

**COVENTRY PARKS & RECREATION COMMISSION
REGULAR MEETING MINUTES
THURSDAY, MARCH 11th, 2021**

The Coventry Parks & Recreation Commission held a regular meeting on Thursday, March 11th, 2021 via virtual platform, ZOOM. Marie Gallo-Hall called the meeting to order at 6:33pm.

Members Present: Marie Gallo-Hall, Bob Martin, Jillian Miner, Jennifer Rodgers, Beverly Carlson and Matthew Kyer.

Members Absent:

Others Present: Wendy Rubin, Director of Parks & Recreation and Caterina Merriam, Recreation Supervisor.

Audience of Citizens:

- William Cherniske, School Cross Country Teams:
 - Mr. Cherniske introduced himself; he has been a long time resident of Coventry and is a teacher at the Middle School. He has always been very involved in athletics, and is here today to request use of Laidlaw Park for the middle school & high school cross country meets for their fall season. The team currently uses Creaser Park, however it is very prone to weather-related issues. There are not very many home meets: the middle school team has 2 meets that meet at Creaser Park (the high school team has 2 or 3, although the distance may be tough for their needs). Meets are usually on a weekday afternoon, and the high school team should be able to work their schedule around soccer's needs. Typical meets run from about 3pm until 5-5:30pm.
 - Ms. Gallo-Hall asked if there is much conflict with soccer. Ms. Rubin noted that soccer practices are usually scheduled for weekday evenings. Ms. Rodgers noted that Fridays may be tough as that is the day the younger kids have soccer practice, whereas most soccer teams like to practice later in the day, no earlier than 6pm, so there should not be much conflict. Ms. Rubin noted that soccer has always been amenable to working around other groups, so it should not be a problem to work around each other.
 - Mr. Cherniske noted that the teams do some trail maintenance before their seasons, just to be sure of no obstructions.

Jennifer Rodgers moved to support the moving of cross country meets from Creaser Park to Laidlaw Park, with their understanding that scheduling will be coordinated with Coventry Soccer Incorporated. Beverly Carlson seconded. Motion voted in the affirmative by Marie Gallo-Hall, Bob Martin, Jillian Miner, Jennifer Rodgers and Beverly Carlson. Motion carried.

Acceptance of Minutes:

Jillian Miner moved to accept the February 11th, 2021 meeting minutes. Beverly Carlson seconded. Motion voted in the affirmative by Marie Gallo-Hall, Jillian Miner, Jennifer Rodgers, Beverly Carlson and Bob Martin. Motion carried.

Correspondence:

- Thank you note from Ms. Rodgers.

Chair's Remarks:

- Ms. Gallo-Hall noted that the Commission sends its condolences to Ms. Rodgers, for the passing of her mother recently. Ms. Rodgers thanked her and the group.

COVENTRY PARKS & RECREATION COMMISSION
REGULAR MEETING MINUTES
THURSDAY, MARCH 11th, 2021

- Ms. Gallo-Hall also welcomed our new Alternate Member, Matt Kyer to the Commission. Mr. Kyer introduced himself: he is the Library Media Specialist at CGS, after more than 25 years as a 1st grade teacher there. He is no stranger to serving on Boards and Commissions; he was Chair of the Inland/Wetlands Commission when he first moved to Coventry, and was on the Board of the Willimantic Food Co-Op for about 9 years. He is also very active in the Scouts and was the Camp Director for our Camp for 4 summers.

Staff Report:

Written Staff Report for the month of February was sent electronically to the membership for their review ahead of the meeting. Ms. Rubin & Ms. Merriam noted the following items:

- Ms. Rubin noted that you can tell spring is coming, as business in the office is starting to pick-up, particularly with phone calls;
- Public Works:
 - Ms. Rubin noted that we have a new DPW Director, who Ms. Rubin is looking to meet with very soon;
- Aquatics:
 - Ms. Rubin added that she has begun summer preparation with our new Head Lifeguard, Colleen McAvoy. Our previous Head Lifeguard, Meredith Hopkins, is leaving for this summer but is helping get Colleen set up in the pre-season.
 - Ms. Rubin added that she had a meeting with Mansfield's Parks & Rec. Aquatics Director, who is going to assist us in re-certifying our guards for this year.
 - Ms. Gallo-Hall asked about our budget and the impact of the lifeguard subsidy being reallocated to the Rec. Supervisor's salary. Ms. Rubin added that the reallocation is actually detrimental to our beach operations; as a result we are looking at closing beaches on August 22nd, which is a few weeks early. Even in doing that, we are still looking at running in the red, and that's with assuming similar revenue as 2020, which was higher than normal due to COVID.
 - Ms. Gallo-Hall asked whether the revenue from Camp will help. Ms. Rubin said that Camp will likely only break even. She added that our deficit is so high, we will be paying off that deficit for a long time.
 - Ms. Gallo-Hall asked if we are offering swim lessons this year. Ms. Rubin said yes, however the American Red Cross is recommending only private or semi-private lessons. We will be modeling our program after Mansfield's which is running well.
 - Ms. Rubin added that our insurance provider, CIRMA has given us the go-ahead to offer Lisicke Beach as "swim at your own risk," Monday-Friday with proper signage & equipment made available to the public.
- Creaser Park:
 - CT Basement Systems is renovating Building # 1's crawl space to address the moisture and mold issues. This will include encapsulating the crawl space and installing a sump pump with an alarm and a dehumidifier condenser unit. This will allow us to maximize the use shared with the Community Gardeners, The trails committee, Disc Golfers and private rentals.
 - Ms. Rubin added that she is still waiting for CT DEEP to respond to our requests to address the vacant buildings, the pond management and conditions, and a possible plan for disc golf's back 9 holes.

