

Minutes of Recreation Advisory Commission
RECREATION ADVISORY COMMISSION

Tuesday, March 11, 2025 6:30 PM

Rec & Ed Office

1515 S. Seventh St. Ann Arbor, MI 48103

MEMBERS PRESENT Mark Brehob, Nicholas Crowe, Naomi Goldberg, Aiden Kang, Irene Kim, Larry O'Connell, Hannah Smith

EX-OFFICIO MEMBERS PRESENT Jenna Bacolor, Victor Morales-Rios, Sean Williams

GUESTS PRESENT Jared Acker, Susanna Brown - Supervisor of First Steps Early Childhood Program, Rec & Ed, Seth Dodson - Manager of Team Sports

I. CALL TO ORDER

A. Mark called the meeting to order at 6:32pm

II. PUBLIC COMMENTARY

A. Jared Acker

1. Commented on the increase of fees for the adult softball program

- a) It's more than just about softball. It's about equity, inclusion, and who can participate in the community
- b) Has been playing recreational adult sports for over 27 years, the last half being in Ann Arbor for Summer and Fall seasons
- c) Fees of leagues and player fees in surrounding areas: Canton - \$875, Novi - \$950, West Oakland - \$875, Livonia - \$860, Saline - \$810
- d) Fees of Ann Arbor league nearly doubled - \$1,475 (2024), \$2,500 (2025), this is the most expensive program in the area
- e) Researched fees in cities further away such as Grand Rapids, Traverse City and Lansing
- f) There is a rise in the cost of living and now the raise in these fees are making it feel inaccessible
- g) The players who make up the team are community members such as teachers, nurses, constructions workers, etc. and they want to play softball in the Summer
- h) Would like to know how it is possible to make this league accessible
- i) Creating and running a sports league that caters only to the upper socio-economic class of our town is contrary to everything we believe in
- j) Softball fields and parks should look like my son's school in the bright neighborhood here in town, full of people from different socio-economic backgrounds and different languages
- k) We believe in the importance of both physically and mentally of parks, nature, sport, and sharing time with one another in positive, healthy ways. Live, work, play
- l) Work as hard as possible to consider all options to offer adult sports leagues that are welcoming to all walks of life and it all starts with the fee required to enter

- m) Team will be joining a handful of other teams from the Ann Arbor league in playing in another league for the first time this year
 - n) Disappointed to drive to a neighboring town to participate in sports leagues
 - o) This isn't sustainable, this isn't equitable, and it's not accessible
2. Mark asked about understanding the fee increase and what happened recently.
- a) Seth Dodson said it is over an extended period of time that cost of the program have risen and it is not just softball, but all diamond sports
 - b) Umpire fees have gone up, field maintenance gone up excessively and getting ready to send a contract out to bid for this summer
 - c) Seth said when he first started fees were not this high, they have been losing thousands of dollars over the years
 - d) Working with the Adult Sports Supervisor, Eliana Brinson, to look at options of how to make this work and be more sustainable. They don't want people to leave and the community is important to them
 - e) The cost of running the league has gone up and skyrocketed from equipment to field maintenance to umpires and has been a challenge
 - f) Mark asked how many fields/diamonds that are maintained
 - Seth said the bill from July 2024 was over \$20,000 in field maintenance only. This does not include lights and umpires
 - Cost for Softball in July is roughly \$10,000
 - Rec & Ed is not trying to make money on this. They want to breakeven
 - 20 fields going a night and this is youth and adult sports
 - g) Mark mentioned the funding model and this is a self-sustaining program that does not receive any money from Ann Arbor Public Schools
 - Jenna mentioned that Rec & Ed pays AAPS
 - h) Mark mentioned that other cities most likely are getting money from the school district or city
 - Sean responded that they're optimistic and were running at a deficit of \$50,000 last year
 - In order to make changes, they have been running at a deficit in softball and trying to make up for it in other programs and have reached a point that they can no longer do that
 - Fees possibly could have been raised more over time and not so drastically, but would have ended up here anyways
 - Because of the deficit and not having funding coming in, we're just no longer able to subsidize the softball program
 - Everything they are doing costs more to run, so revenues just aren't matching up in softball
 - Rec & ED is hopeful for recovery and is making changes, but does not want the program to go away
3. Jared asked a question about the Rec & Ed deficit and if there are conversations happening
- Mentioned that several teams have decided to move leagues.

