

NEWINGTON PARKS & RECREATION RECEIVED FOR RECORD
BOARD MEETING IN NEWINGTON, CT

TUESDAY, JANUARY 17, 2023

2023 JAN 31 AM 11:03

I. CALL TO ORDER

Jay Bottalico called the meeting to order at 6:04 PM.

John O. Murphy
Town Clerk

II. ROLL CALL

Board Members Present: Jay Bottalico, Billy DeBlasio (virtual), Eileen Francolino, Thomas Gill, Tim Hutvagner, Anthony Kulowski (virtual), and Don Woods (virtual)

Board Members Absent: Richard DaSilva, Matthew Kulowski, Ed Marchion, and Nicole Pane

Council Members Present: Tim Manke

Staff Members Present: Bill DeMaio, Superintendent, Sam Lostocco, Administrative Secretary, and Melissa Miller, Administrative Secretary

III. PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE

IV. ELECTION OF OFFICERS

- Jay Bottalico asked the Board for nominations for the Chairperson. Don Woods nominated Jay Bottalico for Chairperson. Thomas Gill seconded the nomination. Roll call was taken and the nomination passed unanimously.
- Jay Bottalico nominated Don Woods for Vice-Chairperson. Eileen Francolino seconded the nomination. Roll call was taken and the nomination passed unanimously.
- Billy DeBlasio nominated Eileen Francolino for Secretary. Don Woods seconded the nomination. Roll call was taken and the nomination passed unanimously.

V. APPROVAL OF THE MINUTES – December 20, 2022 Meeting

- **Motion:** A motion was made by Eileen Francolino to approve the minutes of the meeting on December 20, 2022. Tim Hutvagner seconded the motion. The motion passed unanimously.

VI. PUBLIC PARTICIPATION

NONE.

VII. CORRESPONDENCE

NONE.

VIII. SUMMARY REPORTS

The Monthly Report and Tree Warden Report for December 2022 were given to the Board to review. Bill DeMaio reported that the reports were self-explanatory.

Jay Bottalico commented that a lot of trees have been taken down lately. Bill DeMaio responded, yes, quite a few. Eileen Francolino asked what is going on at the intersection of Main Street and Robbins Avenue. Bill DeMaio replied that is an Engineering project. It is part of the plan to go from New Britain Avenue, down Maple Hill Avenue, and down Robbins Avenue. Instead of a four-lane road, Robbins Avenue will become a two-lane road. On each side, there will be a pedestrian shared zone; for the road to be shared with bicycles and pedestrians walking. The island at the intersection of Main Street and Robbins Avenue will be flattened, a little bit, so that driver visibility will be better for safety in that area. It is a safety precaution that the state has been encouraging. A lot of trees were taken down, as part of the project, but there is a planting program in place, once everything is done. There will be approximately fifteen new trees planted. Thomas Gill asked if any work is going to be done on East Robbins Avenue. Bill DeMaio responded that he believes the project ends at the intersection of Main Street and Robbins Avenue. Thomas Gill went on to say that there is one spot, on East Robbins Avenue, where the road funnels in quite a bit and always seems to be an issue. Bill DeMaio responded that Thomas Gill could contact the Engineering Department and bring his concern to their attention.

IX. OLD BUSINESS

NONE.

X. NEW BUSINESS

a. Newington Goes Country – June 8, 2023

Bill DeMaio reported he is looking for the Board's permission to have the Parks and Recreation staff start working on getting beer and wine permits, along with use of the park, for this special event. We have a tentative agreement, with an agent down in Nashville, to have Jordan Oaks perform again for two nights. It is very exciting! He is currently getting around \$5,000 per night for performing and if everything goes smoothly, we might be around the \$2,000 mark for both nights. They took a liking to what we did last year for them and they said they are not forgetting their friends. It is nice. Bill DeMaio went on to say that the Department is looking for a sponsor for this special event. Any businesses or civic groups that would like to sponsor either Newington Goes Country or Food Truck Friday, we certainly could use the help. We would like to get a mechanical bull and train rides, along with other activities, for the special event. Eileen Francolino asked if people used the mechanical bull at last year's Newington Goes Country event. Bill DeMaio responded that there was a line of about fifty people. Jay Bottalico asked if anyone got hurt on the mechanical bull last year. Bill DeMaio responded that there were not any injuries, knock on wood. The people riding the mechanical bull fall on an inflatable air pillow, so the landing is not too bad.

