

NEWINGTON PARKS & RECREATION
BOARD MEETING
TUESDAY, JANUARY 16, 2024

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I. CALL TO ORDER

Don Woods called the meeting to order at 6:01 PM.


Town Clerk

II. ROLL CALL

Board Members Present: Carol Anest, Billy DeBlasio, Trisha Feeney, Eileen Francolino (virtual), Tim Hutvagner (virtual), Phil Knowlton (virtual), Diana Serra, and Don Woods

Board Members Absent: Ed Marchion and Nicole Pane

Council Members Present: A.J. Tiniakos

Staff Members Present: Bill DeMaio, Superintendent, Sam Lostocco, Administrative Secretary, and Melissa Miller, Administrative Secretary, and Roderick Smith, Recreation Supervisor

III. PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE

IV. ELECTION OF OFFICERS

- Don Woods asked the Board for nominations for the Chairperson. Billy DeBlasio nominated Don Woods for Chairperson. Carol Anest seconded the nomination. Roll call was taken and the nomination passed unanimously.
- Don Woods nominated Billy DeBlasio for Vice-Chairperson. Diana Serra seconded the nomination. Roll call was taken and the nomination passed unanimously.
- Billy DeBlasio nominated Eileen Francolino for Secretary. Carol Anest seconded the nomination. Roll call was taken and the nomination passed unanimously.

Don Woods welcomed the new members of the Parks and Recreation Board: Carol Anest, Trisha Feeney, Phil Knowlton, and Diana Serra. Don Woods looks forward to being the Chairperson for the next two years. He has been on this Board for the majority of his adult life.

V. APPROVAL OF THE MINUTES – November 21, 2023 Meeting

- **Motion:** A motion was made by Eileen Francolino to approve the minutes of the meeting on November 21, 2023. Billy DeBlasio seconded the motion. Carol Anest and Diana Serra abstained from voting. The motion passed.

Carol Anest made a motion to add an item to the agenda, under New Business – Letter of Agreement with the Board of Education regarding the use of the Mortensen Community Center. Diana Serra seconded the motion. The motion passed unanimously.

VI. PUBLIC PARTICIPATION

- Rose Lyons (46 Elton Drive) wanted to welcome the new members of the Parks and Recreation Board. She thanked the Parks and Grounds Department, as well as the Highway Department, for clearing the pathway at the end of her street. Ms. Lyons has noticed overgrown ornamental grasses near the Main Street entrance to Constitution Square. She was wondering if a different type of planting could be done there, so the entrance sign to Constitution Square is not blocked. She thanked the Board for all that they do.
- Bob Smith (101 Fox Run Court) expressed his concern regarding the use of the pickleball courts at Churchill Park during the time of the summer camp program. Last summer, pickleball players were restricted with the times they could use the courts during the day. In addition to the limited hours of play, he stated the pickleball courts were littered with trash from the summer camp program. He suggested the campers could eat their snacks and lunches in a different location within the park.

VII. CORRESPONDENCE

a. Paterson Preschool / Parks and Grounds

The preschool class at Paterson School sent the Parks and Grounds Department a note after watching the Parks and Grounds staff cutting the grass and blowing the leaves at their school. Clay Pedigo, Supervisor of Parks, Grounds and Cemeteries, sent a reply email to the preschool class.

b. Donation from Jill Price

Jill Price made a generous donation, in the amount of \$1,200.00, to be used for summer camp scholarships. This is the third year that Ms. Price has made a donation for summer camp scholarships. Bill DeMaio will be taking a picture on Thursday with Ms. Price, two of our preschool students, and Hadeel Majdoub, Recreation Supervisor who oversees the Camp RECreate Summer Program. Bill DeMaio went on to say that Ms. Price is a wonderful contributor and supporter of the Newington Parks and Recreation Department.

VIII. SUMMARY REPORTS

The Monthly Reports and Tree Warden Reports for November and December 2023 were given to the Board to review.

Eileen Francolino asked Bill DeMaio if the Goosinator has continued to be effective. Bill DeMaio replied that the Goosinator has been tremendously successful. He went on to say that there has been a learning curve with the ice forming on the pond. We are learning how to make the transition better during the winter. Clay Pedigo, Supervisor of Parks, Grounds, and Cemeteries, uses the Goosinator at several locations around town, mostly at Newington High School and Churchill Park. Sam Lostocco and Joey Zawisza, from the Parks and Recreation Office, will use the Goosinator at Mill Pond Park during office hours. Eileen Francolino asked if we had any participants in the recent lifeguarding course that was offered. Bill DeMaio responded that there were four participants in the lifeguarding course and they all passed their lifeguard certifications. There were also four participants in the Water Safety Instructor (WSI) class. All four of those participants passed their WSI certifications. All eight participants are planning to work for the Department. If they work for the Department for two seasonal sessions, they will be refunded the full price of their certification course.

IX. OLD BUSINESS

NONE.