- Seth said that COVID hit Rec & Ed harder than they think and were not bringing in any money for 2-3 years. If they were bringing any in, it was minimal
 - Jenna and Sean have already held discussions and formed committees about the deficit
4. Mark mentioned that the budget was discussed at the last meeting and asked if there is a way out of the deficit
 - a) Sean responded that they are in the process of recovery
 - Fees of diamond sports were discussed at that time
 - Increased marketing
 - Going program by program to look at individual budgets
 - Looking at where they can bring in more
 - b) Mark asked about how they are hoping other things within the department grow so adult sports can be subsidized
 - Sean said they have to see where participation is in all areas
 - c) Sean mentioned that their cost is to maintain the fields and what they're paying to the city - the grooming and field maintenance.
 5. Jared asked if RAC reports back to City Council and how do they get larger powers involved
 - a) Jenna said there is a representative from City Council on the committee, but they are not in attendance
 - b) Jenna has met with the Superintendent and CFO to discuss the Rec & Ed budget extensively
 - c) There is a several step plan, more like a 2-3 year plan to build the fund balance back up from being decimated during COVID
 - d) Jared mentioned that if a league folds, it takes a long time to build that league back up. Teams lose confidence in that league and it can be like that for many years
 6. Mark said that concerned members should contact City Council
 7. Naomi mentioned Rec & Ed does have a fundraiser every year and would be a great opportunity for people to attend

B. Additional Committee Discussion

1. Mark asked questions about team numbers for this year and last year
 - a) Seth said Jared is in a double header league
 - b) There were 71 teams last year and 14 teams signed up so far
 - c) The cost is \$2500 and this is for 20 games
 - Ann Arbor is the only area to offer 20 games where others are an average of 14 games
 - d) Jenna mentioned that other communities get subsidies. The whole recreation program used to be jointly funded by the city and the school district. They do not receive and supplemental funds
 - e) Seth said they took all things into consideration when making this decision
 - Shortening seasons which would save in costs
 - Putting in a bid for maintenance services

- f) Larry mentioned talking about the budget at the last meeting and that Life Long Learning and Team Sports are making money
- Jenna mentioned that they will review the budget presentation from the previous meeting
 - Seth mentioned that with diamond sports, they receive a bill from the city for lights and a bill from DJ's
 - These bills are in the thousands, not a small amount
- g) Naomi mentioned that the city supports parks and the sports fee is essentially paying for the parks a second time
- This should be communicated better
 - Nick mentioned it can be easily misunderstood
 - Seth mentioned when Rec & Ed uses Allmendinger Park they are not paying the city to do so. This is part of their agreement.
 - Rec & Ed does not receive any money from the District even though they are part of the AAPS. They do not receive any money from the city even though they use and run programs the city fields
 - Naomi said not only are we not getting money from the city, but they're getting the bill from the city and people don't understand this
 - When people vote for millages for the parks, they think they are getting is the ability to play softball on a city field, but they are also paying for that in their fees
 - Need to look at how they communicate that to people about why the fees cost what they cost
 - Hannah S. mentioned how youth sports have sponsorship opportunities and other cities have banners hung up at fields. Asked if this has been discussed
 - a. Seth said that since they do not own the field, they cannot put anything up
 - b. Hannah S. said this would be a great way to raise funds for a specific program
 - c. Seth said that he will talk to the city about this
 - Seth mentioned that adult sports also pays for Rec & Ed salaries
- h) Mark mentioned the parks millage from the last election and that this was a missed opportunity for Rec & Ed to be included in it.
- Requested information on what a .25 mil would cover to be presented at the next meeting if possible
 - Jenna mentioned that RAC members could help with some advocacy work
 - It would be hard to have another millage on the next ballot
 - Naomi mentioned that it would have to be under AAPS
 - Jenna said it would be under a recreation millage
 - Sean mentioned that Rec & Ed has a partnership with the city
 - a. Rec & Ed uses and schedules facility use
 - Nicholas mentioned renegotiating deal with the city. Said it doesn't seem like a fair deal when Rec & Ed is managing programs that benefit the city
 - Sean said he will bring this up at his next meeting with the city
 - Jenna said it is difficult to ask for money, but that doesn't mean we shouldn't ask

- Mark said asking the city might be a more reasonable path and ask they put a millage for Rec & Ed
- Jenna and Sean will see what they can do
- Naomi said a big piece is how much Rec & Ed pays to the city
- Mark mentioned that the parks will at some point ask for money again

III. APPROVAL OF MINUTES of the December 10, 2024 meeting. A motion was made by Naomi and seconded by Hannah S. that the meeting minutes of December 10, 2024 be approved. On a unanimous vote, Mark declared the motion carried.

