

TOWN OF ESSEX  
**Park and Recreation Commission**

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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 Willetts*  
*Edward Burleson, Alternate*  
*Peter Sarner, Alternate*

**Unapproved**

**MINUTES Wednesday, November 4, 2015 – Special Meeting**

**Call to Order and Seating of Members**

The regularly scheduled meeting of the Essex Park & Recreation Commission was conducted on November 4, 2015 in Conference Room B, of the Essex Town Hall at 6:00 p.m.

**Attending Members:**

Robert Russo  
Virginia Willetts  
James Rawn  
Anthony Mosa  
Edward Burleson arrived at 6:57 and seated for D. Senn

**Absent Members:**

John Bauman  
Thomas Clerkin  
Douglas Senn  
Peter Sarner

**Staff:**

Norman Needleman, First Selectman  
Bruce Glowac, Board of Selectmen  
Stacia Rice- Libby, Board of Selectmen  
Mary Ellen Barnes, Park & Recreation Director  
Stella Beaudoin, Recording Clerk

R. Russo called the meeting to order at 6:04 p.m.

R. Russo stated that the purpose for this meeting is to discuss the proposed ordinance revision for the Park and Recreation Commission. R. Russo stated that the proposal for an ordinance revision has been in the works since the spring of 2015 and the purpose of this proposal is to reflect the current standards of the Commission within the ordinance, noting that much has changed since the original ordinance was written.

The inception of the Park and Rec Commission stemmed from the need to take care of the parks within the Town and there is a long history of volunteers staffing the parks. In the past several years, the Town has hired professional staff for the overview of the parks and recreation and this ordinance proposal adapts to the current situation.

First Selectman N. Needleman stated that previously, the Park and Recreation Commission was in a position to make decisions that did not require the Town's participation for the use of a park. N. Needleman stated that he is seeking the Commission's feedback on this ordinance proposal.

A Mosa commented on the process of attrition as related to the Park and Rec Commission and questioned the membership numbers, noting that the Commission's new size would consist of five members, which would require three members to constitute a quorum. A Mosa questioned if the reason to reduce the required membership is to insure that the Commission has a quorum at the monthly meeting.

N. Needleman stated that staff has been added to the Park and Rec Department, and the staff handles a good deal of the administrative duties. N. Needleman asked for the Commission to approve a motion to amend the ordinance proposal before them this evening. N. Needleman stated that the purpose of the amendment is to recognize the changes within the Commission and the within the Town. There has been difficulty sustaining the daily operations from volunteers. Positions were created and part time staff has been retained to assist. The role of the Commission has expanded and the Town is always looking for more people engaged to do more work. Now, more of the work is going to staff who reports to the First Selectmen as opposed to reporting to the Commission. There is a smaller core of people handling program related events. The Park and Rec Director is always looking for assistance. N Needleman stated that the changing reality of the world led us to want to continue to provide services and minimize the financial impact on the Town, and he noted, to that end, the Department and the Commission have reached a happy medium. The Park and Rec Director, M. Barnes, with the assistance of part time help is able to produce a high standard of work and programming, and the Department is running well. N. Needleman stated that the proposed amendment to the ordinance is reasonable and will serve to minimize any undermining.

A Mosa stated that he agrees that the Commissions within the Town should be responsible to report to the elected top Town official.

It was noted that Park and Recreation has traditionally been a policy-making Commission and as such, has maintained policy with staff. If policy making is totally removed from the purview of the Commission there would be no reason to have a Park and Rec Commission. Volunteer work for pumpkin festivals and basketball tournaments can be achieved as private citizens, however if the Commission is eliminated who then develops the policy; the Selectman's office of the Selectmen as a group.

N. Neeldeman stated that the Commission plays a vital role and not his intent that the Commission report to Selectmen, however Park and Rec staff does report to the municipal government. The Commission's role morphed, as added professional infrastructure management was incorporated, and

the Department now interfaces with the Public Works Department who assists in project completion in conjunction with Park and Rec projects and events. N Needleman stated that the function of the Commission is for policy making on the direction in which we want Park and Rec services and programming to move. N. Needleman commented on the importance of the role of the Commission and he stated that a turning point was when the Commission wanted to employ paid help. There was a recognition that in order to manage the affairs of the Town, we needed an employee. From the standpoint of all of the volunteers, doing all of the work and setting all of the policy, this created conflicting situations and the amended ordinance creates a very clear organizational chart.

R. Russo stated that within the amended ordinance, Section 7, Item e. states that the Commission shall recommend to the Board of Selectmen for adoption, such rules and regulations as the Commission deems necessary and advisable for the proper control, development, management, operation and maintenance of all parks, recreational areas, facilities, playgrounds, playfields, and other facilities under its jurisdiction.

A Mosa stated the policies will be reviewed by the Board of Selectmen and they will make decisions on what policies are to be kept and what are to be deleted.

J Rawn commented on an email he sent on November 3, 2015 related to this evening's special meeting and in which he references the Board of Selectmen September 1, 2015 meeting minutes. N Needleman stated for the record that he was not copied on that email.