X. NEW BUSINESS

a. NHS Letter of Agreement

The Parks and Recreation Department is trying to make a reasonable accommodation with Newington High School Athletics (basketball and volleyball) to use the Mortensen Community Center Gymnasium. Their use of the Mortensen Community Center Gymnasium will be free of charge, during the week, during the hours that Parks and Recreation staff is here. Newington High School Athletics will take responsibility for safety, vandalism, steeling, etc. There has been cooperation with the Superintendent of Schools, the Athletic Director, and the coaches. This is a pilot program. Bill DeMaio is recommending for the Board to consider waiving the rental fees, during the week from 2:30 – 4:30 p.m., while Parks and Recreation staff is here.

- **Motion:** A motion was made by Billy DeBlasio to accept the NHS Letter of Agreement. Diana Serra seconded the motion. The motion passed unanimously.

b. Newington Goes Country – June 13, 2024

Bill DeMaio shared this is a special event that we have been doing for several years now. It is a big fundraiser for fireworks. Learning from the rain last year, the Department will also put the address of the Mortensen Community Center on the application for the state liquor permit.

- **Motion:** A motion was made by Trisha Feeney to approve the hosting of Newington Goes Country on June 13, 2024 at Mill Pond Park, sponsors to be forthcoming. Also, to approve the staff to apply for a state liquor permit to sell refreshments at the event. Billy DeBlasio seconded the motion. The motion passed unanimously.

c. Food Truck Friday – June 14, 2024

Bill DeMaio is looking for the Board's approval for this special event.

- **Motion:** A motion was made by Diana Serra to approve the hosting of Food Truck Friday on June 14, 2024 at Mill Pond Park, sponsors to be forthcoming. Also, to approve the staff to apply for a state liquor permit to sell refreshments at the event. Carol Anest seconded the motion. The motion passed unanimously.

d. Life. Be in it. Extravaganza State Liquor License – July 17 – 20, 2024

- **Motion:** A motion was made by Carol Anest to approve the Parks and Recreation staff to apply for a state liquor permit for the Life. Be in it. Extravaganza from Wednesday, July 17, 2024 through Saturday, July 20, 2024 to sell refreshments at the event. Diana Serra seconded the motion. The motion passed unanimously.

e. Life. Be in it. Extravaganza Children's Day Carnival – July 18, 2024

Bill DeMaio would like to have the Board's permission to host a Children's Day Carnival, exclusively for the participants of our Camp RECreate Program. The Life. Be in it. Extravaganza Letter of Agreement will be brought to the Board, for their approval, at the Board meeting scheduled on February 20, 2024.

- **Motion:** A motion was made by Tim Hutvagner to approve the Children's Day Carnival, for Camp RECreate, at Mill Pond Park on July 18, 2024, with an inclement weather date of July 19, 2024. Eileen Francolino seconded the motion. The motion passed unanimously.

f. Letter of Agreement with the Board of Education

Bill DeMaio explained a pilot program that will be run by the Board of Education. It is for Newington High School students who need special attention. The program for these students will be held in the Transition Academy classroom, after the Transition Academy school day is over. It will be a pilot program, starting with five students with a maximum of fifteen students. It will run from 2:30 – 5:00 p.m. On Mondays, they will have a physical education teacher from Newington High School come and use the Mortensen Community Center. This is an alternative setting for these students to meet their requirements for graduation. There will be two teachers, a paraprofessional, and a social worker working with these students. When the weather is nice, they will be able to use Mill Pond Park for outdoor activities. If students are out-placed for schooling, it can cost hundreds of thousands of dollars.

- **Motion:** A motion was made by Don Woods to waive the fees for the use of the Mortensen Community Center Gymnasium, per the rules outlined in the agreement between the Parks and Recreation Department and the Board of Education. Diana Serra seconded the motion. The motion passed unanimously.

XI. REPORTS

a. Youth Basketball Program / Jersey Mike's

Roderick Smith is the Recreation Supervisor who oversees the Youth Basketball Program. He reported that Jersey Mike's is the sponsor this year and their company logo is on the back of each youth basketball t-shirt. Jersey Mike's provided subs for all players and coaches on the first day of the Youth Basketball Program on January 6, 2024. Bill DeMaio added that the partnership with Jersey Mike's has been a gigantic success. Roderick Smith, Joey Zawisza, Ted Fravel, Eric O'Neil, and Dale Martin are in incredible supervisory group for the Youth Basketball Program. Phil Knowlton, whose son participates in the Youth Basketball Program, shared positive feedback about the program. He said it was amazing! He was impressed by the different generations of volunteers that are helping out with this program.

b. Orientation Packet

Bill DeMaio met with three members of the Parks and Recreation Board and Town Council, individually, to share an orientation packet highlighting our Department. He wanted to share this with the entire Board. He welcomes any questions that Board members have, now or at another time.

c. Budget Update

Bill DeMaio reported the budget process is mostly an administrative function. He plans to keep the Board posted on the budget process.

d. Donation from Jill Price

Bill DeMaio mentioned the thank you letter that was sent to Jill Price for her generous donation.