- **Motion:** A motion was made by Billy DeBlasio to approve the hosting of Newington Goes Country on June 8, 2023 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. Eileen Francolino seconded the motion. The motion passed unanimously.

b. Food Truck Friday – June 9, 2023

Bill DeMaio reported this was a very popular event last year. We are looking for permissions, again, to get started with the planning for this year's event.

- **Motion:** A motion was made by Thomas Gill to approve the hosting of Food Truck Friday on June 9, 2023 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. Tim Hutvagner seconded the motion. The motion passed unanimously.

c. Life. Be in it. Extravaganza State Liquor License – July 12-15, 2023

Bill DeMaio reported the Life. Be in it. Extravaganza will be held July 12-15, 2023, Wednesday through Saturday. We are looking for the Board's permission to use Mill Pond Park, have a carnival, and apply for a permit to sell beer, wine, and liquor.

- **Motion:** A motion was made by Don Woods to approve the Parks and Recreation Department to apply for a state liquor permit for the Life. Be in it. Extravaganza from Wednesday, July 12, 2023 through Saturday, July 15, 2023 to sell refreshments at the event. Billy DeBlasio seconded the motion. The motion passed unanimously.

d. Northeast Midways Agreement

Bill DeMaio reported that this was received today. We have been negotiating back and forth and received it for tonight's meeting. Hadeel Majdoub, Recreation Supervisor, has the agreement pretty much locked up. It is the same agreement that we have been using the last couple of years. Some of the highlights of the agreement are that they give us \$6,000 towards radio and tv advertising; they are putting \$5,000 aside in case we have torrential rain again and need to fix the field up once they leave; 33% of the gross revenue up to \$50,000 and 40% of the gross revenue after \$50,000. The company gives the Department about 126 free carnival ride wrist bands for iHeart Radio promotions, in return for approximately \$4,000 worth of radio ads. The Department feels it is a pretty fair agreement. The carnival company is going to let us host the children's carnival on Thursday, July 13, 2023, for only \$6.00 per camp participant. There will be approximately 400-450 campers in attendance. It will be quite nice. Tim Hutvagner asked if we will still be selling wristbands for the carnival. Bill DeMaio responded that between Tim Hutvagner and Thomas Gill, they can begin the conversations again with their friends at Frontier. Tim Hutvagner hopes to be able to use credit cards for the Beer and Wine Garden again, maybe even for the upcoming June special events. It was a huge success, last year, being able to have people pay with credit cards. Bill DeMaio shared that we increased sales, last year, by approximately 33%. Using credit card readers saves the amount of time it takes to count the cash at the end of each night. Eileen Francolino brought up the point that there were some troubles with Northeast Midways last year. Bill DeMaio confirmed that the Ferris wheel was broken and it couldn't be fixed in time for the carnival. During the camper day in the morning, there were some complaints that not all of the rides were completely manned. We did discuss that for the upcoming special event. Bill DeMaio did check into four or five

other carnival companies, that other towns use, and they all seem about the same. Don Woods suggested that we should give this carnival owner another chance this year. There was a lot of transition with the carnival company last year.

- **Motion:** A motion was made by Tim Hutvagner to accept the tentative agreement with Northeast Midways to host a carnival and food trucks from Wednesday, July 12, 2023 to Saturday, July 15, 2023 at Mill Pond Park. Billy DeBlasio seconded the motion. The motion passed unanimously.

Thomas Gill asked Bill DeMaio if Frontier is going to be a vendor again this year. Bill DeMaio responded that we are starting the summer plans now, so he has not yet reached out to Frontier. He loved the deal the Department had with Frontier last year. At that time, GoNetspeed was competing with Frontier, in Newington. Thomas Gill said the infrastructure is there and we didn't have any problems with Frontier's service last year. Bill DeMaio responded that he thinks that Frontier already installed hard-wiring on one of the light poles, by the playground. There is a box there, up about 6 or 8 feet. Thomas Gill and Tim Hutvagner will be reaching out to Frontier.

