

RECREATION & PARKS COMMITTEE

Minutes

Tuesday, March 8, 2022

7:30 am

Special Meeting

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.

II. Minutes of Preceding Meeting – January 25, 2022

Dr. Sondheimer made a motion to approve the minutes of the January 25, 2022 meeting as corrected. Mr. Beaudoin seconded that motion which passed unanimously.

III. Public Comment - None

IV. Directors Report

Ms. Checko reported to committee members that the department is currently working on the summer season with regards to planning camps, clinics and programs. Ms. Checko said the two main camps that we run are Summer Fun Camp for grades 1-4, and the Adventure camp for grades 5-9. These are staffed by in house seasonal employees. Summer Fun Camp has two entertainers per week and they swim at the pool 4 afternoons a week. The Adventure Camp is a 7 week camp with an off-site field trip each day. Ms. Checko said she is worried about that camp because of gas costs. All other classes are run by contracted vendors.

Ms. Checko said we are accepting applications and we are desperate for Aquatics Staff. Ms. Checko said the Aquatics Director retired last summer and the Assistant Aquatics Director was promoted to that position. She said yesterday afternoon she met with the Aquatics Director and he resigned. Currently is no supervisory staff for the pool. Ms. Checko said in addition to supervisory staff there are 9 lifeguard positions and gate attendant positions that need to be filled. The plan is to open the pool on June 11 and close on September 5. Ms. Checko said we also run swim team and swim lessons at the pool. We also run two free family movie nights at Sycamore and we are planning on holding those again this summer.

Ms. Checko said the department is also currently coordinating spring field use for Avon Little League, Avon Soccer Club and Avon High School. The High School has priority of all field use from 2:30 – 5:30 p.m., and the other leagues use the fields from 5:30 p.m. on. Once all permits are approved, the department works with DPW Buildings and Grounds to start field preparation including line painting.

Mr. Yass asked if we could use the Town notice capabilities to put the word out for the aquatics positions. Ms. Checko said yes, job opportunities can be found on Avonct.gov as well as Facebook, Connecticut Recreation and Parks Association's website, Central CT College, and the Human Resources page on the Town website. Ms. Checko said we may also use Indeed as well as Zip Recruiter. Mr. Yass also asked what the reason was for the Aquatics Director's resignation. Ms. Checko said yes, he has taken a position for a better opportunity.

V. Correspondence

A. Requested Budget Summary – Recreation and Parks

Mr. Yass said Ms. Checko provided a copy of the Budget Summary based on a conversation that he had with her. He thought going forward as the committee looks to build their expertise as an advisory committee, that perhaps some familiarity with the budget process would be helpful. Mr. Yass said the budget for fiscal year 22/23 has already been passed along to Town Council, but he thought the committee might be able to give Ms. Checko some input when the 23/24 budget gets prepared. Mr. Yass asked Ms. Checko if she had any comments about the Budget Summary that was provided to committee members. Ms. Checko said that we have 7 divisions, most in the General Fund, some in the Special Revenue fund. Ms. Checko said the biggest challenge this year was the increase in minimum wage. Ms. Checko said because of this she cut funds out of services and supplies so that the General Fund would not get hit as hard with the wage increases. She said she also moved some of the positions out of the General Fund and into the Special Revenue accounts to help alleviate some of that burden. Once the budget went to Human Resources, and the Town Managers office, Finance and Human Resources pulled all of the employee benefits out of the Departments budgets and that is why there are so many negatives on the Budget Summary. Ms. Checko said on the second page they summarized all of the categories which shows there is a 99% decrease. Ms. Checko said this is reflective of them pulling out all of those employee benefits.

