Sycamore Hills Pool repairs was the next item Ms. Checko presented. The main pool is in need of some repairs and work. There is a crack in the lap lane area of the pool and the wall needs to be repaired. The stairs in the round section of the pool need to be replaced and the return-inlets need to be replaced. The Project estimate is \$100,000.

The last item that Ms. Checko presented was Renovations to the Countryside Park Building which is also a priority project. It is in the 2022/2023 Capital Improvement Plan. The Town does not believe it would be eligible for ARPA funding. If the annual budget gets approved at referendum, then the project would get funded. The building is 52 years old and showing its age. The design work has been done and construction would include interior and exterior renovations. The Public Works Department would do the site work ahead of construction and the project estimate is \$440,000. Ms. Checko said that the cost does seem high but this building is a public gathering space, so it has to meet certain codes and requirements. One of the items that increased the cost, (in order to have access to the basement), an engineered block wall is needed and is quite expensive. The other costly item is the deck because the deck has to be built to carry a certain amount of pounds per square feet.

Ms. Das asked Ms. Checko what types of events the building is used for. Ms. Checko said the Recreation Department uses it for a lot of storage, programming, trainings, and it is rented by the public for holiday gatherings, showers, birthday parties, small weddings and it is also used by non-profit groups such as Girl Scouts, Garden Clubs, Encore of Avon and many others. Ms. Checko said the building is very heavily used. Mr. Beaudoin asked if there was ever any talk of tearing it down and rebuilding instead of renovating and what the cost of what a rebuild would be. Ms. Checko said yes there was, but the cost came in at over \$550,000. Mr. Beaudoin asked if it would be eligible for ARPA funds and possibly use \$100,000 of ARPA funds to offset the cost and make it a brand new building. Ms. Checko said she does not believe it is, but there is also a lot of sentiment to the Countryside building and she has heard this argument before. We did consider it, but the Town chose to renovate. Mr. Yass asked how long the building would be off line with doing a renovation vs. a tear down and rebuild. Ms. Checko said that has not been looked at yet, but she is guessing it would be at least 3 months off line for the renovation but she is not sure how long a tear down and rebuild would take. Mr. Beaudoin said he would guess 3-4 months offline for a tear down and rebuild. He would be in favor of spending the extra money to rebuild. Ms. Checko said \$30,000 has been invested into design of the renovations. Mr. Yass asked Ms. Checko to bring up to the Town Council that was some interest from this committee to look at a tear down and rebuild instead of renovation so that at least it's reflected in the committee discussion. M. McNeill thought that it would be an interesting question whether anyone would bring up whether or not we need to do an addition at one building when we may have the opportunity to tear down and rebuild a larger building. Dr. Sondheimer said that the west side of town doesn't have many community resources and he has often wondered why better use is not made of Countryside Park, but he believes parking is a problem there. He has often wondered if picnic shelters could be added to go along with the building and he would be open to exploring whether better use could be made for things over on the west side of town.

Dr. Gurtman asked if it is the Town Council that prioritizes the project list. Ms. Checko said she believes it is the Town Manager because it is his budget that is being presented to the Town Council. Dr. Gurtman asked if our committee can give recommendations as far as prioritizing projects. Ms. Checko said yes, the committee can make a recommendation. Ms. Checko said this project was discussed by the committee this past fall. Mr. Yass said if the committee wants to take a position on these things and make it part of the committee report and that would percolate up to but ultimately the Town Manager would recommend and the Town Council would decide. Dr. Gurtman still wondered whether the committee should prioritize the projects so the information gets to the Town Manager. Ms. Checko said the projects were prioritized in the November 2021 Recreation Committee meeting. Dr. Gurtman asked if the order of Ms. Checko's presentation is in the order that the projects were prioritized. Ms. Das said she thinks that this is the order that was prioritized at the previous meeting. Mr. Yass said the top priority was the Senior Center with the HVAC work being the top priority and then secondly the expansion space.

Ms. Checko said the Countryside Park project is also priority, but she put it at the end of the presentation because it is strictly a CIP, not an APRA project. The projects on the list ahead of the Countryside Project are partially or fully ARPA eligible suggested projects. M. McNeill asked Mr. Yass if the minutes from the November 2021 meeting shows the order the projects were prioritized and those were the minutes that this committee approved at the beginning of our meeting. Mr. Yass

said that was correct and projects were put in order through committee discussion based on Ms. Checko's recommendations. Mr. Yass said there was not a 1, 2, 3 resolution from the Recreation and Parks committee. M. McNeill asked if the final list of recommendations was not in the minutes from November 2021. Mr. Yass said in that form, no, there was a discussion of all of the projects. Ms. Checko said to clarify, the discussion of what to do with Countryside Park started several fiscal years ago when the design stage was being funded. Ms. Checko said the original discussion started back in 2018 or 2019 the year the design was funded. There was discussion about a total re-build and it was decided against. This wasn't something that was just decided in November 2021, this has been a two phase project. Ms. Checko said the building is structurally sound. Ms. Checko believes that the design is solid and the structure is perfectly sound and it is on a footprint that can't be expanded because the foundation is almost in the water course. Ms. Checko's recommendation is to proceed with what has already been designed. Mr. Yass thanked Ms. Checko for her response and said he was speaking generally in terms of people's reaction to the overall Capital Improvement Plan and if the committee has process questions, they can be raised during the meetings.