e. Life. Be in it. Extravaganza Children's Day Carnival – July 13, 2023

Bill DeMaio reported this is one of the Department's newer ideas. We hosted the Children's Day Carnival, last year, at Mill Pond Park. We had some problems with it; a lot of the towns weren't totally pleased with it. This year, we are not going to advertise that we are hosting it, but if towns contact us to bring their summer camps, we will say "yes" and charge them \$12.00 per child. Bill DeMaio thinks that Glastonbury already reached out to our Department about the event this year. Nonetheless, we still want our camp kids to experience the carnival. We think that is a tremendous advantage; instead of bussing our campers to an out-of-town place, they get an opportunity to use the carnival during the day, all by themselves. Their carnival ride wristband is also good to come back to the carnival at night, any night. It is a really nice deal for our kids in Newington. Don Woods commented that the wristband deal for the kids was not crystal clear, last year, to those volunteers in the ticket booth. There was a lot of confusion with that. The volunteers were telling the kids "no". He went on to say it is a great idea; he is not opposed to it. Don Woods went on to say that he thinks, this year, anyone working in the ticket booth should be told that a particular type of wristband is good for the day and also at night. Then, it would not be a problem. Bill DeMaio responded that the Department will print up the rules for the wristbands and keep them everywhere. The suggestion, from Don Woods, was a good suggestion.

- **Motion:** A motion was made by Eileen Francolino to approve the Children's Day Carnival at Mill Pond Park on July 13, 2023, with an inclement weather date of July 14, 2023, for Camp RECreate and other towns. Tim Hutvagner seconded the motion. The motion passed unanimously.

f. Recreational Trails Grant

Bill DeMaio reported this is a grant that he was awarded, several years in a row, in New Britain. Now, with the Newington Parks and Recreation Department, he was going to apply for a \$75,000 grant for paths and trails in Eagle Park. This project would be in conjunction with the new playground and pickleball courts. However, we found out this afternoon, that Sonya Richards, the grant writer for the Town of Newington, wrote a grant last year for the Recreational Trails Grant. She had submitted the grant, last year, for the historical walk in the north-end of town, near where Cashway Lumber used to be. The state liked the grant, but did not have enough money left in the grant budget to fund it. They encouraged the Town to apply for the grant again. Bill DeMaio let Sonya Richards know, this afternoon, that it was okay to reapply with last year's grant. Bill DeMaio asked the Board to consider giving the Department permission to move forward with his grant idea, just in case James Krupienski, Acting Town Manager, says he would like to go our route. Bill DeMaio said that timing is of the essence, since the grant application is due by March 1, 2023.

- **Motion:** A motion was made by Anthony Kulowski to approve the Department to write a \$75,000 DEEP Recreational Trails Grant for Eagle Park and forward to the Acting Town Manager, for his consideration, to apply for the grant. The grant will include the planning, design, and construction of approximately 1,000 ft. of asphalt handicap accessible paths, at least 9 ft. wide, at Eagle Park. These paths will complete the connection of the following neighborhood streets: Groveland Terrace, Chestnut Road, Jeffrey Lane, Eagle Drive, and Kimberly Road. It will connect the existing pedestrian and bike paths from West Hartford to Fenn Road in Newington to the CT Fast Track, which will ultimately connect the city of New Britain in one continuous walk and bike way. Eileen Francolino seconded the motion. Don Woods asked Bill DeMaio if \$75,000 is the same amount of money they would be applying for the grant for the historical walk. Bill DeMaio responded that he did not know the answer to that. However, he did know that there is a 20% match, in-kind or cash. The motion passed unanimously.

g. Synthetic Turf Stance

Bill DeMaio reported the Department belongs to the Connecticut Recreation and Parks Association (CRPA), which is an association of Parks and Recreation professionals. They have a lobbyist, a legislation committee, and a variety of other committees. For many years, some people have believed that the rubber in artificial turf causes cancer to those who ingest

