



STATE OF CONNECTICUT – COUNTY OF TOLLAND INCORPORATED

TOWN OF ELLINGTON

Parks and Recreation Commission

55 MAIN STREET – PO BOX 187
ELLINGTON, CONNECTICUT 06029-0187

THOMAS BOSCARINO
CYNTHIA COSTANZO
KEVIN HAYES
SHERRY KRAUS
SHAY DRAKE
CHRISTOPHER WEITZ
CHERI MURPHY
TARA KOZIK

GORDON OLIVER
CHAIRMAN

Parks and Recreation Commission
Regular Meeting Minutes September 9, 2026
7:00 PM at Senior Center, 40 Maple Street

MEMBERS PRESENT: Gordon Oliver, Thomas Boscarino, Cynthia Costanzo, Sherry Kraus, Shay Drake, Christopher Weitz, and Tara Kozik

OTHERS PRESENT: Mary Bartley, Director of Recreation, Kevin Barrett, Assistant Director of Recreation, Robert Gorman, Program and Event Specialist, Jaime Boucher, Board of Selectman Liaison, Matt Reed, Town Manager.

RESIDENTS PRESENT: Ben Luginbuhl, Steve Austin, Michael Emons, Philip Oswald, Doug Haines, Mark Cleverdon, Justin DeCormier, Laura Gottier, Andrew Hartig, Kora Gilbert and Katie Vallier.

I. CALL TO ORDER: Commission Chair Gordon Oliver called the meeting to order at 7:04PM.

II. CORRESPONDENCE: None

III. APPROVAL OF MINUTES: July 21, 2026 Special Meeting
MOVED (BOSCARINO), SECONDED (WEITZ), AND PASSED UNANIMOUSLY TO APPROVE THE JULY 21, 2026 SPECIAL MEETING MINUTES.

IV. PUBLIC FORUM:

Commission Chair Gordon Oliver opened the meeting to public forum.

Steve Austin – 1A Virginia Drive: Volunteer soccer coach, expressed concerns regarding the evaluation process, including the lack of position-specific evaluations, particularly for goalkeepers, and limited coach input. He also referenced the CJA's policy on playing up an age division, noting that other clubs have allowed this to keep existing teams together.

Mr. Boscarino asked whether the other clubs referenced were private or municipal programs. He explained that as a municipal program, Ellington must prioritize broad participation and adopted its age-appropriate policy to prevent players from being displaced by younger players. Mr. Boscarino acknowledged that the tryout process is not perfect and noted that coaches are not identified until after the evaluation process. He also emphasized the importance of independent evaluators in ensuring unbiased team formation.

Mark Cleverdon – 95 Tripp Road: Volunteer soccer coach, raised concerns regarding the timing of soccer tryouts, explaining that some players were unable to attend due to pre-scheduled vacations and other conflicts beyond their control.

Laura Gottier – 101 Webster Road: Parent, asked for clarification on the attendance policy for tryouts. Cynthia Costanzo explained that attendance is mandatory like school teams. Laura Gottier explained that the registration system did not allow her to register her daughter for the correct age group and instead she was allowed to register her for the age group above. She noted that she included her daughter's unavailable dates

in the registration comments section but did not receive tryout information until shortly before the tryouts. Ms. Gottier also stated that her daughter had played up with the same coach for several seasons but was informed she could not play with that team this season. She expressed concerns that her daughter's current team is not at a high enough level for her development.

Mr. Boscarino asked for clarification on her daughter playing up in past seasons. He explained that it was a combined team to ensure there were enough players to form a team and provide an opportunity for those individuals to participate.

Ben Luginbuhl – 32 Ellsworth Lane: Parent, explained his daughter was affected in a similar manner by the age range adjustments. Mr. Luginbuhl expressed his disappointment with his daughter's team placement and lack of accommodation.

Mr. Cleverdon explained that those individuals had played on his team in past seasons and were effectively held back an age-level based solely on their birthdays. Mr. Cleverdon expressed his belief that these players should have been offered a grade level exception in June, before the tryout process.

Andrew Hartig – 7 Cantor Knoll: Parent, acknowledged the imperfections in the tryout process and expressed hope for continued improvement. He noted that while the age group adjustment benefited some players, it negatively impacted younger players in team placement. Mr. Hartig advocated for a grade-level exception allowing players to try out for the age group that best aligns with their grade. He also expressed interest in establishing a soccer sub-committee that includes parents of players in the program.