Ms. Checko said Capital Projects that have made it in the list can be found in the Town Managers budget online under Annual Budget. Ms. Das pointed out that although she liked Mr. Beaudoin's idea of doing a whole new rebuild and adding more things in like Dr. Sondheimer suggested, the quote or the estimate that was obtained a few years ago of \$550,000 has probably skyrocketed or at least jumped by 30% given what's going on today and the cost of materials. Ms. Das said she suspects that a different number would be given if a quote was requested now. The \$550,000 was an estimate that was gotten years ago and would most likely be higher today.

Dr. Sondheimer asked Ms. Checko if she had a sense of what we have a chance of getting approved since other departments are also seeking approval and if we would get much more than the top few projects. Ms. Checko said she does not have a sense of what projects on our list would get approved yet.

Dr. Sondheimer asked Ms. Checko to review the first two or three projects and the amount of money involved. Ms. Checko said the priority projects would be the multipurpose room with \$550,000 with design, the HVAC system for both side of the building at \$121,600, renovating the Senior Center and Community Room bathrooms for \$9,000 for design and \$200,000 for construction. Mr. Yass said that if these projects don't get funded through ARPA, they are still in the Town's Capital Improvement Plan and they would be slotted in as Capital needs. Ms. Checko said that the projects that get funded by APRA will move others up as Capital Projects. Dr. Sondheimer said he is just guessing that the Senior Center project would get accepted. Ms. Checko said she would think so because they are the most heavily impacted demographics and the building needs the renovations. Dr. Sondheimer said the building has to be brought up to code. Dr. Sondheimer asked if the additional multipurpose room is at all controversial. Ms. Checko said she has had feedback from other staff and department heads, Town Manager, Assistant Town Manager, and the Recreation and Parks Committee felt it was a priority project as you can never have enough space. Dr. Sondheimer asked what the next item on the list was and Ms. Checko said it is the renovation to Sycamore Hills Tennis Courts, Pickle ball Courts and Basketball Courts for \$630,000. Dr. Sondheimer is not a tennis player so he has a hard time relating to that project. Mr. Yass said it is an "if you build it, they will come" type of project and they are over utilized currently. Ms. Checko said the existing tennis courts have been plagued with cracks for many, many years. There is probably root intrusion. Ms. Checko said either way, the tennis courts need to be replaced within the next few years. Dr. Sondheimer said he can relate to youth playing fields such as baseball, soccer, much more quickly than he can relate to a large expenditure for tennis courts. Ms. Checko told Dr. Sondheimer that he may not be aware how popular pickle ball is and surrounding communities have built 4 and 5 courts just for pickle ball. Mr. Yass said the pool repairs seem to be pretty urgent as well. Ms. Checko said the pool repairs can continue to be band-aided but it is just kicking the can down the road and we are to a point where we really should make these repairs, but there is always going to be money needed for pool repairs. Dr. Sondheimer asked Ms. Checko if what she is saying is that we can expect that the Town is aware of its responsibility to maintain the pool and will always budget for pool repairs. Ms. Checko said yes, based on her recommendations,

the recommendations of contractors and Public Works staff. M. McNeill said she understands that it is a lot to take in and the need for fixing the courts but we didn't get to the baseball field that has sections under water unlike soccer where you can play in the mud and also the Lightning Protector and hopefully nothing will ever happen because we don't have the Lightning Protector but she feels that each person would come up with a different list as to what take priority. M. McNeill said we will just have to wait it out and see how it goes and support what Ms. Checko feels is the best way to do it. Ms. Checko said there is also a second round of ARPA funds that will come to the Town and the total ARPA funds will be closer to \$5 million dollars if she understands correctly. Mr. Yass asked Ms. Checko if once she submits everything to the Town Manager and finds out how it sorted itself out, if she could let the committee members know. Ms. Checko said she is going to schedule another Special Meeting toward the end of February and we can cover this in that meeting and then during the March meeting she will cover the General Fund Budget.

VIII. New Business

A. Carry Out What You Carry In

This topic was covered earlier in the meeting.

Mr. Yass said that Ms. Checko has sent out the meeting schedule for the year and he asked if anyone had any questions on the schedule and if everyone was okay with keeping the meetings at 7:30 a.m. Committee members agreed to keep the current time and schedule.

Some of the committee members had questions regarding items that were not on the Agenda. Ms. Checko reminded the committee that because this is a Special Meeting, only items on the Agenda can be discussed. Dr. Gurtman asked Ms. Checko if members could submit to her items they would like to discuss at the next meeting so they could be put on the Agenda. Ms. Checko said she would speak to Mr. Yass about that.

Mr. Yass said the items on the Agenda for this meeting have been covered and committee members will wait to get the notice for the upcoming Special Meeting in February.

III. Adjournment

Ms. Das made a motion to adjourn the meeting at 8:32 a.m. James Beaudoin seconded the motion, which passed unanimously.

Respectfully submitted by

Sharon Henry

Sharon Henry
Clerk