

TOWN OF ESSEX
Park and Recreation Commission

29 West Avenue • Essex, Connecticut 06426
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 Willets
Edward Burlison, Alternate
Peter Sarner, Alternate

Unapproved

Minutes - Regular Meeting
Wednesday, April 1, 2015

Call to Order and Seating of Members

The regularly scheduled meeting of the Essex Park & Recreation Commission was conducted on April 1, 2015 in Conference Room A, of the Essex Town Hall at 7:00 p.m.

Attending Members:

Robert Russo
Virginia Willets
Thomas Clerkin
James Rawn
Peter Sarner seated for John Bauman

Absent Members:

John Bauman
Anthony Mosa
Doug Senn
Edward Burlison

Staff:

Mary Ellen Barnes, Interim Park & Recreation Director

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

Approval of March 4, 2015 Regular Meeting Minutes

MOTION made by P. Sarner to approve the March 4, 2015 Minutes as presented; **SECONDED** by V. Willets; **Voting In Favor:** R. Russo, T. Clerkin, P. Sarner, V. Willets, J. Rawn; **Opposed:** None; **Abstaining:** None; **Approved:** 5/0/0.

Public Comment

Dennis Robida, Cedar Grove Terrace Extension to discuss the cessation of the opening and closing of the Viney Hill Brook Park gate. D. Robida provided a brief history on Viney Hill Brook Park Preserve and stated that he has been involved in the development of Viney Hill Brook Park since the inception in 2000. D. Robida stated that there has been a longstanding process of communication with the

surrounding neighbors and he expressed his disapproval over the cessation of the gate which closed at sunset and opened at 7:00am.

D. Robida referenced an A-2 survey of the Park, pointing out the location of the gate. During the development of the Park the surrounding neighbors on Hillside Drive were assured that the placement of a gate at the entrance to the active area would be installed which would assure no passage into the Park after dusk. D. Robida stated that there is a longstanding track record of parties occurring in the Park in the hours after dark. When the gate was installed, the partying ceased. D. Robida stated that there was an incident one year ago where the State police were called and they appeared 45 minutes after the call. D. Robida stated that the police do not monitor the park.

R. Russo stated that he appreciated D. Robida's attendance at this evening's meeting and his comments related to Viney Hill Brook Park.

J. Rawn thanked D. Robida for presenting. J. Rawn stated that an understanding and an agreement was in place between the Selectmen and the Planning Commission that there would be a gate in place which would be closed at sunset and opened at 7:00am. J. Rawn stated that a commitment was made to over thirty homes for a gate to be installed.

Tom Mack who resides with Shelly Mack on Hillside Drive stated that the Public Works department is in the area early every day in the summer to empty the trash barrels, and the police monitor the area daily. He suggested that the Town ask the police to come back at sunset to lock the gate. The Town has paid someone a few thousand dollars yearly to ensure that the gate is opened and locked at day's end.

Norman Needleman, First Selectman stated that the Town is constantly looking for ways to save money. The cessation of the gate is being done on a trial basis. Viney Hill Brook is an underutilized park and the swimming area is seldom used. N. Needleman stated that in the interest of saving a few dollars, there was a proposal made to leave the gate open which would save money and also make the park more accessible.

T. Mack stated that this is not a monetary issue. If the Town is willing to pay someone \$3-4,000 to open and close the gate, that was money spent inappropriately allocated when Public Works is at the Park every day to empty trash barrels and this is a task they could easily handle. T. Mack suggested that if the park is underused, then the gate should remain locked.

N. Needleman stated that the Park is not private property which would preclude the ability to keep the gate locked, and he noted that he would like to make the property more accessible. Further, leaving the task to open and close the gate to fall upon the duty of the Public Works department, is not the most reliable way to do it. N. Needleman stated that he is being asked to put Town resources toward opening and closing the gate and we do not have the capability to do so on a reliable basis. N. Needleman stated

that he will give his word that the issue will be looked at again after the trial period. At this time there is no recommendation to take the gate down.

Jim Mack, Hillside Drive stated that there has been vandalism in the park. There are people speeding up and down the road and accidents on the road because it is not monitored. He stated that he has had other people's dogs on his deck threatening to bite. J. Mack stated that he works hard on his yard and frequently while working in his yard, he has had people who trespass with their dogs and in the process destroy all of the yard work.

Penny Mack, Hillside Drive stated that she had someone knock on her door and asked if they could drive across her property as a means to exit the park. In an attempt to access the park, this same person drove across her yard, taking down a fence. P. Mack stated that there are many infringements on her property and invasion of her property because of the Park. The cessation of the gate will further exacerbate their privacy and compromise their property. P. Mack stated that the swimming area may be underutilized, however the Paw Park, the hiking trails and the remainder of the park is extensively utilized.

N. Needleman stated that if the cessation of the gate is going to cause this large of a controversy, he will keep the gate in place. There was a desire to speak with the neighbors before a decision was made, however the harsh winter caught all by surprise.

J. Mack suggested that Public Works open and close the gate Monday through Friday and leave it up to the Board of Selectmen to find someone to open and close on the weekends. J. Mack stated that the sum of \$3-4,000 to monitor the gate, for a Town as affluent as Essex is not a talking point.

R. Russo stated that there was a promise made to the residents and it is important to keep that commitment. Particularly if in doing so, offers the community a sense of security in their own homes.