Mr. Boscarino expressed concerns regarding players who try out for an older age group but are not selected for that team, specifically regarding where those players would be placed.

Mr. Hartig explained that he believes those players should still be placed on the recreation level team.

Philip Oswald – 7 Ridgeview Drive: Parent, mentioned that while the CISA rules may only affect a small number of players, the implementation of it by the Recreation Department could have been less rigid. Mr. Austin agreed with Mr. Oswald's thoughts and referenced the less rigid implementation of the rules by other clubs.

Justin DeCormier – 260 Windsorville Road: Parent, emphasized the difficulty of planning around tryout dates. He explained the dates are not conducive to families who have made summer plans months in advance.

Laura Gottier echoed Mr. DeCormier's sentiments on the tryout dates.

Mr. Boscarino assured attendees that their concerns and comments have been heard and will be discussed. He also explained that tryout dates are scheduled with consideration for other programs that have historically created scheduling conflicts such as Little League and Softball.

Mr. DeCormier and Ms. Gottier expressed interest in having a tryout date scheduled later in the summer or spread out over a longer period.

Cynthia Costanzo reiterated that the commission has heard the concerns of the community members and will work toward a solution. She suggested collaborating with the Recreation Department to identify affected individuals and address issues related to age-group placement. Ms. Costanzo also acknowledged concerns regarding the evaluation process, including the timing of evaluation dates, while noting that it is a separate issue from the proposed age group adjustments. Ms. Costanzo also acknowledged Andrew Hartig's idea to establish a soccer subcommittee and offered to serve on it as a member of the commission.

A community member and current U12 Ellington soccer player spoke on behalf of his sister who was placed on a U10 team due to her birthday. He explained that the current policy will not prepare players that wish to play at the middle school level due to the different rules enforced depending on the age group.

Michael Emons – 6 Raspberry Lane: Volunteer lacrosse coach, suggested that parent committees should be created for each sport to keep up with surrounding towns.

Cynthia Costanzo proposed setting a timeline for the commission to follow up on the points brought up by community members.

Gordon Oliver suggested appointing two parents as contacts for the commission. Mark Cleverdon and Ben Luginbuhl volunteered to be contacts.

Shay Drake reminded attendees that they are always welcome to attend commission meetings. She noted that the commission is responsible for overseeing all recreation department programs and the individuals who participate in them.

Sherry Kraus assured attendees that all members of the commission care about the feedback of the community and the recreation programs in Ellington. Ms. Kraus explained that members of the commission were involved in recreation programs themselves as parents and coaches.

Thomas Boscarino asked audience members to identify their children that fall into the grade level gap created by the adjusted age groups. Parents and guardians whose children were impacted by the change provided the commission with their child's name.

Andrew Hartig clarified that he believes grade level exceptions should be offered but optional.

Katie Vallier – 120 Orchard Street: Parent, expressed disappointment in her daughter's team placement due to the age group adjustment. Ms. Vallier believes that it has a negative effect on her daughter's experience to see her classmates on the team ahead of her.

Kora Gilbert – 10 Fairview Avenue: Parent, asked about those who had already pulled out of the program due to the age group adjustments.

V. CHAIRMAN'S REPORT: None

VI. RECREATION DEPARTMENT REPORT

Mary Bartley thanked the commission for their attendance before acknowledging the work of Kevin Barrett, Robert Gorman, and Tina Modzelewski for working to support the department after Dustin Huguenin's departure. Ms. Bartley informed the commission that the department is hoping to fill the open position shortly with applications being received and interviews coming up next week. She updated the commission on the beach season. There were 163 primary passes and 87 secondary passes that were purchased this season resulting in over \$30,000 of revenue. A new yoga program that was held on Sandy Beach was also successfully introduced this summer. She also mentioned the upcoming Tedford 5k, Mike Dolen's cross country program, adult volleyball, men's basketball, and travel basketball registration taking place this fall.

VII. COMMITTEE REPORTS:

- A. FINANCE: None
- B. MAINTENANCE: None
- C. OPERATIONS: Mr. Boscarino mentioned that the operations committee will schedule a meeting.

VIII. OLD BUSINESS: None

IX. NEW BUSINESS:

Kevin Barrett informed the commission that tryout dates have followed the same general timeline for several years. He noted that some parents have expressed a preference for earlier tryout dates and explained that moving tryouts to August could create challenges with team submissions, jerseys, and other necessary deliverables. Cynthia Costanzo suggested that tryout dates should be consistent year to year, but she does not believe July is the correct time to hold evaluations.

