

TOWN OF ESSEX  
Park and Recreation Commission

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Telephone (860) 767-4340 x110 • FAX (860) 767-8509

**Regular Members**

*Robert Russo, Chairman*  
*John Bauman*  
*Thomas Clerkin*  
*Anthony Mosa*  
*James Rawn*  
*Douglas Senn*  
*Virginia Willetts*  
*Edward Burleson, Alternate*  
*Peter Sarner, Alternate*

**Unapproved**

**Minutes - Regular Meeting**  
Wednesday, September 2, 2015

**Call to Order and Seating of Members**

The regularly scheduled meeting of the Essex Park & Recreation Commission was conducted on September 2, 2015 in Conference Room A, of the Essex Town Hall at 7:00 p.m.

**Attending Members:**

Robert Russo  
Virginia Willetts  
Anthony Mosa  
Thomas Clerkin  
James Rawn  
Edward Burleson arrived at 7:10 pm and was seated for John Bauman  
Peter Sarner arrived at 7:30pm

**Absent Members:**

John Bauman  
Douglas Senn

Honored Guest: First Selectman, Norman Needleman

**Staff:**

Mary Ellen Barnes, Park & Recreation Director  
Stella Beaudoin, Recording Clerk

R. Russo called the meeting to order at 7:00 p.m.

**Approval of April 1, 2015 Regular Meeting Minutes**

**MOTION** made by T. Clerkin to approve the April 1, 2015 Regular Meeting Minutes with the following amendment: correct the spelling of Virginia *Willetts*; **SECONDED:** V. Willetts; **Voting In Favor:** R. Russo,

T. Clerkin, A. Mosa, E. Burleson, V. Willetts, J. Rawn; **Opposed:** None; **Abstaining:** None; **Approved:** 6/0/0.

### **Public Comment**

Two youths who were in the audience stated that they enjoyed the Park and Rec sponsored summer camp and made special mention of the archery program.

### **Selectman's Report**

First Selectman, Norman Needleman stated that with is oversight, the Town attorney, David Royston has reviewed the Park and Recreation ordinance and a revision to the ordinance has been crafted to better suit the way in which the Park and Rec Commission is currently functioning. The original ordinance was written in 1967.

N. Needleman stated that from the inception of the Park and Rec Department, the Commission was comprised of volunteers who managed the various sports activities, i.e., football, baseball, etc. N. Needleman noted that the Town currently employees professional staff to manage the various recreational programs.

N. Needleman stated that it was a challenge to create a happy balance between structure that once existed and structure that currently exists. The scope of the Commission's authority was reviewed as was the scope of the authority in other Town's Park and Rec Commissions. N. Needleman stated that there was some weakness in the ordinance in that there was too much empowerment without oversight. The Commission serves a vital purpose going forward in terms of programs and the challenges of presenting new and novel ways to serve the public.

N. Needleman stated that he would like to have the Commission members maintain an active participation in the programs offered to the Town and he noted that his vision for the Town's infrastructure is going to be that all municipal infrastructure will be managed by professional infrastructure specialist. N. Needleman stated that this ordinance is not looking to disrupt the operations of the Commission, however it addresses the reality on the ground.

N. Needleman stated that he is comfortable with the programming and the way in which the Commission currently operates. N. Needleman suggested that the Commissioners review the proposed ordinance and stated that he would be happy to return to a future meeting to address any questions and listen to further suggestions.

A Mosa questioned if the other Commissions within the Town operate in the same manor.

N. Needleman stated that a Sanitary Waste Commission had existed for the past 40 years. This Commission oversaw the solid waste management operations and when the landfill closed and with the inception of the transfer station, that Commission ceased to have a purpose and was dissolved. There

are no Commissions within the Town that operate with employees other than the Zoning Commission, who is statutorily assigned and obligated to have the Zoning Enforcement Officer in attendance at their meetings, however the ZEO reports to the First Selectman on a daily basis.

N. Needleman stated that the ordinance was established in 1967 and the Commission was created because parks were a neglected piece of infrastructure and there was not a good deal of focus on the parks. The ordinance was amended to increase the size of the Commission because the thought was the more members, the more volunteers. Over the years, the Commission has made the decision that they need help. The Town attorney re-wrote the ordinance to incorporate those changes made by the Selectmen and this newest ordinance would replace anything written in the past.

The Board of Selectmen would like input from the Park and Rec Commission and a vote of support for the ordinance. The Board of Selectmen will then decide what language to incorporate into the ordinance and then vote to either accept or to reject the amended ordinance. If accepted, a Town meeting will be scheduled and once approved, the ordinance will be adopted. N. Needleman asked the Commissioners to review and to put forward suggestions that will take the ordinance into the next twenty years and in-process look to reinvent and redefine the Park and Rec Commission to continue to be a vital, ongoing influence.