Mr. Yass asked Ms. Checko to give some insight as to the mechanics of the budget and what is behind the methodology of the funds. Ms. Checko said fund 01 is the General Fund Budget and it is tax based. Fund 09 is the Special Revenue Accounts and they are funded by the revenue that we generate from programs. In Fund 09, there is an account for Recreation programs, one for Parks and one for seniors and each of these accounts have to be self- sustaining. In planning, Ms. Checko projects what the expenses are going to be, and what the revenue will be on the Fund 09 side, that is how we determine what we are proposing for our budget. Fund 12 is the Fisher Meadows fund and the Forest Management fund. Mr. Yass asked if these funds are Town labels and Ms. Checko said yes they are but she is not sure about other departments.

Mr. Yass asked what the timeline was for the budget. Ms. Checko said we start working on the capital budget in early August, and it is presented to the Town Council by the first week of November. We start working on the operating budget in September, and that is due by the end of October. Mr. Yass if that would be the time to hear her presentation of the budget and give any comments that might be worthy to pass along to Town Council. Ms. Checko said that was correct.

Dr. Sondheimer asked Ms. Checko if there were any major changes that the Town Council or the Town Manager requested or any increase that we were able to get? Ms. Checko said no that it was pretty straight forward. She said the only thing that Town Council has been talking about funding a Community Aide line to help with Special Events, and to possibly help Non-Profits that may come to us for support for events in town.

Mr. Yass referred to another item that was in the agenda packet but not on the agenda and that was a copy of a letter that he submitted at Ms. Checko's request in support of a Grant application that she applied for. Ms. Checko said that she applied for a grant to the Lower Farmington River and Salmon Brook Wild and Scenic Committee (LFSWS) for the Fisher Farm River Trail Clearing Project. Ms. Checko said this is the second year in a row that they have grant opportunity and she chose to apply to have the river trail in Fisher Farm cleared again. She said the reason she went with this project is because it was so well received as a project and also because the LFSWS wants to give each town about \$6,000 so that the grant money can be spread out more, and because it was appealing to them. Mr. Yass asked if she received other letters of support to go with the application and Ms. Checko said that Dr. Sondheimer and Tom Iezzi both wrote letters of support.

B. Options for Countryside Park Building Facility

Ms. Checko said at our last meeting there was discussion about rebuilding vs. remodeling Countryside Park and when the project got to the Town Council, there was renewed discussion to that effect. The Town Manager asked Ms. Checko go to back to the architect and get some pros and cons of both. Ms. Checko said basically the building is structurally sound, and the cost to renovate is much more feasible than to demolish and rebuild. Ms. Checko opened the subject up for discussion with the committee. Mr. Yass said he knew some people went for a visit with Ms. Checko to Countryside, and he asked those that went to share their thoughts. Mr. Beaudoin said that he lives near and drives by Countryside every day and he doesn't understand why it went from \$400,000 for a remodel to \$800,000 for a rebuild. He believes that the investigation was done correctly but he just thinks that is a high number and he was wondering if there was breakdown of the \$800,000 cost. Ms. Checko said she has a breakdown for the renovation cost of \$540,000 but she doesn't have a breakdown for a new build. Ms. Checko said the deck alone is \$100,000 because it has to be built for a gathering place and has to be able to hold a certain amount of weight per square foot. She said the other expensive component is making the basement accessible. The current accessibility is through a garage door that's under the deck, and there is a retaining wall that has to be built. Mr. Yass asked Mr. Beaudoin if the \$800,000 was the actual number, would he consider being in favor of the remodel. Mr. Beaudoin said he likes new and he realizes there is sentiment to the building but he thinks \$540,000 vs. \$800,000 and as long as it didn't breach the \$800,000 number he feels the building would be spectacular. Ms. Checko said because that facility is in the 100 year flood plain and in the wetlands, the foundation cannot be changed. Ms. Checko said if you added on a second floor, then an elevator would have to be installed, and there is no space to expand parking so making a large building still doesn't mean programming could expand. Ms. Checko said the \$800,000 doesn't include a second floor. Mr. Yass said one of the cons that the architect pointed out in terms of renovation is that the building lacked ADA accessibility in many areas and would this issue be addressed. Ms. Checko said yes it would. Dr. Sondhemier said that he did visit the building with Ms. Checko and it really needs effort and there is no question that the building is worn out and run down. Dr. Sondheimer brought up a topic for future discussion. If you take a look at the Master Plan for Recreation there is a proposal to expand the facility at Buckingham and push it eastward toward Huckleberry Hill so that it would be more or less north of Countryside Park and perhaps to justify the investment perhaps there would a way to link the two facilities so that there would be one continuous park facility and he would love to talk about it in the future. Mr. Yass asked Dr. Sondheimer if he came to any conclusion on the issue of remodel or rebuild. Dr. Sondhiemer said he is not an expert, and he understands where Mr. Beaudoin is coming from because the costs for both the rebuild and the remodel are high and he didn't comment on either. His only comment is that something has to be done. Dr. Gurtman said she also went there on Saturday and she agrees with what's been said and the facility definitely needs work. She said it is a beautiful location and she thinks the renovation seems to make more sense vs a rebuild because the footprint is still going to be the same so she doesn't think the additional \$300,000 would be worth it. She did feel that the renovation would increase the use of the building. Mr. Yass asked if that building has any historical designation that we need to be concerned with and Ms. Checko said no it does not. Mr. Beaudoin asked if the cost had anything to do with the bridge that goes over the dam. Ms. Checko said no, that is not part of the cost. Mr. Yass said based on conversation the general consensus is to remodel vs. rebuild and he asked if the Town Council is seeking a formal vote by this committee. Ms. Checko said she thinks a motion and a vote it would be helpful. Dr. Gurtman motioned that hearing the report of the architect, the committee is inclined to recommend renovation rather than replacement of the Countryside Park facility. Dr. Sondheimer seconded the motion, and there were 6 in favor and Mr. Beaudoin opposed the motion. Mr. Beaudoin said his opposition is because he doesn't feel the \$800,000 cost is real.

