

TOWN OF ESSEX 29 West Avenue Essex, CT 06426

PARK AND RECREATION COMMISSION MEETING

Tuesday, March 5, 2024 5:30 pm, Essex Town Hall and Zoom

1. Call to Order: B. Fitton called the meeting of the Town of Essex Park and Recreation Commission to order at 5:30pm.

2. Attendance: Present: Commissioners John Bean, Carolyn Field, Brette Fitton (Chair), Anthony Mosa, Dan Needleman, Mary Ellen Barnes (staff – Essex Park and Recreation Director)

A quorum was established. Absent: Chris Perry

Members of the Public via Zoom: Cory Needleman

3. Approval of Minutes: With a motion by D. Needleman and a 2nd by C. Field, the minutes of the January 9, 2024 meeting were unanimously approved.

4. Public Comment: A member of the public, Cory Needleman, via Zoom, spoke about the need for a fence around the Grove Street Park behind Essex Town Hall.

5. Financial Reports: General Fund Report. D. Needleman inquired about the reference to Seasonal (expense). Mary Ellen Barnes said it refers to the cost for the person who opens and closes Viney Hill Brook Park. Additionally, C. Field asked about the water usage line item. D. Needleman said it refers to the water used at Main Street Park in Ivoryton.

With a motion by C. Field and a 2nd by D. Needleman, the financial reports were unanimously approved.

6. Directors Report, Parks & Program Updates: MaryEllen Barnes gave the following report:

Three Park Events will take place in March: 1. **Catch a Leprechaun 5k on March 16 at Grove Street Park.** 2. **Essex go Bragh Parade on March 23 at Main Street/Grove Street.** Barnes reported that this is expected to be the largest parade we've ever had with 30-35 groups and floats participating. She asked for Commission assistance 9a-12pm. Volunteers arrive at 9am; Barnes will be there at 8:30m. D. Needelman and C. Field will assist in the parking lot in the classic car area. 3. **Essex Eggstravaganza on March 30 at the Grove Street Park.** Barnes asked for Commission assistance from 8:30-10:30. Tim LeChance will work at this event with members of the VRHS basketball team helping.

Looking Ahead – Summer Concerts 2024 have been scheduled starting July 2 at Ivoryton Park

Winter/Spring Programming

Yoga (ages 16 +), New Programming – Kids Cooking, return of Cupcake Decorating (ages 6-16) Archery (ages 8 and up), Zumba, Running Rams (grades k-8) Basketball(k-8) Tennis (ages 7-15) Tennis (Adult 16+) Zumba (k-6), Men’s Basketball – we have had a great turn out for the winter season of programming. Youth Basketball Rec League have wrapped up with a great season and our K-1 coed league was very well attended. Our travel team is in the playoffs, and we are hopeful they will end the season on a positive note.

Summer Program planning is already underway, including:

Summer Camp at EES

Middle School Summer Program

Engineering Camp

Running Rams Camp

Tennis Clinics

Basketball Camp

Family Day with the Yard Goats

Intro to Adult Pickleball

Summer Concerts

Parks Update

All Parks –we are working on spring maintenance plans – and PFC is scheduled for spring cleanups as well.

Grove Street Park - Installing playground grade mulch which will include removing some of the old mulch and then filling it in with the new product. Our Maintenance Supervisor and our P&R assistant will do the bulk of the work with support from DPW.

Comstock Park – The torrential rainstorm in January caused the river to overflow and cross into the Little League ballfield. Professional Field Care will address all areas that were affected during the spring maintenance process.

Viney Brook Park – is scheduled for a deep spring clean-up including the dog park – In addition we will address securing the fence line to make sure no dogs and get under and escape the enclosure. Also, we plan to add a large gate to the small dog park to make access for maintenance easier.

Hubbard Park - STEAP GRANT UPDATE

1st Selectman Norm Needleman has signed the contract to build the new equipment/concession/restroom building. Norm requested that the Director of DPW and the P&R Director schedule meetings with the abutting neighbors for March 12 at 11am at Essex Town Hall to show them the plans for the project and answer any questions they may have. In addition, the neighbor at 75 North Main Street who shares a driveway with the park was invited to a separate meeting with the Director of DPW, P&R and Building Official. That meeting was on Feb. 27th and in attendance were Commissioners Mosa and Fields. During the meeting the focus on the discussion was the parking area and maintaining greenspace. A meeting with the Town Engineer is planned. C. Fields suggested it would be nice to add a bench.

Timeline for the project is to start late July 2025 to be completed by December 2025.

7. Old Business: Discussion took place about the proposed Fitness Trail by Commissioner John Bean. Further discussion tabled to the next meeting.

8. New Business: Discussion centered around the idea for fencing proposed by public member, Cory Needleman. The following ideas were suggested: 1. Completing the already existing stone wall. 2. Adding a single rail/split rail fence with a gate with 12 feet between the split rail fence and the tennis courts. 3. Closing in the children's park. ME Barnes said that the park must have machine access via High Street for the Town crew (Joe enters through High Street); emergency vehicles would need access, and any gates would need to be ADA approved. B. Fitton suggested adding this topic of park perimeter fencing to the next meeting Agenda.

B. Fitton introduced the discussion of what is the role of the commission? How does the Commission bring new ideas beyond Capitol planning, Strategic planning, and Infrastructure? T. Mosa said that historically, the Commission operated in a more independent role. For example, they saw the need for a truck for Essex Park & Recreation and volunteers purchased one. Fitton said that she is interested in having native plants in the parks and minimizing pesticides as an example. She'd also like to host a thank you event for the Police Department for helping to upgrade Sunset Pond.

J. Bean added that he joined the Commission to "give back to the community." He asked how the Commission can add value to Essex Park & Rec.

D. Needleman suggested adding basketball or volleyball tournaments. He also suggested creating a family fun day with renting bouncy castles and providing hot dog vendors as a different way to engage the community.

It was determined that subcommittees are needed in order to meet beyond the bi-monthly Commission meetings and to discuss these new Commissioner-led ideas.

9. General Discussion: D. Needleman said that Little League begins early this year. The fields will be beautiful for opening day. ME Barnes said she is looking into hiring a pickleball instructor. Pickleball programming would be contingent on Region 4 permitting use of the Valley Courts.

With a motion by C. Field and a 2nd by D. Needleman, the meeting was adjourned at 6:30pm.

Respectfully submitted,

Susan K. McCann

Essex Park & Recreation Commission Clerk

Next meeting: May 7, 2024 at 5:30pm