

ESSEX PARK AND RECREATION COMMISSION
MINUTES
December 11, 2013

SPECIAL MEETING

(Please note these minutes have yet to be approved)

Acting Chairman Tony Mosa called the meeting to order at 7:08pm.

Members Present: Cathy Bishop, Jim Rawn, John Bauman, Tony Mosa, Bob Russo, First Selectman Norman Needleman.

Park and Recreation Director Rick Audet was also present.

Acting Chairman Tony Mosa called meeting to order at 7:08 pm.

Acting Chairman Tony Mosa stated the purpose of tonight's meeting and the sole item on our agenda is to discuss the proposed use of Park & Recreation Sinking Funds to pay for cost of new fencing for the tennis court. It has been noted by the Commission that Park and Recreation Sinking Fund monies have been approved by the Board of Selectmen and Board of Finance and are slated to be voted upon at Town meeting. However, the proper process by which the Park and Recreation Commission would first decide and make a motion to approve use of such funds was not followed or adhered to. The Commissioners voiced a number of concerns to the Director and First Selectman on how this came to pass.

The Commission discussed the proper protocols and process for use of Sinking Funds. The Commission inquired of the Director and First Selectman if there are other expenses related to the Civic Campus project that are designed to be paid for with sinking funds. The First Selectman confirmed that no other project expenses other than the previously approved playground installation and the current discussion of tennis court fencing.

Rick Audet confirmed the correct figure for our discussion of sinking fund cost is \$18,500 for the fence, as a quote has been obtained by a local fence company. The director explained that the decision to install a new fence was made by the Civic Campus Project team for a number of reasons that were in the best overall interests of the project and the Town. The director did agree that there was not an adequate level of notice in informing the commission at its next meeting of the decision made in favor of a new fence and mostly where the funding would come from, in this case Park and Recreation Sinking Funds.

Tony Mosa stated cost of installation was approved by the Civic Campus Project Team the Town campus, not the Park & Rec commission. For playground installation, the Commission approved \$30,000 and went to a town meeting, Rick Audet confirmed that the cost of \$33,000 was the best quote obtained for installation after a through bid process.

Norm Needleman stated his apology for going to the Board of Selectman first to approve sinking funds for cost of fencing without going to Park & Rec. first. The bid was for the whole project \$473,000 from a STEAP Grant. The Town reviewed and trimmed the cost of the project on a line to line basis. Core of project costs were playscape, tennis court, and paving parking lots. Public Works crew and state contractor pricing completed various parts of project as well.

Norm stated that when the Town took down the tennis court fence, it was hoped that the fence would be in good enough condition to go back up and be reused. None of contractors thought that the fence should go back up. Norm was satisfied with the quote of \$18,500 for new fencing.

Norm stated that the town meeting vote can be put on hold, however the Board of Selectman are ready to go a town meeting. The Park and Recreation should have voted first for use of Park and Recreation Sinking Funds, but the BOS has done this in the past when necessary.

Bob Russo asked when is the town meeting for use of these funds to be voted upon. Norm Needleman answered next week. Bob asked if the town meeting cannot go through until we vote on it. Norm stated if the Town has to make a decision they need to move quick.

Norm Needleman shared with the Commission his thoughts and outlook on the role of a Commission made up of volunteers in managing capital type projects or resources for the Town as well as any role in supervising Town staff. Norm feels it is not appropriate for volunteer commissioners who may not have had adequate training or experience to supervise full time professional staff in a direct report capacity, especially when there are up to 10 individual commissioners involved. Norm also shared his intentions of making changes within the Town whereby town staff all report directly to full time professional Town staff, such as the First Selectman in case of department heads, and not 9-10 separate volunteer commissioners. Norm also stated that careful thought needs to go into the checks and balances and decision making authority of various commissions on final, capital in nature, important issues that would affect the whole town. Bob Russo asked Norman Needleman if he would come back soon at a later date and further clarify and explain his intentions and actions with the Park and Recreation Commission. Norm Needleman stated that he would.

Jim Rawn stated that it's more of a procedural issue that we are concerned with. We want to follow the process the correct process and that which has traditionally has been used. Norm Needleman stated a new fence for the tennis court was ultimately his decision. There was discussion as to what the process should have been: it should have come to the Park & Rec Commissioners, and then the Board of Selectman for approval, then Board of Finance for approval, then Board of Selectman place it on an agenda for a town meeting. Jim Rawn highlighted the fact that we have a quote of \$18,500 for new fencing however the town meeting shows a vote to use funds in the amount of \$25,000. Norm Needleman explained that we needed another \$3,000 for the playscape installation on the playscape, \$18,500 for fencing, and then a small buffer amount that may not necessarily be used but would allow for a small amount of extra funding in the event of an unforeseen contingency.

Jim Rawn stated that we again did not follow the proper process. If we are going to exceed an allocation of over \$30,000 someone would get back to the Commission for approval. Now we are at \$21K. What is the extra \$4000 for? Norm Needleman stated so we don't have to go back to this again. Jim Rawn stated when you go over that number you go back and get permission. We didn't know what was going on before the Dec. 3rd meeting. Rick Audet stated that it was mentioned at the last

meeting we were going to go over on the playscape installation costs; he made this known to the Commission.

Norm Needleman stated he apologizes that we made decisions was made, but this expense came out of nowhere within the scope of a much larger project, and that there is no choice.

Tony then spoke and said that he called this meeting and if he is going to run it, he is going to run this fairly. He asked Rick Audet if there are any other monies for expenses that had to be approved at this meeting that hasn't been discussed or brought into the light yet.

Rick stated the town meeting is amount is a quote for the fence at \$18,500, and an extra \$3,000 for the playground installation, and then a small amount for a contingency in case of unforeseen expense related to the tennis court.

Tony Mosa stated the Commission needs a motion.

Bob Russo made a motion to approve use of Park and Recreation Sinking Fund monies in an amount not to exceed \$25,000 for the cost of new fencing.

Cathy Bishop stated she has a problem understanding the amount this because we first asked to approve 18,500 for fencing and now the amount is \$25,000.

Norm stated that we need to finish this project with the funds that have been explained.

Jim asked to make a motion that all Park and Recreation Sinking funds be restricted to be used only for the tennis and playscape for this project, and only Park and Recreation needs moving forward. Norm Needleman that this goes without saying.

Tony stated that we don't have a history to have that our Sinking Fund monies are used for anything other than Park & Recreation. The Commission agreed with this sentiment.

Jim Rawn retracted his motion of restriction.

Motion was made by Bob Russo to approve an amount not to exceed \$25,000 from the Park & Recreation Sinking Fund for the purposes of paying for new tennis court fencing, \$3000 for installation of playground, and unexpected overages that may occur related to tennis court. Jim Rawn seconded the motion and it was unanimously approved. Motion carried.

Motion was made by Bob Russo to adjourn at 8:40pm. John Bauman seconded the motion and it was unanimously approved. Motion carried.

Respectfully submitted,

Cathy Bishop
Essex Park and Recreation Commission