

ESSEX PARK AND RECREATION COMMISSION

May 1, 2013

MINUTES

(Please note these minutes have yet to be approved)

Chairman Mike Holmes called the meeting to order at 7:00pm.

Members Present: Mike Holmes, Cathy Bishop, Tony Mosa, John Bauman, Bob Russo, Jim Rawn.
Doug Senn arrived at 8:00 pm

Park and Recreation Director Rick Audet & Program Manager Mary Ellen Barnes was also present.

First Selectman Norm Needleman arrived at 7:15 .

Approval of Minutes

Motion was made by Bob Russo to accept the April 3, 2013 minutes as presented. Jim Rawn seconded the motion and it was unanimously approved. Motion carried

Public Comments:

None

Financial Updates

General Fund Financial Reports were presented by Rick Audet and reviewed by the commission. Jim Rawn commented that the monies saved on the life guard payroll could be encumbered to offset the contracted expenses for the Viney Hill Brook Park awning project. Rick Audet stated that he was going to submit a request to encumber those funds. Mary Ellen Barnes reviewed the Program Revenue Fund with a general discussion of year to date revenues and expenses for each program as well as the Special Revenue Fund totals year to date.

Motion was made by Jim Rawn to accept the financial statements as presented. Cathy Bishop seconded the motion and it was unanimously approved. Motion carried.

New Business:

First Selectman Norm Needleman notified the Commission that \$5,000.00 for the engineering cost for the Main Street Park Embankment Project was approved at the Town Meeting and that that the result of the application to FEMA for the damage done to the embankment was approved and it is anticipated that the Town will receive \$18,000.00 from FEMA for the embankment damage.

First Selectman Needleman also informed the Commission that Recreation Program Manager, Mary Ellen Barnes will be performing the Social Service Representatives functions for the Town and in this capacity reporting directly to the First Selectman. After a ninety day probationary period he plans to appoint her as the Town's Municipal Agent as well. Mrs. Barnes hours have been adjusted so that they compromise that of a full time employee with benefits. He stated that the Town is updating the Town Hall's personnel manual and updating job descriptions as well.

He also stated that Rick Audet is an excellent employee. That his service on the web site committee was much appreciated and that his hours have been increased so that to include publishing the web site.

Mr. Needleman also stated that the Park and Recreation Director's salary is established by the Board of Selectman and feels that a Commission of volunteers should not have direct oversight of employees and that for Boards and Commissions to establish salaries and set personnel policy would create an unenviable environment. According to the First Selectman, our town is made up of elected, appointed, salaried, hourly, union types of employees and he feels that it is very important that there needs to be set guidelines and policies to accommodate all. He hopes under his administration he leaves the Town in a better place. It's important to him because he loves this town and he knows that the Commission does as well. He stated that the Town doesn't have reasonable employment practices or a chain of command currently however work is very much in progress toward this end. His plans for reorganization are an attempt to clarify and operate as a municipality should according to best practices. Norm stated that he will be seeking to change ordinances as necessary whereby all town employees have a direct line of reporting in our organizational chart to the first selectman and not town boards and commissions. Additionally, Norm feels that the Park and Recreation Commission specifically should not have the authority to create permanent or capital type changes to a park without the concurrent approval of another Town body including the Board of Selectmen and Town Meeting of residents. He hopes this is not a deterrent to the volunteers that comprise the commissions in continuing the valuable and great work that they do.

Tony Mosa asked Mr. Needleman how does he see this Commission operating any differently. Does the Commission's responsibility change? Mr. Needleman replied that he believes there will be some changes including more focus on programs. He stated the ordinance that established the Park and Recreation Commission was poorly designed and it was written some decades ago when the Commission members actually did the work. It also allows for the Commission to make infrastructure changes that do not have to answer to the public. He would like to see a chain of command reporting directly to the First Selectman. Tony Mosa asked how an ordinance is changed and Mr. Needleman responded by a Town Meeting. He also stated that basic oversight of Park and Recreation remains with the Commission, he just wanted to professionalize what we do.

Jim Rawn stated that the Park and Recreation Commission is an independent body and it reports directly to the Town Citizens. Checks and Balances are in place in regards to the budget with approval coming from the Board of Finance and the Board of Selectman approving Commissioners. It was the Park and Recreation Commission that developed the department's job descriptions. Mr. Rawn stated that he believes that Mr. Needleman's reorganization and changes to reporting are interesting. He believes that all Town Boards and Commissions should meet with the Selectman in a workshop format to discuss such proposed changes.

Mr. Needleman stated that the First Selectman is the CEO/Manager for the Town and responsible for the management of the Town's Employees and how can a volunteer Commission manage an employee and why would anyone want the responsibility. In addition an employee should not have seven bosses, imagine how that must feel. He has a problem with an employee reporting directly to a commission.

He believes that Park and Recreation Commission should focus on programming and that it is the responsibility of the First Selectman to focus on infrastructure, now that the Commission has a staff.

Mr. Needleman stated that he is very sensitive to the Commission's concerns and want to make any reorganization a good transition.

Rob Russo stated that he agrees with Mr. Needleman that department employees should report to the Selectman however he believes the role of the commission is important in the employee review process. Mr. Needleman strongly agreed. Mr. Needleman stated that final decisions on pay should be made by the First Selectman. He also stated that there was no formal review process and the town needs to centralize. Presently salary increases are not merit based and he believes some component should be. He believes salary increases should be based on reviews and performance.