IV. OLD BUSINESS - None

V. NEW BUSINESS

A. Welcome and introduction of the new Rec & Ed Director, Sean Williams

1. Jenna introduced Sean Williams as the new Rec & Ed Director
2. Sean has been with Rec & Ed for 24 years, spending many years in Team Sports, then moving into a supervisor role and managerial position with facilities, facility rentals, various software systems and department operational items
3. Sean is excited to carry on the restoration, make improvements to the budget, getting people interested/participating in Rec & Ed programs and provide great service

B. Presentation: [Rec & Ed's Early Childhood Program](#) - Susanna Brown

1. Susanna Brown has been with First Steps for 9 years
2. First Steps Early Childhood
 - a) Programming for families with children birth - age 5
 - Year Round Adult/Child Classes, Sports & Camps
 - Independent Enrichment Classes for 3-5 year olds with Adults on Site
 - Drop-Off Spring Break & Summer Camps for 3-5 years olds
 - Free, Seasonal Family Events for Registered Families
 - An Active First Steps Parent Teacher Organization
 - a. PTO started because they've been one of those small divisions historically that doesn't make a lot of money because they have many small classrooms
 - b) The classes, camps and events offered by the Early Childhood Division are the first introduction for many families to AAPS and Rec & Ed.
3. Who We Are
 - a) Building community with year round programming for families with children birth to age 5
 - b) Provide a space for young children to gain social & emotional confidence side-by-side with their adults (parents, grandparents, caregivers)
 - c) Sites: Westerman Preschool & Family Center, Eberbach Cultural Arts Building & Elementary school gyms and sports fields
 - d) Evening and weekend class options to reach more families
 - e) Teachers who support children's development as well as the adults who attend

classes

4. Winter Numbers - 2025
 - a) 537 babies, toddlers and preschoolers registered
 - b) 52 weekly classes
 - c) Video of classes on slides 5 & 9 of presentation
 - d) Adults range from grandparents, parents, nannies, aunts and uncles, etc.
 - e) Some classes offered:
 - Curious Wiggle Worms, Infant Massage, I Like To Move It, Move It, Creative Ballet and Who Let The Dads Out? Playgroup
5. The First Steps Parent Teacher Organization (PTO) formed in 2011 fundraises for the scholarship program at Rec & Ed and community awareness about the First Steps Early Childhood Division
6. KidFest
 - a) 2025 - 11th Annual KidFest
 - b) Saturday, May 3, 2025 from 3-5pm at the Leslie Science Center
 - Fun activities hosted by our sponsor tables
 - Sing and dance-a-long concert led by Joe Reilly
 - Online auction Saturday/Sunday
 - c) All proceeds benefit the scholarship fund for classes & camps
 - \$10,000-\$17,000 raised
 - d) Ticketed event - family tickets offered
 - Free tickets offered to GSRP Preschool students
 - e) Trike-A-Thon in the Fall
7. How can we continue to reach new families with young children?
 - a) Print Advertising (ie. A2 Observer, Mom-to-Mom Sale, flyers at libraries/community bulletin boards, etc)
 - b) Facebook Community/Parent Groups
 - c) Partnering w/ Kid-Friendly Businesses/Non-Profit Orgs
 - d) Reach Out to Pediatricians for Referrals
 - e) Suggestions
 - Naomi said that when they moved here, they thought it was only daytime classes. Suggested making a PDF of just evening and weekend offerings and send it out to daycares
 - Pediatricians - First Steps will get referrals
 - Mark suggested the GEO - Graduate Employees' Organization and Hope Clinic would be a good organizations to reach out to

C. Presentation: Before/After Care Ad Hoc Committee - Jenna Bacolor

1. Referenced [Rec & Ed Budget/Grant Update](#) from December 2024 RAC Meeting
 - a) Rec & Ed ended at the end of last fiscal year down 471,103
 - b) During the pandemic, went from a \$3.5 million fund balance to about \$600,000
 - Right after the pandemic they were at about a million
 - c) If they want to be healthy, they need to have about 25% of expenditures in fund equity, which would be \$1.4 million
 - d) Rec & Ed came into this year with another \$400,000 some projected deficit, which would put them at about \$200,000 fund equity