J. Rawn stated that many commissions have a problem obtaining a quorum and all Towns have seen a reduction in participation of citizens. J. Rawn stated that the question of reporting was an open discussion at the time that the Commission was establishing the Director's position, which was approved. J. Rawn stated that the Commission has drifted away from the policy and he stated that in order to make this amendment an effective document, it would behoove the Commission to sit down and go through the list of things that the Commissioners are interested in adjusting, and the to discuss their reasons, and how to proceed. J Rawn stated this Commission should be an independent Commission as all the Commissions within the Town are and he stated that the Commissions within Essex report to the Town, not to the selectmen. J. Rawn stated that he would advocate to the Commission to consider moving slowly on the amendment proposal. J. Rawn stated that there does not appear to be any serious time constraint related to the approval of the amendment and he stated that the Park and Rec Commission should not be different than any other Commission within Town, in that they will report to the Town, not to the First Selectman.

A Mosa asked for clarification as to whom the Commission's report.

N. Needleman stated that appointment of members is the duty of the Board of Selectman which is approved at a Town meeting. N. Needleman stated that the ordinance amendment stands on its own, however he is open for suggestions and comments.

J Rawn distributed a list of the "P & R Commission's Role / Function As A "Check & Balance" for Town Agencies Re Parks & Recreation Issues".

R Russo questioned the relevance of this list to the ordinance amendment

J. Rawn stated that the Commission has always reported to the Town as an independent body.

R Russo stated that there are several different types of Commissions within the various Towns. There are regulatory commissions, who have enforcement actions and they possess regulatory duties and powers, and there are Park and Rec Commissions who do not have those regulatory and independent powers to make decisions over land use, etc.

J Rawn stated that within the Town of Essex all of the Commissions directly report to the Town citizens. As a result of that structure, situations have arisen where the Commission has had to respond from people who are not involved in the parks. J Rawn stated that he does not think that should change and suggested that the Commission revisit the language.

N Needleman stated that this amendment has been on the agenda since March 2015. N Needleman stated that the Town attorney took his ideas and the ideas of the Board of Selectmen and created the language for the proposed amendment.

J Rawn stated that under this ordinance, he wants the Park and Rec Commission to continue to report to the citizens.

N. Needleman stated that the Board of Selectmen is looking to provide oversight to a non-statutory Commission that has had too broad a range of authority.

#### Public Comment

B Glowac stated that historically the Park and Rec Commission has maintained a relationship with the Town. B. Glowac stated that he previously owned and operated a landscaping business and in that capacity, he worked closely with the Town maintaining the parks. At that time the Commission was a working Commission comprised of a group of volunteers that oversaw the duties of Park and Rec and whom were also very active within the Town. B. Glowac stated that when he was elected as the Essex First Selectman, he had the job of overseeing all of the Boards and Commissions, and he noted that there is a distinctive difference between the regulatory and the non-regulatory Commissions, stating that the Park and Rec Commission must have a symbiotic relationship with the Board of Selectmen. The Board of Selectmen will enforce or bring a change to the community if there are problems within the parks, and the Commission should have oversight responsibilities, but the oversight should come from the Board of Selectmen. B Glowac stated that as related to this ordinance proposal, N. Needleman brought it forward as there were some issues, and he asked the Town attorney to draft the ordinance and there is merit to this amendment. The Commission cannot oversee an employee if they are going to meet only every three months. There have been times when the Park and Rec Commission has gone several consecutive months with not meeting due to a lack of a quorum. B. Glowac stated that there has to be a better working relationship between the Board of Selectmen and the Commission and he urged the Commission to review the amendment, and if it makes sense, the Commission should take a vote on it.

S. Rice Libby stated that she previously served on the Park and Rec Commission and noted that the duties have changed over the years. S. Libby stated that it is a concern that there is a lack of quorum on a regular basis and given the challenges faced by the Commission over the past several months, this ordinance makes sense. It has been on the Board of Selectmen agenda since March 2015 and pro-active decisions must be made as to how to move forward.

Bruce Glowac left the meeting at 7:01 pm.

M. Barnes stated that four members constitute a quorum.

N. Needleman suggested that the focus be on how to obtain more volunteers and to engage the younger people in-Town to volunteer. Focus should also be on obtaining more programming. N. Needleman stated that the second biggest attraction for a Town is recreational facilities and programming. Engaging volunteers is critical in enhancing programming and keeping taxes low.

**MOTION** made by A. Mosa to approve the amended and restated ordinance creating a Park and Recreation Commission for the Town of Essex, as presented on November 4, 2015; **SECONDED:** V. Willetts;

**Discussion:** J. Rawn stated that all of the commissioners have devoted time and energy to the goals discussed by the First Selectmen. The Town is fortunate to have the physical facilities and a community that supports park and recreation. J. Rawn questioned if the motivation for the ordinance amendment is to address quorum and he stated his reluctance in supporting something that addresses a quorum. J. Rawn stated that the Town is structured with checks and balances and would not like to see that changed.

**Voting In Favor:** R. Russo, V. Willetts, A. Mosa; **Opposed:** J. Rawn; **Abstaining:** E. Burleson;  
**Approved:** 3/1/1.

**MOTION** made by V. Willetts to adjourn at 7:03pm; **SECONDED:** A Mosa; **Voting in Favor:** R. Russo, V. Willetts, A. Mosa, J. Rawn, E. Burleson; **Opposed:** None; **Abstaining:** None; **Approved:** 5/0/0

Respectfully submitted,

Stella C. Beaudoin  
Recording Secretary