VI. Committee Communication

M. McNeill asked where the committee might be able to get information about use of the various

programs and she is especially interested in participation rates for young people who may be diabetic or who have disabilities so that they could have some idea of how we are doing on that. She asked if there should be any discussion on any additional services that we could have to make sure that everyone in town is able to utilize Recreation and Parks. M. McNeill said this is something that she would like to have discussed or have a report on going forward. Ms. Checko said she can put together a report for the next meeting but she said that the Avon Recreation Department is probably at the forefront of Recreation Departments' accommodating people with special needs. She said we have had children with diabetes, behavioral issues, physical disabilities, and we accommodate everyone that we can. We are very in tune to the Department of Justice to the Title 2 and the ADA laws. The consultant that we had as ADA Coordinator recently retired. Ms. Checko said we have been training Ms. Roccapriore to assume those responsibilities. She has been attending seminars and doing lots of research. We have reached out to the Town attorney and we are adding questions to our camp registration to make sure that we know going in, if a child needs accommodations or has medical devices. Ms. Checko said we have Recreation Support Specialists who are assigned to campers or participants that need a little bit of assistance. If a child has an IEP or is more involved then we have Para Professionals and we pay them for their services. Ms. Checko said it is getting harder and harder to find Para Professionals since COVID. She said the Board of Education has their own program for their children and most of them will go there this summer but Recreation will also have their own special needs kids. M. McNeill said she appreciates all of that information and background and she said one of the things for her is that she feels that in the future as a committee we are going to want to communicate the benefits of Recreation and Parks in the Town and if we have stories to tell, we should figure out a way to tell them. M. McNeill said one of the reasons she wanted to be on the committee is to be able to tell the great story of why this is a great community to live in.

Mr. Yass asked if we talk about accessibility in our program materials. Ms. Checko said that our Mission Statement clearly says that we programming and offering opportunities for everyone. Mr. Yass asked if we talk about that in our brochures. Ms. Checko said yes, our policy for special needs accommodations and our limitations are in there. She said one of the things that the multi-purpose room will provide us with is a space and the ability to do more inclusive programming.