A. Mosa noted that this development would remove the Commission from making policy decisions and continue in the tradition of simply volunteering, i.e., coaching basketball, etc. and assist M. Barnes with some of the programs.

N. Needleman stated that he is not adverse to the Commission making policy decisions, however he is not in favor of the Commission managing an employee, nor does he wish for the budget to be micro managed, as those are the responsibilities of the Selectman.

B. Russo referenced Section 7 of the ordinance which speaks to the Commission's accountability to the Selectmen and responsibility to make policy.

N. Needleman stated that he would like to move forward on the completion and approval of the ordinance prior to the end of the year.

T. Clerkin suggested that members arrive at 6:00pm to the October 7, 2015 meeting to discuss the ordinance. Members will mark up their draft copies and forward to M. Barnes prior to the October 7<sup>th</sup> meeting.

B. Russo thanked members for their attendance this evening and asked the Commissioners to think about what Park and Rec has accomplished and, moving forward, what things are most important.

### **Financial Reports**

R. Russo referenced the Commission's financials from the previous fiscal year and noted that the staffing change greatly assisted with a reduction to the budget.

M. Barnes distributed the General Fund Budget Reports for July 2015 and September 2015. The September 1, 2015 budget report offers a summary of the summer for which 99% of the summer programs fall into this fiscal year with the exception of Track and Field which falls under the previous fiscal year budget. M. Barnes stated that the year-to-date revenue is similar to that of last year, and the expenditures are a bit less. Program Revenue is up \$10,000 from 2014 fiscal year.

M. Barnes reported that Ivoryton is in the midst of putting the park back together. There were additional expenses related to irrigation and to installation of updated electrical.

R. Russo stated that it was prudent to upgrade the electrical and other necessary updates while the park was in process of renovation.

M. Barnes reported that Program Revenue is in the black and that revenue is up \$6,294.

**MOTION** made by V. Willetts to accept the September 1, 2015 budget report as presented; **SECONDED:** T. Clerkin; **Voting In Favor:** R. Russo, T. Clerkin, A. Mosa, E. Burleson, V. Willetts, J. Rawn; **Opposed:** None; **Abstaining:** None; **Approved:** 6/0/0.

**MOTION** made by J. Rawn to accept the July 1, 2015 budget report as presented; **SECONDED:** V. Willetts; **Voting In Favor:** R. Russo, T. Clerkin, A. Mosa, E. Burleson, V. Willetts, J. Rawn; **Opposed:** None; **Abstaining:** None; **Approved:** 6/0/0.

#### **Director's Report / Parks & Program Update**

M. Barnes reported that the location of the summer camp was changed due to roofing construction at Essex Elementary School. This year's program which was conducted at the Essex Town Hall was highly successful and received rave reviews from parents. The campers had access to Grove Street Park, Playground and tennis courts. Hubbard Park and Cross Lots were also utilized on a daily basis. Hubbard Park provided an opportunity for a variety of sports and the volleyball nets provided a new sport experienced for the campers. The library was also utilized and quickly became another favorite location.

Access to the kitchen in the Essex Town Hall further enriched the program allowing campers to incorporate cooking activities into the weekly themes. M. Barnes reported that the new location at the Town Hall quickly gained popularity and the access to a variety of local parks and other resources increased the enrollment as the summer pressed on. The campers were very happy with the change of venue and M. Barnes has received a great deal of positive feedback from parents, children and the public regarding the new location of the summer camp.

The Letter to the Editor in the Valley Courier titled *Happy Accident*, supported the change in venue and commented on the increase in opportunities to the campers at the Essex Town Hall that are not available at the Elementary School. M. Barnes received an email from Jessica Branciforte who heads the Children's Department at the Town Library in which she states how wonderful it was to have the

campers visit the library throughout the summer and further commented on how well the Park and Rec staff conducted themselves and managed the campers.

There were eight full time staff including a Director and Assistant Director and there were three new hires all of whom were CPR and first aid trained. The counselors also received blood borne pathogen training. There were 125 participants ages 5-12 and there were 35 weeks of scholarships offered to 50 eligible students. The ratio to campers was 8-1 and with the younger campers it was 5-1.

The field trips included, Hammonasset State Park, Bowling, Mystic Aquarium and Mystic Seaport, Essex Historical Society property tour, Pequot Museum, Northford Ice Pavillion. Special guests for Science Week included Elizabeth Bartlett, Ivoryton Library Children's Librarian and member of Essex Garden Club.

The Essex Garden Club sponsored 15 children and there was one sponsorship from a private citizen the remainder funded by the Student Assistance fund at Essex Elementary School.

A total of 80 campers attended Slatina Jamma basketball, each session, and over 45 campers attended the Track and Field Camp. Tennis was held for four sessions with an average of 10 campers per session. Baseball Camp had 13 attendees and the Girls Basketball camp had 17 campers. The girl's LAX program was cancelled. Over 80% of the participants for the summer programs registered online.