it. We don't believe that it is the situation where we shouldn't replace our artificial turf or purchase artificial turf for the high school. Bill DeMaio was wondering if the Board thought the same way, and if they did, the Board could give him permission to write something, or lobby at the State Capitol, or call our legislators. He would have a stronger voice if it has the approval of the Newington Parks and Recreation Board, with approval on this date. Bill DeMaio went on to say that this would help the CRPA, if you wanted to go that route with this topic. When Bill DeMaio was in his previous job, he studied this because he installed field turf in a lot of places. He could not get the State of Connecticut to provide him with a health study that said artificial field turf causes cancer. However, in Washington State, a woman's soccer team had three goalies, that developed some type of cancer. What they found out, was the state of Washington had the highest amount of that specific form of cancer of any state in the United States. They were trying to tie that to the artificial turf. Jay Bottalico asked if our town's artificial turf is grandfathered in. Bill DeMaio responded that the way this legislation is written, is that once ours needs to be replaced, it would have to be replaced with natural grass. Don Woods replied that we should strongly fight for the existence of artificial turf. Don Woods went on to say that years ago, there were people opposing the artificial turf in Newington, but we were able to substantiate that the claims were, basically, not true. Now, with the cryogenic rubber and the way things are processed, it is different. Don Woods asked Bill DeMaio if he has heard of any recent accusations of cancer caused by playing on synthetic turf fields. Bill DeMaio responded that he has not heard of any cases. Don Woods is hoping that the professionals in the Parks and Recreation field, the lobbyists, and the lawyers, will also get in this fight and say that this is crazy. Bill DeMaio said to look at all the high schools, around us, that have synthetic turf fields. Local colleges have synthetic turf fields too. Don Woods mentioned the restrictions that are put on maintaining natural grass fields. There is a lack of availability, during the wet seasons, to continue sports on natural grass fields. Jay Bottalico asked Bill DeMaio if he would be able to give a good argument, if he were to go before the state. Bill DeMaio responded by saying yes. Bill DeMaio went on to say that the CRPA has asked to get the local Parks and Recreation Boards and professionals behind this.

- **Motion:** A motion was made by Don Woods to authorize the Superintendent of Newington Parks and Recreation to speak, on the Board's behalf, in strong opposition of the CT Proposed Bill No. 5070 – Act Prohibiting the Purchase and Installation of Artificial Turf Fields, at the state level, in any written and verbal communication. Eileen Francolino seconded the motion. The motion passed unanimously.

h. Summer Camp Licensing Stance

Bill DeMaio reported this is legislation time of the year. A legislator, from Cheshire, is proposing to make all summer camps licensed by the State of Connecticut Office of Early Childhood (OEC). Our preschool is currently licensed under the OEC. As an association, the CRPA has been fighting this for 40 years. We don't think it is going to pass, but the Department is looking for the Board's support because this would cause additional training costs, nursing costs, testing, fencing, and paperwork that would cause it to be difficult for us to host summer camp programs at Churchill Park and Mill Pond Park. Bill DeMaio feels strongly against this and is going to take a strong stand. The Department will follow the safety rules and regulations, just like the pools, but we are not interested in going through the licensing procedure. It would be very, very difficult and costly for the Department. Bill DeMaio knows that it would cause many, many parents to complain.

- **Motion:** A motion was made by Thomas Gill to authorize the Superintendent of Parks and Recreation to speak on the Board's behalf, at the state level, in any written and verbal communication, in strong opposition of requiring summer camps to be licensed by the State of CT Office of Early Childhood. Tim Hutvagner seconded the motion. Jay Bottalico asked Bill DeMaio if there is a guaranteed fee associated with the state licensing. Bill DeMaio responded there would be a lot of fees. You need to have an education consultant, a nurse consultant, a state permit, and additional training for the staff. The motion passed unanimously.

i. Preliminary Master Plan of Mill Pond Park

Bill DeMaio reported the Board has been presented with a Preliminary Master Plan of Mill Pond Park. There are some people who have asked to consider getting the Mill Pond Pool project in the forefront of the decision makers. The Board members, the Acting Town Manager, the Town Council, and the state legislators are all decision makers. This would start the process, again, of bringing this to the forefront. The document has already been sent to the Acting Town Manager, upon his request to look at it. It has gotten started, a little bit, at the state legislature level. Bill DeMaio continued by saying State Representative Gary Turco has Senator Matt Lesser and State Representative Kate Farrar interested in raising a considerable amount of money in the bonding program. The number is around \$5 million, half of what the project will cost, at \$10.6 million, if the Town of Newington is willing to put up some money. Bill DeMaio has been actively working with the Town of Newington Finance Director, Janet Murphy, to try to find out if there is some American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (ARRA) money, which there is, that former Town Manager, Keith Chapman, set aside for this pool.