John Bauman stated that he serves on a non-Town board as well and that it plays an integral part in staff review and provides input in employee management and he feels it is important to keep the commission as an integral part of the department and asked the First Selectman if the input of the Park and Recreation Commission would be used as a factor in the performance reviews performed by the First Selectman and Norm responded that it would.

Norm Needleman stated that he would like to implement a level of upper management for reporting and oversight of Town operations, the levels would be Finance, Infrastructure and Administration. He also stated that the Commission has a key role in the future of Park and Recreation however, again, any changes to the use or infrastructure of the parks need to go beyond the Commission.

Jim Rawn encourages that the Commission and the Board of Selectman to work together to establish a clear line of communication and understands that any changes of the ordinance needs to be adjusted to include check and balances.

Mike Holmes stated that he understands that there is a risk to the town if changes to the infrastructure are not made, however he feels this Commission get things done and doesn't want the Commission's ability to do that to be taken away. He doesn't just want to show up for meetings and if that was the case serving on the Commission would not be appealing for most commissioners.

Norm Needleman stated that he is seeking only to make changes that protect the liability and risk of the town.

Mr. Mosa asked if any changes would be made to programming. Mr. Needleman responded no, he believes the driving focus of the commission over the next twenty years will be programing. His plans are to identify problems and to create solutions.

Directors Report:

None submitted.

Program Managers Report:

Summer Program Registration is underway, there good response thus far. Mary Ellen Barnes feels that not being able to send flyers home through the school for each program along with the fact it is Little League and Lacrosse season, has hindered enrollment. Many of the afterschool programs have been cancelled due to limited enrollment.

Parks Report:

All parks have been sprayed and fertilized per turf care contract.
All parks have been aerated per turf care contract.

Mowing began the week of April 22, all parks will be mowed by May 2.

Main Street Park

Damaged pine tree removed

Irrigation open and tune completed / damaged irrigation heads replaced.

Dickinson Park

Spring clean-up and debris removal completed, Garden Club will work on beds.

Hubbard Park

Field prep completed for spring by Professional Field Care.

The baseball field was in fantastic shape for the Opening Day ceremony as agreed by all.

Sunset Pond

Grading of embankment completed

PW to maintain grounds and mowing

Ivoryton Green

Landscaped bed work performed by Tower Lab Staff for Earth Day

Pruning of dogwood tree

Irrigation System opened and tuned

Comstock Park

Field prep work completed by Professional Field Care.

Clark's Pond

Viney Hill Brook Park

Stump grinding ordered for dog park.

Additional picnic tables brought into dog park.

New Business Continued:

Cathy Bishop met with Dan Mercuri from the Lions Club about creating a Dog Agility Park within the "small dog area" of the Viney Hill Brook Dog Park. She would also like to honor the Lions Club Volunteers at a bbq over the summer.

Old Business:

- A. Main Street Park Embankment Project
- B. 2013 Lions Club & Park and Rec Commission Project: Viney Hill Brook Park
Awning
- C. Signs in Town Parks
- D. Civic Campus STEAP Grant: Grove Street Park Playground & Tennis Court

Main Street Park Embankment Project:

Rick Audet reported that a simple quote sheet for local engineers went out today to design the work to be performed. The engineer would also complete the Certificate of Permission from the CT DEEP that is required.

2013 Lions Club Awning Project at Viney Hill Brook Park:

Cathy Bishop stated that the concrete pad will be poured Thursday May 2 and that we need to secure the area with caution tape for safety concerns.

Signs in Town Parks

Rick Audet stated that he researched four surrounding town's policies and none had a written policy. He asked the Commission what was the goal of the Commission by creating this policy. The Commission agreed that no signs should be posted in the parks without notifying the Park and Recreation Director. Cathy Bishop stated that there should be no signs in the parks unless they are related to a Park and Recreation supported event. Jim Rawn believes that we should have a non-intrusive designated location to put the sign and it should have limited use. John Bauman wanted to know how we would police this policy, we would need to set up standards. Doug Senn believes we should notify the public of any new procedures. Rick Audet will work on presently a rough draft of a policy for the June meeting.

Civic Campus STEAP Grant: Grove Street Park Playground & Tennis Court

Rick Audet updated the Commission on the status of this project. He stated that he feels that we should maximize our sources of money for the new playground to see if we can add to the monies that we allotted by the STEAP Grant. Mr. Audet distributed initial designs of the playground. The quote for the design is 128,000.00 that includes everything but installation. The Commission asked what additional funds are needed. Rick Audet suggested allocating 30,000.00 from the Park and Recreation Capitol Fund to cover the expenses that exceed the 150,000.00 STEAP Grant for the project.

Motion was made by Doug Senn to allocate 30,000.00 from the Park and Recreation Capitol Fund to cover the expenses that exceed the 150,000.00 STEAP Grant for the project. Bob Russo accepted the motion and it was unanimously approved. Motion Carried

Commission Overview:

Bob Russo wanted to thank Jim Rawn for organizing the Memorial for Jack Spangler. Jim Rawn stated that he very much appreciated that the Commission attended.

Public Comment:

None

General Discussion:

Tony Mosa stated that he agreed with Mike Holmes about his earlier comments pertaining to First Selectman's statements and the future role of the Commission. The Commission agreed that further discussions are necessary.

Motion was made by Doug Senn to adjourn at 9:15pm. Bob Russo seconded the motion and it was unanimously approved. Motion carried.

Respectfully submitted,
Mary Ellen Barnes
Essex Park and Recreation