M McNeill said to revisit the issue on the Take out what you carry in signs, she drove around town and she said at Fisher Meadows, she wasn't quite sure there was enough signage and there was only one that was in Spanish so she was wondering how we address that going forward in an effort to support Ms. Checko on this issue. Ms. Checko said in the Parks and Recreation world and in the Public Works world there is such a thing as sign pollution.

If you put too many signs up people are not going to read any of them. Ms. Checko said we try to keep the signage on site conservative, then we use email blasts, notes on the websites and any other reminders that we can on social media to supplement to augment what we are doing to support and enforce our policy.

Dr. Gurtman asked if there have been opportunities in the past to see what the public would like, to get a sense of whether they like the programs that are out there or whether they like to see new programs. As far as our efforts in programming we do surveys pretty frequently especially if we have a program that is run by a vendor. Ms. Roccapriore does visit some of the programs a few times but cannot get there for all sessions, so we get input from her visits and we also get parents input from their children's experience. Ms. Checko said as far as new programming, we work on a proposal system and we accept proposals three times a year. There have been many new ideas coming forward for new programming but our challenge is facilities and where to run them. Dr. Gurtman asked Ms. Checko if these programs are from people just coming forward and not us writing to them to see if they want to offer them. Ms. Checko said yes, that is correct. Dr. Gurtman said so rather than having a formal survey, it is responding to comments that come from the community. Ms. Checko said the formal survey would be after the program is run. Ms. Checko asked Ms. Roccapriore to comment. Ms. Roccapriore said is it one of her goals to create a general program survey but she is not sure if it would be sent out once a year or if it would just be on the

website so someone could take it at any point and send it in. She has started to do specific program survey's to see if people like the program or if there was something they would like to see changed.

Mr. Yass said Ms. Checko said the last time a survey was done was in 2007 with the Master Plan and maybe this is something we could add on to the agenda in the future to update that and do a broader or more formal community survey could be part of that.

Dr. Sondheimer said he suspects that the proposals are coming in in part because our neighboring town of Farmington under education has a very extensive continuing education program that has many different offerings. The town of Simsbury has a very active Recreation Department and he would love, as part of educating ourselves, if we could devote some time in the future, just for comparison, to see how our Recreation programs compare to our neighboring towns. He would like to see this done at a future meeting. Dr. Sondheimer said maybe the committee could form a sub-committee to do the program comparison with other towns.

VII. Old Business

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

Ms. Checko said she presented the list of ARPA projects to the Town Council at their February 3, 2022 meeting and at the same meeting, supplemental appropriations were approved for \$100,000 for pool repairs, \$15,000 for the Sycamore Hills Playscape replacement. Ms. Checko said at the March meeting, she asked for approval for \$140,000 for the HVAC system at the Senior Center because two of the units out of the 4 that cool the community room have stopped working. Town Council did approve the supplemental appropriation and it will go to Board of Finance at the end of the month and then that project can be started. Ms. Checko said all of the units will be replaced. Ms. Checko said Town Council is interested in adding another shade shelter at Sycamore Hills Park near the new playscape so she is getting updated costs on that. Ms. Checko said she is also getting updated cost for the two pavilions at Fisher Meadows. She said the cost for Buckingham's preliminary design is getting updated by Engineering. Ms. Checko said Town Council did cut the Sycamore Hills Tennis Court renovation, which was to add pickleball courts but Ms. Checko said she does have money in the capital budget to renovate the tennis courts. The multi-purpose room is still favorable and she said they have asked her to come back with a more conservative figure on the bandstand at Sycamore Hills Park.

VIII. New Business – None

III. Adjournment

Mr. Yass reminded committee members that our next meeting is scheduled for May 10, 2022 at 7:30 a.m. M. McNeill made a motion to adjourn the meeting at 8:19 a.m. James Beaudoin seconded the motion, which passed unanimously.

Respectfully submitted by

Sharon Henry

Sharon Henry
Clerk