COVENTRY PARKS & RECREATION COMMISSION
REGULAR MEETING MINUTES
THURSDAY, MARCH 11th, 2021

- Camp Wangumbaug:
 - Ms. Merriam said that plans are in the works for this year's program, and that we are moving forward with offering a scaled-back program. Due to COVID-19 regulations and social distancing requirements, our program will have a minimum of 50 kids, with a max of 75 versus our normal max of 140. Trailblazers and Mini-Explorers will not be offered this year; camp will be available to grades K-6 & CITs.
 - Ms. Merriam added that a few components of our regular program will not be available this year, due to COVID restrictions, including before care & after care and trips, while other components must be cut due to budget constraints, including special guest performers, snack and camper tshirts.
 - Because we can only accommodate 75 kids, among 5 groups (including CITs) weekly fees will also rise significantly this year. Our budget still needs some finalizing, but it's looking like fees will need to increase from \$165 to at least \$200 per week.
 - Ms. Merriam said that the brochure should be up on the website by the end of the month, with registration beginning in April.
- Disc Golf At Creaser Park:
 - Ms. Rubin noted that the disc golf course is very close to completion; we are working on a ribbon cutting event that we plan to schedule for some time in June.
- Pickleball:
 - Ms. Rubin said that we had a ZOOM meeting with the US Pickleball CT representative, who will work with us on setting up leagues by way of a social event at the high school courts for some time this spring.

Old Business:

- Softball Field Committee Update:
 - Ms. Rodgers said that the Committee has been in talks with Anchor Engineering for the past month, as to accurate cost comparisons for the project; current estimates should that the Landfill location would cost approximately \$150,000 less than the Gravel Pit. Ms. Rodgers noted that this difference does not change the Committee's direction, in that they still want to pursue the Gravel Pit as their recommended location. The Committee does not want to take a prospective football field (that could be used for lacrosse, or even soccer) away, if needs change down the road.
 - Ms. Rodgers also noted that an email campaign has begun in support of a \$300,000 bond that is being included in the current Town budget proposal. Ms. Rodgers added that Committee's main goal is to have an approved location; at which point fundraising can begin.
 - Ms. Rodgers also noted that the Softball League is gearing up for their "Equal the Playing Field" Campaign, which will include tshirt & yard sign sales. She added that the link for tshirt sales should be available tomorrow, and signs will go out as soon as the ground thaws. She added that there is a gender inequality issue to address here, in the lack of playing space for girls softball.
- Budget:
 - Ms. Rubin said that for the current fiscal year, the Town Council had said that they would be seeking funding for our deficit by June 30th; she added that there may be some COVID-related federal funding coming to the Town that may be available to help cover recreation revenue losses.
 - Ms. Rubin added that the park & facility maintenance costs that we incur each year, are a major issue; the Rec. Supervisor's salary is not our only source of concern. COVID-19

COVENTRY PARKS & RECREATION COMMISSION
REGULAR MEETING MINUTES
THURSDAY, MARCH 11th, 2021

has exposed these issues, as much of our expenses are so reliant on revenue that without the revenue coming in, we have no way to cover our overhead expenses. COVID-19 aside, our budgetary issues are long-standing, since 2009 when our budget was cut and we absorbed previously funded maintenance costs.

- Ms. Rubin said that we are struggling with how to get our message across and asked the Commission for assistance/suggestions. She went on to say that the services we provide are essential, whether it is childcare, or access to public parks & outdoor spaces, which, through this pandemic, have been proven to be necessary for maintaining mental health. Philosophically, Parks & Recreation should be able to offer certain services and programs without charging fees; it is expected from community members & taxpayers. In most communities, Parks & Recreation is partially funded by revenue & tax dollars; in Coventry we are at the end of the extreme where very little funding comes from tax dollars, so most everything we offer requires that we charge fees.
- The Commission discussed whether it would be appropriate to ask the Department of Public Works for more support. Ms. Rubin noted that DPW did used to do more, but in recent years either refer us to outside contractors or require that we purchase the materials. Ms. Rubin said she was just approached to purchase playground mulch for this year.
- Ms. Carlson said that it sounds like the maintenance costs are the real problem. She suggested that we add an educational piece in our newsletter for the public for a better understanding of what their taxes pay for and what they do not pay for. Ms. Gallo-Hall agreed; we need to address the maintenance issue.
- Mr. Kyer suggested that we put actual dollar amounts on what fees would have to be to show that the overhead/maintenance is detrimental and where those fees come from. He said that there is a way to sell camp as an essential service, as it provides an affordable childcare option during the summer months while school is out of session. It is not an option for most families, it is a must. The pandemic has shown that without affordable childcare, people cannot return to work.

New Business:

- CNHS/CHS Cross Country Field Use Request: Laidlaw Park
 - Discussed under Audience of Citizens.

Adjourn: With no other business to discuss, Marie Gallo-Hall adjourned the meeting at 8:24pm.

Respectfully Submitted,

Caterina Merriam,
Recreation Supervisor

Please note: These minutes are not official until approved by the Parks & Recreation Commission at the next Parks & Recreation Commission Meeting. Please see the next Parks & Recreation Commission Meeting Minutes for approval or changes to these minutes.