There has been some talk about that. Bill DeMaio is not the decision maker. He needs to provide the information to everybody, so that it is transparent and out there. Bill DeMaio asked the architect that has been working on this to update his memo and make sure all of the numbers were correct. Just the pool section of this project went from \$6 million or \$7 million to \$10.6 million, two years from now, to build. Bill DeMaio said it takes time to get funding for it and it takes time to build it, so he wanted to be accurate in what we were asking for and be able to produce a product. If the Board believes in this and votes on this, Bill DeMaio can go forward and speak freely to state legislators, the Acting Town Manager, and the Town Council. He is trying to present all of the facts and all of the numbers. Everything is real. In the report, you will see that the best pool professional, probably in the northeast, says that if we hesitate too much longer, there is no guarantee that either of the pools are going to last before we build a new one. He is a real pool expert who knows this is a real problem in our town. Jay Bottalico asked Bill DeMaio if we are going to have to take a look at this again. Tim Manke responded that the Town Council did not approve what had been submitted. Eileen Francolino asked Tim Manke if the Building Committee had been disbanded. Tim Manke replied that this proposal would go to the new Building Committee. The Pool Committee has not been disbanded. Eileen Francolino had spoken with State Representative Gary Turco and his belief was that this project could be pushed through quicker if it was proposed as a park reconstruction project, not just a pool project. It would be an easier sell if it was for the park, as a whole. Eileen Francolino read in the document that the depth of the pool ranges from 3 ½ to 5 feet. She believes that American Red Cross, in order to teach diving, requires deeper than 5 feet of water. She doesn't believe that you can dive off a diving block, for competitive swimming, in a 5 foot section. Bill DeMaio replied that we would check on that. The proposed pool design has eight lanes and the depth is 5 feet on the deepest end of that area. The diving blocks would be on the side of 5 feet and you would swim to the 3 ½ foot section of the pool. Jay Bottalico asked if the price of the park, instead of just the pool, would be a higher cost. Bill DeMaio responded that you would highlight the preschool aspect of the playground, the pool, the bathhouse, the stone archways at every entry, new parking lots, the splash pad, the football and soccer fields, and the flat areas of grass. Those are all park improvements. The project has two phases and phase two is the rest of the park. Tim Hutvagner asked Bill DeMaio where the new pool would be located within Mill Pond Park. Bill DeMaio responded that the last location that was talked about, was across the street from the Town Hall on Garfield Street. It would be near the location of the current preschool playground. The façade of the Town Hall and the façade of the new building will match. It would look like a Government Center, while driving through. Pictures of the proposed pool and building were displayed for the Board to view. The design also offers a splash pad and gives an easy transition for our preschool children and our summer camp children to access the new pool area across the street. It saves money on the underground sewer, water, and electricity by being located right here. Bill DeMaio explained that in the Parks and Recreation profession, you build a new pool in a different location than the existing pool. This way, you don't take the negativity from the parents and the politicians about closing a pool for a year and a half to two years to build another one. You leave the existing pool open, build the new one, open the new pool, and then close and knock down the old pool. That is the thinking behind it. Tim Hutvagner asked Bill DeMaio if we would be able to sell that idea to the town. Bill DeMaio confirmed there is no architect or engineering firm that will approve, or recommend, putting a new pool in the same place. The water table is too high and there are no other options for the location. If you make a mistake 60 years ago, it wouldn't make sense to make the same mistake again, with all of the knowledge we have. The chlorine companies will not even deliver liquid chlorine to us anymore, because the pool is too close to the pond. If there was any leakage, they would be liable and would go bankrupt. Billy DeBlasio shared a point to Eileen Francolino's comment about the depth of the pool for diving. He shared that the American Red Cross recommends 9 feet of water depth for head-first dives, including dives from decks. Bill DeMaio responded that the diving board is going to be in an area of the pool that is 13 feet deep. Bill DeMaio will clarify this information with the architects, in writing, for the Board. Don Woods said that when professionals are hired and would never consider building a new pool in the same location, it is our responsibility to educate the public and get the public behind the project. We want to put the pool in the best location possible. It makes the most sense for all uses. If it happens, it is incumbent upon us to get ahead of this and explain to everybody, clearly, and as often as we can, about the location of where the new pool needs to be. Tim Hutvagner asked if people are afraid of the price tag of the whole project. Bill DeMaio responded that if we could grab \$9 million of not Newington's money and it would be just a million dollars out of the Capital Improvement Plan (CIP), or fundraising, it makes sense. Bill DeMaio added that it currently costs the Department \$60,000 to \$100,000, every spring, just to seal the cracks. We are sealing cracks on top of cracks. Everything is so old; we are chasing fate right now. It's always about timing in government. Now that the project has some interest at the state level, if we don't take the \$5 million, the next town over is going to take it. Thomas Gill asked if one pool can service Newington. Bill DeMaio responded that we would run Churchill Pool to the ground; keep it going until it couldn't run anymore. The problem with Churchill Pool is that it is 26 feet higher than the parking lot; to make it handicap accessible would be a very difficult task. The thought is to run Churchill Pool to the

