

**Town of West Hartford**  
**Parks & Recreation Advisory Board**  
March 15, 2021 5:30 – 6:30  
West Hartford WebEx

Present: Shawna Kitzman, Robin Collins, Steve Kutscher, Steve Garneau, Gus Melita, Tanja Low, Jen Evans, Anna Park, Kate Eikel

Absent: Greg Shimer

Non-Members Attending: Helen Rubino-Turco

1. Welcome and Housekeeping
  - a. Helen reviewed the protocols necessary for a virtual public board meeting.
  - b. Helen thanked the former Chair, John Minze, for serving and the members who served their terms, which ended in 2020.
2. The Board adopted the November 16, 2020 meeting minutes. The January 2021 meeting was canceled due to weather.
3. Old Business
  - a. Board Appointments/Chair Election
    - i. There are many new Board members, including Anna Park, Gus Melita, Steve Kutscher, and Steve Garneau; each introduced him/herself. Existing members Robin Collins, Tanja Low, Kate Eikel, and Shawna Kitzman introduced themselves, followed by Helen.
    - ii. Shawna Kitzman accepted the nomination of Advisory Board Chair.
  - b. Capital Improvement Plan (CIP)
    - i. Presented at the end of December 2020. Specifies Years in stages (1, 2 and 3, 4-6, 7-12 years).
    - ii. Spicebush Swamp McGovern Pond recently dredged. The project is 15-20 years overdue. Goal is to preserve the freshwater habitat. Dredging completed without disturbing wildlife. Site restoration is underway, with material moved to an upper meadow. The material will be leveled out and seeded early April 2021. The pond will be stocked with fish donated by DEEP.
    - iii. Wolcott Park: Will solicit bids for reconstruction of the western parking lot (Chatfield side) to be done this spring/early summer. Wolcott Park is undergoing phased renovation, consistent with plan developed in consult with UCONN's Peter Miniutti's graduate program. Accomplished so far: basketball and pickleball courts, lighting infrastructure (Wolcott is the only lit public park in West Hartford), community gardens at southeastern side (near Wolcott School). Eastern area would be next year.
    - iv. Whiting Lane park: Recent improvements nearly complete; tennis courts will be painted this spring and ready for play. Lower soccer field improvements were partly funded by Field of Dreams along with Town CIP funding, and included irrigating, stripping, and sod.
    - v. Baseball field at King Philip Middle School will be conducted this spring.
    - vi. There has been some community support for sandlot volleyball; proposed location at Eisenhower Park. The draft plan submitted to TPZ for acceptance in April and hearing in May.

- c. Park Planning Update
  - i. Kennedy Park is poised for improvements. Consultant for the park planning of Wolcott will be solicited; Peter Minutti is not available, so the Town will go to bid.
  - ii. Gus Melita asked about the planned timeline. Helen is confirming eligibility for HUD funding. Selection of consultant first. Park planning process includes: assessment of existing amenities; community outreach; plan development; prioritization and funding; and implementation over time. This is a great opportunity to engage the community. Steve G recommended Sal Jiminez, a local firefighter who had historically worked in Kennedy Park, as a good contact.
- d. Ten Minute Walk Initiatives – Town supports this initiative of National Recreation and Park Association (NRPA), Urban Land Institute (ULI), and Trust for Public Land (TPL). Approximately 80% of West Hartford residents live within 10-minute walk of a park and/or public school with a playground. Efforts of recent years past include tree planting and development of pollinator gardens.
- e. Helen expressed that Covid-19 really taught the Town how much people value public parks and open spaces. There was a lot of community support and appreciation for exercise and socialization. This was incredibly reaffirming! Municipal Operations Recovery Team help guide reopening strategies.

#### 4. New Business

- a. 2020 Annual Report: Submittal of periodic notes to the Town Council and Mayor by this Committee are required. The 2020 Board collaborated with Helen to develop a brief outline of initiatives, challenges, and opportunities, which was shared with the group prior to the meeting. It will be presented to the Town Manager and Town Council.
- b. Support for ADA funding
  - i. The Town is soliciting ideas on how to use HUD grant funding to improve the community. Eligible programs include improvements to under-served neighborhoods or people, and to increase handicap accessibility in parks and facilities. The Leisure Social-Services department endorses investment, with further endorsement from Citizens With Disabilities Commission and Senior Center Advisory and others.
  - ii. The Town held a virtual public meeting (no one attended) and are accepting community input, submitted to Luan Ceka. Funds may support non-profits, infrastructure improvements such as curb cuts, ramps, ADA compliance (including Westmoor Park), water fountains, etc.
  - iii. Design and infrastructure at Kennedy Park may be eligible (basketball, pool house, irrigation, playscapes, parking, etc) because it is in a low- to moderate-income area.
  - iv. Shawna moved to draft a letter on behalf of the Committee to support proposed improvements. Robin seconded. Unanimous vote. March 26 draft. For example, Eisenhower Park – accessible restroom with two, single use handicap-accessible, funded by CBDG.
- c. Friends of Fernridge/Parks Foundation
  - i. Steve Kutscher introduced Friends of Fernridge, a volunteer group he is associated with to advocate, enrich the park, and fundraise to implement additional resources.
  - ii. The last 3-6 months the group is focusing implementation of a broader group serving as stewards of parks, creating the West Hartford Parks Foundation.
- d. Celebrate West Hartford
  - i. The traditional festival for 2021 is canceled.

- ii. The plan is to host socially distanced runs, a park-to-park walk (Friends of Fernridge), a virtual arts and crafts show, and potential for park-to-park bike rides or similar. There may be opportunity to coordinate a trails event for Trail Day, June 5.
    - iii. Celebrate West Hartford was also canceled last year; the Town hosted the Fund Run in June 2020, which drew a unique crowd.
  - e. Leisure Services Spring & Summer Programming
    - i. Opened registration on February 1. Registration has been brisk. The assumption is that camps will run; most are outside. Guidelines for camp sizes was released today. Pods of 20 or less needed.
    - ii. Current Program Guide bundled Spring/Summer with Summer Camp. Considering moving to all virtual program guide, supplemented with smaller post cards, heavily relying on school communications and social media.
    - iii. Elmwood Community Center does social media advertising. Anna advocated funding for printing of brochure with a small run for facilities and libraries to stock, but not mail to every household. Could print 300 instead of 32,000.
    - iv. Completed contract with the Golf Pro, Andrew Killoran. There is an Adult Golf Camp.
    - v. Health Fitness, Manager of Cornerstone, is overseeing management of all town pool aquatics programs and services. Cornerstone is open by appointment only. It will remain to be seen how quickly the Town can open Cornerstone based on the Governor's regulations, updated today.
- 5. Other Business
  - a. Next meeting is May 17, 2021 at 5:30 pm. Helen proposed hosting at Westmoor Park to see the Outdoor Classroom. Helen will confirm once approved by Doug.
  - b. Upcoming
    - i. 10-minute walk ideas
    - ii. Update on West Hartford Parks Foundation
    - iii. Planned events for Celebrate West Hartford
  - c. Helen introduced the call for people to submit letter of interest in serving on Sustainability Committee by March 31.

Meeting adjourned 6:40 PM

Next meeting Monday, May 17 at 5:30 PM. Location Westmoor Park – pending confirmation.