#### **Grove Street Park**

- CIRMA conducted a Playground Safety Inspection and they recommended the placement of mulch to the playground. Mulch and new surface material was installed.
- Two bulbs are out in the tennis courts and M. Barnes is working with DPW to replace. There is a likelihood that a lift will need to be rented to install the bulbs.
- Sullivan paving completed the second phase of the stamped asphalt entryway for the Tennis Courts, installing the new walkway to the park side tennis court entrance.

#### **Sunset Pond**

- DPW mowing is ongoing.
- Water treatment was performed by CT Pond Services.

#### **Ivoryton Green**

- The Grant Project is now complete and the irrigation system is running and set to aggressively water due to the dry conditions during construction.
- Turf care is scheduled for September, fertilization has been performed and mowing is ongoing.
- M. Barnes reported on all of the upgrades to the Green, post-renovation. The State of CT stated that they did not wish to subsidize the installation of the live hedge or the fence. N. Needleman discussed the safety issue with the State of CT who then agreed that the fence may stay and the live hedge may be installed, however it may not be more than 30 inches in height.
- The Farmer's Market has been a great success.

#### **Comstock Park**

- J Kuzaro recommended that most of the major work within the parks should be conducted in the Fall. This will place those parks within the purview of the Park and Recreation Commission on same schedule with Region 4 schools.

#### **Clark's Pond**

- DPW mowing is ongoing
- Water treatment performed by CT Pond Services

#### **Viney Hill Brook Park**

- Water testing was performed throughout the summer and there were no issues with the water quality.
- Spring cleanup was completed.
- VRHS students assisted with clean up for Community Help program.
- DPW mowing is ongoing.
- The Gate is being opened and closed daily.
- M. Barnes called Bogaert Construction in June to inquire if the Pavilion construction would be completed prior to July 1. M. Barnes has not received a return call.

#### **Hubbard Park**

- The basketball has had some severe cracking, however the surface is no longer covered under warranty.
- The perimeter fencing around the court and behind the shed and snack shack had a severe amount of weeds, vines and overgrowth which was removed by Professional Field Care.
- The playing field fencing capital improvement has been completed.
- The playing field infield upgrades will be completed in September which includes clay conditioning and re-sodding the infield. M. Barnes reported that the Park and Rec Department has partnered with the Essex Little League to re-sod the area. Park and Rec will subsidize some of the cost, however as previously discussed, Essex Little League will pay for a portion of the re-sodding.
- The seasonal water pit will be upgraded working with Ivoryton Plumbing and CT Water Company. Proposed additional upgrades address overflow parking in the grass area, replacement of perimeter fencing along the driveway, basketball court, shed and concession stand. Additional upgrade needed is replacement of the score board.

V. Willetts suggested the installation of netting to prevent balls from going into neighbor's yards.

M. Barnes will investigate the upgrades and price it out and she will look into the cost of a new scoreboard.

#### **Dickinson Park**

- DPW is mowing is ongoing.
- The Garden Club cleaned out the beds, performed park clean up including tree pruning with the oversight of Augie Pampel, tree warden.

#### **Main Street Park**

- The Seawall Restoration is complete, the dock is secured and the park looks great. M. Barnes stated that she would like to replace the picnic tables and Allison Nichols has offered to donate a picnic table in memory of her husband, Neil Nichols.
- The Embankment Project had some plantings die off over the summer due to the lack of rainfall and they will be replaced. The embankment has remained stable.

#### **New Business**

The Ivoryton Village Gardeners will plant a Sunset Maple on Sunday, September 13, 2015 at 2:00 p.m. There will be a celebration at the Ivoryton Library following the tree planting.

#### **Old Business**

There was no old business.

#### **Commission Overview**

R. Russo stated that N. Needleman has approached the Commission regarding the change of the structure within the Park and Rec Commission and noted that the Commission needs to focus efforts in a few different places. R. Russo asked that Commissioners commit to attending the Pumpkin Festival and commit to attending the parade, and he asked Commissioners to commit to volunteer to work on a committee on either or both of those events.

#### **Adjournment**

**MOTION** made by V. Willetts to adjourn at 8:40 p.m. to the next regularly scheduled Park and Recreation meeting to be held on Wednesday, October 7, 2015 at the Essex Town Hall, 2<sup>nd</sup> Floor Conference Room B, 29 West Avenue at 6:00 p.m.; **SECONDED:** A. Mosa; **Voting In Favor:** R. Russo, T. Clerkin, A. Mosa, E. Burseson, V. Willetts, J. Rawn; **Opposed:** None; **Abstaining:** None; **Approved:** 6/0/0.

Respectfully submitted,

Stella C. Beaudoin  
Recording Secretary