ground and put in a \$1 million splash pad for the 15,000 picnickers who visit the park each year. It would be a place for them to cool off and a longer season to do so. You make the new pool eight lanes wide, instead of six lanes wide, to make it bigger, so that you could provide enough linear footage of a pool to teach swim lessons for both the older campers at Churchill Park and the younger campers at Mill Pond Park. We have about 400-500 campers now. The Department will have to be very clever about how we divide the times up. Having a splash pad will certainly allow for the kids to cool off, while the other groups are participating in swim lessons. That is the way we could think, for planning purposes. We will open it up for the first year, and see how it goes. Tim Hutvagner asked if the swim season would also be extended. Bill DeMaio replied that is a possibility. It's certainly about money too. The splash pad would open on April 1st and be open until October 31st. Depending on how big the roof of the bathhouse is, and how many solar panels can be placed on it, you would either have enough solar panels to heat the water for showers or you could augment the heating of the water in the pool and maybe have a secondary gas-fired furnace to heat the water. If that was the case, you could probably open the pool, on the weekends, maybe even in April or May. Eileen Francolino shared a concern about the younger and older children at the pool together. Bill DeMaio responded there have been a lot of changes to the camp programming over the years. Just like we do with the amusement park rides on the carnival day, we have the younger and older campers there at different times. If we are creative enough, especially with the air-conditioned gym at the Mortensen Community Center, we will make it work. They can also use the splash pad that is totally separate.

- **Motion:** A motion was made by Don Woods to approve, and send to the Acting Town Manager, the Board's support of the Preliminary Master Plan of Mill Pond Park. Tim Hutvagner seconded the motion. The motion passed unanimously.

XI. REPORTS

a. Budget Update

Bill DeMaio reported the budget was submitted in December and the Finance Director, Janet Murphy, and Acting Town Manager, James Krupienski, are reviewing it. They are scheduling times for the Department Heads to meet with them, along with Lisa Rydecki, from the Finance Department. They will be asking us questions about the budget. It is a very flat-lined, zero-based, kind of thinking. The places where we went up were all contractual-type of agreements; union raises went up 2%; the big jump for the Parks Division was \$20,000 more for port-o-potties. The state bid for port-o-potties ended two years ago and now the prices have quadrupled. The Department tried to be strategic and not put port-o-potties at the schools and at particular schools. We received a lot of complaints and decided to get more port-o-potties for all of the sports fields, including schools. There are some also some contractual tree agreements; a lot more tree work has to be done in town during the winter. The budget did not go up, drastically, in any area. We updated what real costs are for the Department and will keep the Board posted on the budget. Eileen Francolino asked why the cost of port-o-potties went up so much. Bill DeMaio responded they are not on a state bid anymore.