Shay Drake suggested a later evaluation date at the cost of practices, referencing the high school and middle school timelines. Christopher Weitz pointed out that the schools have fewer teams to establish than the recreation department. Thomas Boscarino emphasized the importance of avoiding dates when private clubs hold their evaluations.

Ms. Costanzo acknowledged the impact of the adjusted age guidelines on players. Ms. Bartley informed the commission that it is difficult for the rec department to accurately identify those individuals because the registration software allows individuals to change their birthday and register for their preferred program. Kevin Barrett explained this has affected basketball as well with players trying out for teams they are not truly eligible for, resulting in the need for the recreation department to confirm grade level before finalizing teams. Mr. Barrett also mentioned that the number of girls' soccer players is up this season.

A lengthy discussion followed whether to focus on the current season and maintain consistent eligibility rules or consider changes based on parent concerns. Members noted that exceptions could lead to recurring requests and emphasized the need for clear, consistently applied rules. It was also noted that players will always be affected by the cutoff date.

The commission discussed how other local clubs handle eligibility rules. Mr. Boscarino noted that private clubs operate differently from the municipal recreation department and may accept non-resident players. Kevin Barrett stated that, to his knowledge, Ellington is the only municipally based program in the area.

The commission discussed whether the changing youth sports culture warrants revisiting current policies. Members noted that most concerns come from older age groups and clarified that exceptions should not allow players to move up multiple age groups to play with a specific team or coach. Mr. Boscarino noted that exceptions could lead to broader movement across age groups. Ms. Kraus acknowledged that the situation is unfortunate and suggested that families seeing alternative options consider private programs.

Mr. Boscarino explained that the new CJSA age guidelines are the same guidelines in place in the past and emphasized the differing missions of recreation and private clubs. Members discussed the changing youth sports culture and the importance of maintaining an inclusive recreation program while considering potential improvements. Mr. Boscarino noted that community feedback had led to program changes, including the use of independent evaluators.

Ms. Costanzo expressed her belief that the recreation department could maintain its philosophy while working alongside a potential parent-run organization. Gordon Oliver expressed concerns about the organization's long-term success of a parent organization, citing lacrosse as an example, which was absorbed by the recreation department. Ms. Kraus and Ms. Costanzo explained they believe it should be an option.

Ms. Costanzo and Mr. Weitz asked if it would be possible to receive the data on effected individuals. Mr. Boscarino raised concerns about the timeline for reviewing the data and notifying parents. Mr. Weitz also mentioned that he would like to see the domino effect of granting an exception on teams and other players. He asked the commission what number of players being granted an exception would be considered too big of a disruption in the upcoming season. Shay Drake asked about the number of players that had withdrawn from the program due to the age guideline changes, while Gordon Oliver supported focusing on currently enrolled players. Ms. Costanzo mentioned that a discussion should be had with Town leadership regarding the desired direction they would like Ellington to go. Ms. Costanzo asked when the commission would receive the number of impacted players and when a decision would be made. Kevin Barrett stated that the recreation department could provide the numbers as early as Thursday, September 10. Ms. Costanzo and Ms. Kozik expressed concern about delaying communication to parents through the weekend. Mr. Boscarino noted that a formal decision requires a meeting and asked what number of impacted players would warrant a change. Gordon Oliver suggested communicating the decision timeline to parents. Shay Drake recommended that the commission make a motion to set the number of individuals that would warrant a change. Cynthia Costanzo suggested that if 12 or more players are affected by the adjusted age guidelines, there should be no change in team placements and if there are 11 or less players affected, those players would be offered an adjustment by

grade for this season. Sherry Kraus expressed concern about using an arbitrary number to decide the outcome. Christopher Weitz and Cynthia Costanzo suggested that the number be set at 9 players, about 5% of the total participants. Thomas Boscarino stated that if exceptions are granted, then players who withdrew should also be considered. Ms. Costanzo mentioned that it would be difficult to consider those that withdrew.

Motion was made that if 9 or more players (5% of participants) are affected, there will be no change in team placements due to impact on the program overall. If there are 8 or less participants affected, those individuals will be offered a grade level exception for this season only.

MOVED (COSTANZO) SECONDED (DRAKE) AND PASSED (4-3).

X. ADJOURN

MOVED (COSTANZO), SECONDED (BOSCARINO), AND PASSED UNANIMOUSLY TO ADJOURN AT 10:27PM.

Submitted by:

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "R. Gorman", written over a horizontal line.

Robert Gorman