

West Hartford Parks & Recreation Advisory Board
Minutes of Board Meeting held Monday, November 15, 2021 at 5:30 pm
Elmwood Community Center, West Harford

Present: Shawna Kitzman (Chair), August Melita, Robin Collins, Tanja Low, Steve Kutscher, Greg Shimer, Steve Garneau, Kate Eikel, Anna Park

Absent: none

Staff: Helen Rubino-Turco

Shawna Kitzman called the meeting to order at 5:30 pm. Tanja Low volunteered to take the minutes.

1. Roll Call
2. Adoption of September 20, 2021 meeting minutes – adopted unanimously
3. Old Business
 - a. Mayflower Property Update
 - i. A press conference was held with Governor Lamont and other speakers to announce the upcoming community center project. The property was purchased with a \$2.5 million state bond and about \$500,000 from the Town of West Hartford.
 - ii. An RFP, posted on the town website, solicits design/engineering firms to conduct a feasibility study and community outreach to solicit opinions and buy-in from the community at-large.
 - iii. The Town Council is establishing an advisory committee of stakeholders and community members. Anna Park and Robin Collins from the Parks and Recreation Advisory Board have volunteered to serve as representatives of the Board.
 - iv. It has not yet been determined if it will be a new building or a retrofit of the existing structure.
 - v. The Elmwood Community Center and Faxon Library will likely be relocated to the Mayflower Property, but both will continue to operate in their current locations until the new space is open. Both existing buildings could be potentially attractive to developers.
 - vi. Mobile Foodshare has already used the Mayflower Property for distribution, as well as the West Hartford Police Department for training. Otherwise, it is vacant and unused.
 - vii. Timeline is anticipated to be a 3-5 years before the space will be open to the public.
 - b. Capital Improvements Update
 - i. Kennedy Park undergoing 3 improvement projects --
 1. Replaced irrigation system for the soccer and baseball fields and signed a contract to re-do the basketball courts with post-tension concrete – both projects funded by CDBG; currently conducting a feasibility study for a modest renovation of the pool building (including plans to make it ADA compliant) – funded by Town funds.

2. Kennedy is the next park that will undergo a major “park planning” project. Hope to launch planning this winter.
 - ii. Eisenhower Pool
 1. RFP bids have been received; interviews will be conducted in the next few weeks; and hope to award the project in December.
 2. Funding requires an amendment to the Town’s Capital Improvement Plan; a Town Council vote must approve the money.
 3. The general timeline, if all goes according to plan, is to have the builder selected by mid-February, demolition in March/April, building in Summer and Fall 2022, return early Spring 2023 to finish the pool before a June 2023 re-opening.
 - iii. Wolcott Park
 1. The western parking lot is almost complete and the eastern side is in the design process.
 - c. American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) Funds
 - i. The Town of West Hartford has identified \$14.65 million of ARPA funding in 4 general areas (Infrastructure & Operational Improvements, Economic Vitality & Community Support, Recreation/Neighborhood Services/Sustainability, Public Safety).
 - ii. Some projects that fall under Sustainability include pollinator gardens, rain gardens, and the tree canopy study. Other improvements include at Veterans Rink, Cornerstone, Kennedy Park and various other parks.
 - iii. Town-wide free WiFi, including parks, falls under the Infrastructure category.
 - d. Memorial Bench Program
 - i. The price of the benches has gone up to \$3,000 due to increased production costs. Cost includes bench, plaque, installation and upkeep.
 - ii. Approximately a dozen or so benches have been put in over the last few years.
4. New Business
 - a. Parks & Rec Advisory Board
 - i. Appointments - Tanja Low will be reappointed to the Parks & Recreation Advisory Board. Her term expires on December 31, 2021 but she is eligible for a second term.
 - ii. 2022 Schedule - Reviewed the meeting dates for the 2022 schedule. Meetings are generally held the 3rd Monday of each month, with a couple exceptions. The proposed meeting dates are: 1/24, 3/21, 5/16, 6/20, 9/19, 11/21 and 1/23. There was a motion to approve those meeting dates and the motion was seconded and approved.
 - b. Winter Programming Update
 - i. Leisure Services recovered post-Covid and has resumed afterschool activities, with most programs being full or near capacity. Covid safety protocols are being followed and enforced.
 - ii. The Men’s Open Gym Basketball program is still on pause until the school-wide mask mandate is lifted by the Board of Education.

- iii. There was a need to add some additional programming due to high demand (including Soccer Shots). Swim lessons sold out very quickly. Leisure Services staff is cognizant that some programming is in high demand and is putting the schedule out to preview in advance of when the open registration begins. They have added extra sections when possible, but there is a struggle to find staff.
 - iv. Both Girls and Boys town recreational basketball leagues are going forward with winter and the travel programs have already begun. Masks must be worn by anyone in school gym at all times.
 - v. In a comparison of registration numbers pre and post Covid, Veterans Rink saw 1st Session numbers in FY 19 of 103 and FY 21 of 106. The Second Session comparison is FY19 at 112 and FY21 at 231. This demonstrates high demand for programming.
 - vi. The Waves swim team will be managed and staffed by Cornerstone employees, but parents are still welcome to participate as volunteers.
 - c. Urban Tree Program
 - i. An Urban Forestry Advisory Group is being formed to study tree numbers, conditions, biodiversity and location in town. Goal is to develop a tree canopy study and implementation plan, incorporating equity across neighborhoods. The hope is to combine ARPA and grant funding to do the study and plant trees.
 - d. Celebrate West Hartford
 - i. Scheduled for June 11 & 12, 2022. It will be an in-person event.
 - ii. They are looking for new volunteers and leadership (including someone to take over the craft show after this year). Volunteer opportunities include obtaining business sponsors, encouraging non-profits to sign up, direct traffic, move ice, set up booths, etc. Greg Shimer volunteered to become involved.
 - e. Miscellaneous
 - i. Leisure Services hopes to utilize part of the Leisure Services Scholarship Fund to pay for low- or moderate-income teenagers to get certified in lifeguarding, with the stipulation they would work for the town for 1 year. This has the benefit of providing these teens with income, a resume builder and life skills.
 - ii. There was a discussion of Wellness Credits in the high schools and that there is an interest among teenagers in using lifeguard certification toward those credits but they have encountered logistical and other difficulties in making it happen.
 - iii. Friends of West Hartford Parks
 - 1. Steve Kutscher shared that the Friends of Fernridge Park group has made the legal transition to Friends of West Hartford Parks. The group adopted the name change and will be working on stewardship and fundraising for all town parks.

5. Public Comment - none

Meeting adjourned at 6:45 pm.