e. Night of Lights / A.I. Services

Bill DeMaio shared about a company located in California, Placer.ai, that uses an Artificial Intelligence (A.I.) program to provide data about the people who attend special events. The report showed that approximately 6,600 people attended the Night of Lights special event, between 6:00 - 8:30 p.m., on December 2, 2023. The Board was provided with additional information that was included in the A.I. report. The information is calculated by tracking the cell phones of the people in attendance of the event. It is a very expensive service to purchase; \$23,000.00 for the year. It reported that 75,000 people attended the Saturday of the Life. Be in it. Extravaganza in 2023.

f. Building a Strong Community Awards

Bill DeMaio thanked everyone for their participation in the Building A Strong Community Awards. It was a wonderful evening with great recognition for everyone. The 2023 Building A Strong Community Awards plaque is already on

display on the “Wall of Honor” at the Mortensen Community Center. The award recipients were: Kiwanis Club of Newington, Bonavita Luxury Lavatories, Eric O’Neil, and B&M Tree Service. Sam Lostocco displayed a picture of the plaque for the Board to view.

g. Eagle Park Playground Construction

Bill DeMaio reported the whole base of the handicap accessible playground is completed at Eagle Park. The drainage has been installed and stone dust has been put down. The shipment date for the playground materials, from Iowa, is scheduled for March 1, 2024. The pickleball court has been completed and painted. People are using it and the neighborhood residents are enjoying it.

Don Woods asked Bill DeMaio about the vandalism, in general, at the neighborhood parks. Bill DeMaio replied that the vandalism calms down during the winter months. The town is currently working on a sophisticated camera system, but it takes time to put that all together. The following town departments are working together on this project: Parks, I.T., and Police.

h. Candlewyck Park Basketball Court

Bill DeMaio reported the basketball court at Candlewyck Park has been completed and painted. There is a new, 400-ft. handicap accessible path from the road to the playground. Hopefully, Candlewyck Park will be the next new handicap accessible playground, after Seymour Park. The strategy is to install a new handicap accessible playground, each year, at one of the neighborhood parks. Little Brook Park will be the next park, after Candlewyck Park.

i. Saputo Scoreboard

Bill DeMaio reported he received two checks from Saputo, today; one in the amount of \$38,000.00 (from the Wisconsin Saputo location) and the other one in the amount of \$12,000.00 (from the Newington Saputo location). The scoreboard is installed and we are waiting for the Saputo sign to be delivered. The electricity is done, the scoreboard is in, and we ordered three sets of bleachers. It is going to look really nice and the spectators will enjoy having three new sets of bleachers at Clem Lemire Field. There will be a fun special event at Clem Lemire Field, in the spring, that will include a ribbon cutting ceremony with the Mayor, the Town Council, and the Parks and Recreation Board. Youth sports participants will be invited and will be encouraged to wear their uniform shirts during the special event. It will most likely take place before or after a lacrosse game. There will be a DJ and free food for attendees to enjoy. Saputo will fly representatives in, from Dallas and Wisconsin, to attend the special event and give a few speeches. Bill DeMaio added that Saputo donated \$25,000.00, nine years ago, to install the exercise equipment at Mill Pond Park. Since then, Saputo has donated the liquid for the soft-serve ice cream that is sold at our concession stands. Bill DeMaio cannot say enough good about Saputo.

j. Facebook Live – Youth Basketball Program / Jersey Mike’s

Bill DeMaio reported that within twelve hours of posting this Facebook Live video, 2,500 people viewed the video. Sam Lostocco displayed the video for the Board to view. Bill DeMaio added the businesses love this publicity. It is a win-win for the businesses and the residents of Newington. Jersey Mike’s also sponsored the DJ at the Night of Lights special event on December 2, 2023.

XII. COMMENTS BY THE BOARD

Eileen Francolino asked Bill DeMaio if there was a high school basketball league this winter. Bill DeMaio replied that it was advertised, but the Department did not receive any registrations. Eileen Francolino mentioned a few of the high school students she knows are enjoying coaching for the Youth Basketball Program, but they do miss playing basketball too. Perhaps it has changed, since COVID. Eileen Francolino asked Bill DeMaio about the status of the pool committee. Bill DeMaio replied that he believes there are two Town Councilors on the committee, so the committee officially exists. Don Woods will look into the status of the committee.

Phil Knowlton asked Bill DeMaio if there was a possibility of getting a splash pad in town; does it have to be tied into getting a new pool? Bill DeMaio responded that for the past nine years, he has put a splash pad at Churchill Park, a splash pad at Mill Pond Park, a new pool at Mill Pond Park and a new pool at Churchill Park, in the Capital Improvement Plan (CIP), but it gets cut from the budget. It costs approximately \$1 million for a splash pad. Bill DeMaio mentioned the state health laws regarding splash pads. Based on the state health laws, he recommends building a splash pad next to a pool. Participants need hot soap showers if you do not recirculate the splash pad water.

XIII. PUBLIC PARTICIPATION

NONE.

XIV. ADJOURNMENT

Billy DeBlasio made a motion to adjourn the meeting. Diana Serra seconded the motion. The motion passed unanimously. The meeting was adjourned at 6:56 PM.

Respectfully submitted by,

Melissa Miller

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