b. Youth Basketball Program

Bill DeMaio reported the Youth Basketball Program is going wonderfully. We are on our second week of games. Bill DeMaio shared how great it is to come to the Mortensen Community Center, on a Saturday, and watch four games going on at the same time. The games go from approximately 9:00 in the morning until 5:30 at night. A lot of kids are participating in the program, from kindergarten through 8th grade. Hats off to the staff, Melissa Miller and Sam Lostocco, and everyone on our staff for organizing everything and registering participants for the Youth Basketball Program. Roderick Smith and Elliot Markman are doing a great job running the Youth Basketball Program. It is a great group of people, working together to pull off a wonderful program of approximately 425 kids playing basketball in Newington; not including approximately 100 kids playing Travel Basketball. Sam Lostocco volunteers to coach a team. It is quite nice and he enjoys it.

c. Camp RECreate

Bill DeMaio reported we are already planning for Summer Camp RECreate. Hadeel Majdoub is doing a great job! She has staffing planned, all of her supervisors are hired, she has weekly trips planned, and is just looking to hire a couple more camp staff. On the aquatics side, Nancy Glynn is looking to hire twelve lifeguards. We are always 6-months ahead of ourselves for planning purposes.

d. Kala Ukulele Grant

Bill DeMaio reported the Department came across an opportunity to apply for a competitive grant from Kala, a ukulele company from California. In honor of Elvis Presley's birthday on January 8th, they are giving away ukuleles if you submit the grant. Bill DeMaio worked with Sam Lostocco to write the grant and the Department received notification that we received fifteen ukuleles, thousands of dollars-worth, along with tuners and an Elvis songbook. There is a picture of Elvis on every ukulele. On top of that, the Department has planned a class, in coordination with the Lucy Robbins Welles

Library, called "Everything You Want to Know about Ukuleles and Were Afraid to Ask". It is going to be held on March 23, 2023 at 6:00 p.m. There will be two instructors, at the library, to explain the current ukulele trend. If people like what they hear, they will be able to register for ukulele lessons through our Department. There will be a maximum of twelve participants in each class; a beginner class on Thursday nights, this spring, at 6:00 p.m. and an advanced class at 7:15 p.m. On June 15, 2023, the outdoor concert at Mill Pond Park will be 30-35 ukulele players, out of Simsbury, providing a 2-hour concert. To continue our Department's music movement, Sam Lostocco is going to be teaching private and semi-private guitar lessons. We are still looking for a vocal instructor; we would like to give singing lessons too, if anyone knows of a vocal instructor. The Lucy Robbins Welles Library also bought five ukuleles to lend out, like a book, and the Parks and Recreation Department had money to buy two additional ukuleles to lend out for people to use.

e. Neglected Cemetery Account Grant

Bill DeMaio reported there is some money at the state level, in the amount of \$5,000, and we will be writing a grant. The Board is not in charge of the cemeteries, but people often think that you are. Bill DeMaio wants to keep the Board up-to-date with this and he will hire Atlas Preservation, out of Southington, if we get the grant. They will restore some of the old, crumbling monuments at Center Cemetery. The Department did about \$30,000 worth of renovations, with contractors, over the past two years.

f. Facebook Live

Bill DeMaio had Sam Lostocco show the Board a Facebook Live that was recorded, with Santa, in our Creative Playtime Preschool Program. Eric O'Neil, a member of our Parks staff, volunteered to dress up as Santa and visit the preschool students. Eric O'Neil is a great guy and is very supportive of all of our Department's programs. He volunteers, almost every Saturday, with our Youth Basketball Clinic for children in kindergarten and 1st grade. Eric is also the Athletic Director at Emmanuel Christian Academy, here in Newington, and he coaches basketball there. He is very good at it and is great with kids! He really helps our Department out at great deal.

Sam Lostocco displayed a picture for the Board to view of Beacon Park, highlighted in a calendar from M.E. O'Brien and Sons, Inc. They are the company that represents Landscape Structures, out of Iowa. They selected Beacon Park, as one of the twelve pictures in their 2023 calendar. The actual calendar was passed around for the Board to view. It included a written description of Beacon Park, along with a beautiful picture of the playground. It is very exciting to have a playground in our town featured in a calendar!

XII. COMMENTS BY THE BOARD

NONE.

XIII. PUBLIC PARTICIPATION

NONE.

XIV. ADJOURNMENT

Jay Bottalico made a motion to adjourn the meeting. Tim Hutvagner seconded the motion. The motion passed unanimously. The meeting was adjourned at 7:25 PM.

Respectfully submitted by,

Melissa Miller

Melissa Miller