- e) Jenna reiterated the different charges that Rec & Ed has
 - Business service fees to the school district - \$70,000
 - Custodial overtime
 - Paying utilities for CAB building
 - Staff costs, retirement, FICA are biggest expense
 - a. Staff have received pay increases over the year, but are well deserved
- f) Contributing factors to the budget deficit
 - Changes in enrollments have not bounce back since the pandemic
 - Program costs have gone up
 - Increase in vendor usage and trying to rebalance this
 - a. Larry asked what this means
 - Jenna said Rec & Ed hires vendors to do programs, they split the revenue with them. They're trying to make sure that that revenue split is beneficial to them
 - Credit card processing fees - were absorbed by Rec & Ed and passed along in December 2024
 - Fees not matching actual program costs
 - Increase in staff costs
- g) Goals for 24-25 & Beyond
 - Moving strategically and trying to make structural changes when able
 - Donna and Sean met with each program and talked through how much does this actually cost
 - Trying to be proactive and in a way had to be reactive
- h) Initial actions
 - Meeting with Superintendent and CFO and creating a four-part deficit reduction plan
 - Ended up posting second front office position, but in a different way than before
- i) Next Steps
 - Explored program challenges, set timelines and monitoring closely
- j) Summary of Changes to Date
 - Before/After Care Ad Hoc Committee
 - a. Wanted to have additional voices at the table
 - Members included: Hannah Smith, Glenn Nelson, Melita Alston, Darci Francoeur, Kate Porter, Donna Dishman and Jenna Bacolor
 - b. Had two meetings total.
 - First meeting they provided a lot of information and answered questions and developed some scenarios based on ideas and based on questions
 - Second meeting they came with a scenario to share
 - Now they have a good plan for before and after care that actually involves more bus transportation
 - Will be able to offer after care for every elementary building
 - Will have strict minimums so that they are not running under enrolled programs

- Going to raise fees slightly
- Looking at some other staffing changes
- c. Sean mentioned that hearing and seeing what's happening and understanding that they can use this for a lot of their programs
- d. Mark asked about Rec & Ed finding a different vendor for field maintenance
 - Sean said they are finding what is the most economical
- e. Mark asked about confirmation that after care will be offered at all schools
 - Jenna said yes, but may not mean that it is at their school
 - Bussing may be involved
 - This is planned for 25-26 school year
 - Have to stick to the minimums
- f. Naomi recommended putting in an article to the Ann Arbor Observer
- g. Larry asked if this plan put before and after care on a break even
 - Jenna said it will allow for some surplus
 - If they stick to minimum numbers, which they have not done, they will be ok.
 - There will be slightly higher fees and only run programs where they can cover the costs
 - Allow same number of scholarships
- h. Mark asked bussing for before care and probably not able
 - Jenna confirmed they are not able to do this
- e. Larry asked about the budget deficit and if they're going to get to that of do better
 - Jenna said Rec & Ed is currently in registration for Spring Break Camps, Summer Camps, Spring and Summer Classes
 - They will know more in mid-April
 - Also saving from the marketing coordinator retiring
 - Looking at what is working and not working for marketing
 - Jenna said they could still breakeven
- f. Larry asked if each program is analyzed to know where they are at
 - Sean said they always have been and doing more of this. Now it is more of a collective and keeping people involved. Looking at all aspects and seeing what needs to be boosted
 - Susanna referenced custodial costs. How she plans classes at buildings that have something going on already at the same times and they can save on some custodial costs
 - Jenna mentioned the MiLEAP Out-of-School Time Grant and that this will cover thousands of dollars of staff costs in child care and summer camp area
 - Naomi mentioned Rec & Ed should send out

communication for all classes/activities that still have openings.

VI. BRIEFING AGENDA

A. Report from PAC - Hannah Smith

1. PAC January & February Meetings

- a) Presentation on improvements to be made to Forsythe Park
 - New apartment building going in
 - Part of funding is going towards park upgrades
 - a. Lighting, park fixtures, benches, that kind of thing, improved basketball court, etc.
- b) Presentation on potential long-term land lease for Skyline crew and a boathouse that they want to put on the dam side of Barton Pond in the Barton Nature Center
 - Skyline is the only high school without a current rowing facility
- c) Update from the Natural Area Preservation Group
- d) Update on the ongoing parks capital asset study
 - City is reviewing the current condition of all their facilities
 - Parks & trails included
- e) Resolution for construction contracts for Allmendinger Park improvements
- f) Grant application to the Michigan DNR for Clinton Park playground improvements
- g) Application for designation for Ann Arbor to be a Bird City of Michigan

B. Report from Parks and Recreation - Victor Morales-Rios

1. Dog Park update

- a) Pilot program has worked well and they've had positive feedback
- b) A little over 3 weeks left of it before benign turned back into a ball diamond
- c) About 100 visitors per day - set up a people counter

2. Bicentennial Park

- a) Start construction on the splash pad soon
- b) Redoing parking lots in September
 - This may affect Rec & Ed programming
- c) Fields agreement with Rec & Ed is coming to an end soon
 - Meeting with Parks & Rec, Sean and Staff
 - Talk about cost and fees as well as maintenance

C. Report from Community Education & Recreation - None

VII. TRANSMITTALS - None

VIII. ADJOURNMENT

- A. Nicholas motioned to adjourn the meeting and Naomi seconded the motion. After a unanimous vote, Mark adjourned the meeting at 7:59pm

The next RAC meeting is scheduled for May 13, 2025