N. Needleman stated that the issue and current proposal will remain as is, and further dialogue on the gate will be conducted. N. Needleman agreed to reinstate the daily, 7:00am opening of the gate and closure and locking at sunset.

MOTION made by R. Russo to reinstate the locking and the unlocking of the gate at the Viney Hill Brook Park and to pursue funding for the same with the Board of Selectman. **SECONDED** by J. Rawn; **Voting In Favor:** R. Russo, T. Clerkin, P. Sarnier, V. Willets, J. Rawn; **Opposed:** None; **Abstaining:** None; **Approved:** 5/0/0.

Financial Reports

M. Barnes reported that the Town Hall's systems were in process of upgrade and as such she was unable to update the month end report for distribution at this evening's meeting. M. Barnes stated that she will forward the report to members, when available, for review at the May 6, 2015.

Director's Report / Parks & Program Update

M. Barnes reported:

- The Essex Go Bragh event did not occur.
- Despite the snow and the rain, the March 28, 2015 Egg Hunt was a huge success.
- Spring/Summer Programs are ongoing.
- Basketball League Updates – Review of Information re Local Programs:
M. Barnes stated that there was a very limited feedback to the survey, perhaps five or so responses. She will resend. At the March 4th meeting, former Park and Recreation member, Cecelia Brown stated that it is the responsibility of the Park and Recreation Commission to make programs developmentally appropriate and fun for the age group and she expressed concern regarding the appropriate ball size and court lengths. M. Barnes spoke with the Park and Recreation Departments in the Towns of Old Saybrook, Westbrook, Guilford, Clinton and Haddam-Killingworth and she reported that programming in each Town differs. The Old Saybrook Park and Rec Director was extremely well-versed on the topic and an extensive discussion was conducted on the court size and half court size and the grouping of the players. R. Russo stated that enrollment is declining in the elementary school and moving forward, Park and Rec will need to mold the program around the age and enrollment by changing the court size, etc. in order to make it as appealing as possible. A transition year will occur which will help to determine where the fourth graders stand.
- Job Positing & Job Description– Recreation Aide-Update;
Allison, who was hired as a temporary aide has now been offered a permanent position. There is an additional recreation aid who was hired. This young man attends Middlesex Community College and he has coached at Deep River Park and Rec and he has participated in basketball and baseball. M. Barnes reported that she has applied for the Essex Park and Recreation Director's position.
- Correspondence: None
- April Park Permitted Events - Grove Street Park - The Literacy Volunteers 5L/Backwards Mile which will occur on April 11, 2015 is an annual event ongoing for the past seven years. Grove Street Park is maintained by the Public Works Department who will make sure the park is in proper working order.
- Main Street Park Seawall Restoration is moving forward under the oversight of Park and Recreation: M. Barnes reported that she has not experienced a good deal of success in getting bids for this project. However, Joe Kuzaro, mason looked at the seawall project and he will provide an estimate for the repair.

MOTION made by J. Rawn to authorize M. Barnes to utilize the previously budgeted \$12,000 for the installation of the fence and repair of the seawall. **SECONDED** by P. Sarner; **Voting In Favor:** R. Russo, T. Clerkin, P. Sarner, V. Willets, J. Rawn; **Opposed:** None; **Abstaining:** None; **Approved:** 5/0/0.

- M. Barnes reported that she and J. Kuzaro visited Comstock Park, Hubbard Park, Main Street Park, Ivoryton Park and Viney Hill Brook Park. Although J. Kuzaro does not typically handle the mowing for Viney Hill Brook Park, he will handle the spring clean-up of the dog parks and the park itself. He will blow the leaves and do general clean up. The fields are currently closed, however Hubbard Park will open on Wednesday, April 1st and Comstock open on Friday, April 3rd.

April 20, 2015 is the first baseball game and J. Kuzaro will have Comstock in playing order. 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.

- Grove Street Park Safety Inspection is scheduled for April 23rd with CIRMA. DPW will maintain this part including spring/fall clean up and mowing. M. Barnes contacted Sullivan paving to complete the second phase of the stamped asphalt entryway for the Tennis Courts. The nets are up and the courts are open, however the lights are not yet on. The courts will be open until sunset through May 1st, then the lights will be turned on to allow for evening use of the courts.

NEW BUSINESS

There was no new business.

OLD BUSINESS

Ivoryton Grant Updates

M. Barnes reported that this project went out to bid and the deadline is this week. The construction phase is between the months of May to June. The road will not be closed, however it will be subject to the construction. The Ivoryton Park project will be completed around mid-June. The bid includes the upgrades to the electrical and the installation of the live hedge fence which will be salt resistant.

M. Barnes reported on the Viney Hill Brook awning project. The roof is not on yet, but she expects this portion of the construction to be accomplished once the weather conditions are drier.

Commission Overview

No report.

Adjournment

MOTION made by T. Clerkin to adjourn at 8:50 p.m. to the next regularly scheduled Park and Recreation meeting to be held on Wednesday, May 6, 2015 at the Essex Town Hall, 2nd Floor Conference Room B, 29 West Avenue at 7:00 p.m.; **SECONDED** by J Rawn; **Voting In Favor:** R. Russo, T. Clerkin, P. Sarner, V. Willets, J. Rawn; **Opposed:** None; **Abstaining:** None; **Approved:** 5/0/0.

Respectfully submitted,

Stella C. Beaudoin
Recording Secretary