

Town of Hamden
Parks and Recreation Commission
Minutes of a Regular Meeting
Tuesday, March 9th, 2021
5:30 pm

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Minutes

- 1. Call to Order:** Chairman Rich Leonardo called the meeting to order at 5:37 pm.
- 2. Attendance**
 - a. Attendance: Richard Leonardo, Chairman; Ken Sweeten; Sarah Morrill; Christine Huber; Chris Ruggiero
 - b. Also in Attendance: Craig Cesare, Parks Director; Patrick Donnelly; Liana Paglia, Commission Clerk
 - c. Absent: Thaddeus Watson; Arnie Mann
- 3. Approval of Past Minutes:** February 9th, 2021
 - a. Chairman Leonardo requested a motion to approve the minutes. Ms. Huber made a motion to approve the minutes, which was seconded by Ms. Morrill. All were in favor.
- 4. Parks and Recreation Director's Report**
 - a. Mr. Cesare explained that he has an official budget meeting with the mayor on Thursday, March 11, 2021. He is requesting pre-Covid funding, assuming full scale camps/operations will be in play for the upcoming fiscal year. He is prepared to scale back, but is hopeful it will not be necessary. He discussed potential scenarios for concerts in the spring/summer.

Ms. Morrill asked if the Parks and Recreation Department sponsored the Easter Egg Hunt. Mr. Cesare clarified that it was cosponsored with the Police Department. He mentioned last summer's successful drive in movie series, which was spearheaded Mr. Donnelly. Mr. Cesare is hopeful to continue offering similarly innovative options this year.

Mr. Donnelly expressed his hope to continue moving forward, with new Covid-friendly options for Hamden residents. He sent an informational packet to commissioners prior to the meeting, overviewing park fees in other CT towns/cities. Mr. Cesare praised the Parks and Recreation department for their work in gathering and organizing the data.

He urged commissioners to read through the packet and organize official recommendations to present to the mayor.

Mr. Ruggiero asked Mr. Cesare if he is anticipating more money than usual for the Parks and Recreation Department. Mr. Cesare explained it was too early to tell. He noted again that he is requesting a full budget comparable to two years ago, and will scale back as needed.

Mr. Cesare expressed that his goal is to continue broadening offerings this spring/summer. He is pleased with how the department was able to actively offer new virtual activities, such as a special needs dance. He has a meeting with the Board of Education on Friday, March 12th, 2021, to plan for the camps. Mr. Cesare admitted that it is challenging to organize these camps during a pandemic, but the department is moving forward.

Mr. Cesare noted that he did not disperse any Youth League contributions in the most recent fiscal year. With a tighter budget, the department contacted each team, essentially asking for a brief explanation of their need for the stipend. Mr. Cesare explained that with the budgetary restrictions, he would prefer to award the stipend to the teams who most need it, like those who were actually able to hold a full or partial season. At the time of this meeting, only the Green Dragons has responded. Any teams who did not previously receive the stipend should receive it this coming fiscal year, since Mr. Cesare is requesting his usual full budget. There was a brief discussion regarding which youth teams did hold full or partial seasons. He once again urged the commissioners to examine the park fees packet, and make a formal list of recommendations to be presented to the mayor.

Ms. Morrill asked about the status of the fireworks budget. Mr. Cesare was unclear about whether that was part of budget cuts from the last budget cycle. She also questioned why the summer camps are not strictly outdoors this year, and the cost implications about holding them indoors. Mr. Cesare explained that holding the camps primarily indoors provides certain benefits. Staff and kids would have access to bathroom facilities and a classroom setting which is useful for some activities. He also emphasized that schools are used as no additional cost to the department. Mr. Cesare noted that outdoor camp options are being discussed, and rainy day scenarios. Ms. Morrill noted that last minute cancellations due to weather could cause issues, particularly with parents who treat camp as a form of daycare. Mr. Cesare agreed and noted that the ideal setup would be an indoor based camp that goes outdoor when possible, as opposed to a strictly outdoor based camp. He admitted it has been difficult to organize and schedule the camps this year.

Chairman Leonardo asked if the basketball hoops would be put up soon. Mr. Donnelly does not have an explicit date yet, but said to expect guidance from the administration soon.

Mr. Ruggiero asked if the fee structure should be based on each individual location. Mr. Donnelly praised the Parks and Recreation Department for their efforts in aggregating

this data. He suggested contacting himself, Mr. Cesare, and the commission clerk, Ms. Paglia, with fee ideas/comments, so that a unified document can be compiled, and eventually presented to the mayor. Mr. Donnelly said he would update the list of parks on the Town website.

Ms. Morrill commented that it would be helpful to understand what specific activities are allowed at each park. Mr. Donnelly said he would send the commissioners a copy of all park ordinances within the next several weeks. He did note that no other towns have established different fees for each park. He urged commissioners not to overcomplicate the fee structure.

Mr. Ruggiero questioned if the permitting process should be included in the official suggestions made to the mayor. Mr. Donnelly did not feel that this was an urgent order of business for the commission. He said he can look into allowing a permitting feature on the website. Mr. Ruggiero suggested posting a Parks events calendar on the website, with the hopes of preventing any conflicts. Mr. Donnelly said this wouldn't be difficult, and he would look into this.

Ms. Morrill asked all commissioners for a deadline to submit comments and ideas. After a brief discussion, Monday, April 1st was agreed upon. She asked Mr. Donnelly if he thought there was an appetite for imposing park fees, amongst the legislative council members and the mayor. As the budget is currently being devised, he said that appetite is currently being examined. Ms. Morrill admitted that there could be fallout from imposing park fees, especially after recent years' increased taxes and reduced services, such as bulk up. Mr. Sweeten wanted to clarify if the imposed fees would apply to residents or non-residents. Mr. Donnelly suggested that the commissioners continue to debate this. He will give proposals based on the comments from commissioners.

Chairman Leonardo asked Mr. Donnelly if he was in possession of a prior fees proposal made to the mayor. Mr. Donnelly was unsure if an official proposal was ever created, but will look.

Mr. Cesare urged commissioners to take their time in digesting the information in the packet. The commissioners agreed to have their official suggestions outlined by April 1st, so they can be discussed at the next meeting on 4/13. Mr. Cesare hopes to have the official recommendations presented to the mayor sooner rather than later.

Ms. Morrill asked Mr. Cesare if West Woods Park was fixed. He confirmed it was fixed last year. There was a brief discussion between Ms. Morrill, Mr. Donnelly and Chairman Leonardo regarding the basketball camps moving forward.

Mr. Ruggiero requested clarification regarding field requirements- specifically noting that Quinnipiac Valley Health Department guidelines should be followed. Mr. Donnelly agreed and sent a copy of Governor Lamont's most recent Covid guidelines regarding public events. Based on this statement, Mr. Donnelly is hopeful for the return of the food truck festival.

5. Old Business: N/A

6. New Business

a. Recap of February TCP meeting

- i. The clerk, Ms. Paglia, recapped the February Town Center Park Commission meeting, which Mr. Mann and Ms. Huber attended. Chairman Matthew Fitch is essentially on board with establishing a unified parks fee structure. He invites all members to the next meeting on 3/22/21 at 4:45 pm. He is hoping to have the Finance Director, Scott Jackson, provide some insight regarding the creation and implementation of these fees.

7. **Adjournment:** Chairman Leonardo requested a motion to adjourn. Mr. Ruggiero made a motion to adjourn at 6:26pm, which was seconded by Ms. Morrill. All were in favor.

Submitted by: Liana Paglia, Commission Clerk