

**TOWN OF MANCHESTER, CONNECTICUT
PARKS AND RECREATION ADVISORY COMMISSION
THURSDAY, JANUARY 15, 2009
MINUTES**

Meeting began at 7:01 p.m.

PRESENT: Chairman: Ron Conyers; Commissioners: Tom Tierney, Frank Livingston, Tom Crocket, Joel Janenda, Bill Gochee; Parks and Recreation Staff- Scott Sprague, Ken Longo

MINUTES:

The minutes for November 2008 were unanimously accepted.

COMMUNICATIONS:

There is a new baseball league in Manchester. There has been no communication from this group to the Parks and Recreation Department. The new league is a continuation of the Legion program. It is comprised of players age 19-25. The new league does not compete with the Silkworms.

RECREATION REPORT:

There was water damage at the Bennet Leisure Center rec. building gym. 1/3 of the floor is currently involved, however, most likely, it will eventually be the entire floor. The floor has buckled and this will continue to spread. There was also damage to the track. The new roof had not leaked before. It is possible that an ice dam trapped water on the roof and it found its way through. An insurance claim will be filed and research will be done to find out who is responsible. The gym has been unusable for the past few weeks and it is expected to remain unusable for the rest of the season. The new hoops have not been installed yet.

All winter programs are up and running. There is a good drop-in attendance at the recreation centers. The open house at Bennet was well attended.

Budget meetings are ongoing. The Recreation Department has prepared 09/10 budget options for the General Manager that 1) maintain current service level, 2) zero budget growth including minor service cuts backs, and 3) a less than zero growth budget with substantial service cut backs. No one knows how the State's budget will affect the Town's budget. The Town anticipates money coming from the State each year. The State is not giving any hints this year, as they may not know the figures yet either. The biggest portion of the money from the State is used for education. Manchester also receives funding for Public Works projects. A review of the Nike Tykes program including the subsidy provided by the Town is underway. The department is reviewing options, which include a scaled back program, or possibly combining with another provider such as the YWCA. Fees may go up 10% and it is questioned if clients will be lost. Usually, when fees go up there are more scholarship requests. There is a shortage

of affordable pre-school slots in Manchester. However, there is not a shortage of pre-school slots in general in Manchester.

It is possible the Town will decide to close one or two outdoor pools.

Youth sports groups are not charged anything and are not required to give back to the Town. Even if youth participation fees were increased and a specific amount was given to the Town, it would, most likely, not cover the costs involved in field preparation, field maintenance and utility costs. If the Little League were to disband, the Town would most likely have to pick up the program and run it. With a town of 55,000+ people, you have to have a Little League program. It is a quality of life issue. The Town has to have quality youth programming. It was questioned if adults expect this for their own programming as well.

The Recreation budget is approximately \$3,000,000. The Park's portion of Ken's budget is about the same. We are running up against a financial wall; need vs. nice.

It was questioned if out of town users have increased. Maybe there will need to be a higher charge for the adult programs. A meeting may need to be held with all the youth sports programs to discuss future costs.

The Youth Services Program works closely with the Parks and Recreation Department. They will be moving to a new space across from Center Park at the corner of Linden and Myrtle Streets. They assist the Parks and Recreation Department by providing Youth Service Counselors for summer camp. They handle the problems beyond normal camp matters. The Recreation Department works closely with Youth Services on a variety of issues throughout the year.

The computer lab designed for the Bennet Leisure Center did not get funded.

Keeping youth busy is an important part of after school and evening recreation programs. Public recreation provides for people who can't afford private recreation.

A copy of the Recreation Department core services chart was mailed to all Commissioners. If there are any questions, contact Scott.

The Senior Center programming has been a Recreation Department responsibility for about five years. There are 150 program offerings there. There are more seniors and activities than ever before.

Many programs are self-sustaining (Board of Directors' definition is that the program pay for the direct cost of an instructor, building supervisor, supplies and materials.) The Town pays for the facility and administrative costs. You have to balance the fees with the maximum people who are willing to pay before they decide to no longer participate. The little niceties add up to a lot.

Summer camp fees will be determined in February. Our fees are low, \$30 per week plus \$40 for before and after care. The suggested base fee is \$40.00 per week. The average charge by

surrounding towns for summer camp is \$92 per week. Some campers already are on scholarship. If fees increase, more participants will request scholarship/fee waiver. An increase in demand is expected this year due to the economy. The summer camp is a quality program. There will not be as many trips. However, youths will swim twice per week, attend special events in Town, go rollerskating and take other trips. The old playground program and camp program were combined years ago. The youth are signed in and signed out daily. There is no freedom to come and go. A licensed nurse is available for medication dispensing and injuries. There are waitlists mainly for people waiting for a specific site; most could have been accommodated at another location.

There is a new Little League President, Paul Rubin. He expressed interest in constructing two new fields at Martin School.

FIELD SERVICES REPORT:

Ken had a good meeting with the Board of Directors to discuss core services. Manchester's success is leading to some of the financial problems the Town has. All the successful ball programs lead to more field maintenance funding needs. During the month of June, the fields had over 500 uses. That includes multiple uses of the fields every day. If mowing were to be cut back to one time per week, the weather could cause conflicts in the schedule. Then there would be complaints from users about the grass length. Many fields are fertilized and watered. They were mowed three times per week during the peak-growing season. There is so much use the fields are never rested. There was 4,300+ hours of mowing, 3,700 hours of field preparation and 1,736 hours of pool maintenance (for 8 week program) last year. The staff loves to do their job and they are proud of the work they are doing and the results. Manchester has wonderfully maintained fields compared to surrounding towns.

Manchester has softball field commissioners for all adult softball league games. The commissioners are part time Recreation Department employees. This enhances the quality of the program. The cost is \$22-23,000 per summer (adult softball leagues). Do we keep them or do we have the umpire run the field instead? There is no trouble getting umpires, but they may have to go forward without the field commissioners. This will reduce program quality.

The Parks staff is associated with every event in Town. Some do not realize the time and effort put into preparing facilities for programs and events. Ken has had the opportunity to make everyone aware of what his staff actually does. What gets set up has to eventually be taken down. A lot goes into the quality events Manchester holds.

OLD BUSINESS:

Frank Livingston viewed the trees to be removed/trimmed in Center Springs Park. He questioned if the goal was to open the park to be used more. Security and removing dead/dying trees is the goal. It is not a harvest project; only problem trees will be removed. It was questioned if the money that will be used for cutting would be better spent elsewhere. A tree harvest would have been a "wash", however this project will not be. The Park Department staff

has already begun removing underbrush. There will be a cost, as the larger trees will be left standing. The area used to be used as a picnic area, which people enjoyed. Times have changed.

Recently there have been concerns raised about health risks posed by artificial turf fields. The results of new studies will need to be taken into consideration if an artificial field becomes possible in Manchester. Scott Sprague noted that Cheney Tech's artificial turf fields are in their first full season of use. He spoke with Cheney Principal Bruce Sievers who expressed no reservations.

Robbie Ricker's presentation went well on Tuesday night.

NEW BUSINESS:

The Pavilion Fee will be adjusted. Individuals and non-profit groups, as well as family and social events do not require insurance. All other users must provide insurance. Typically, every weekend mid-April through mid-October the pavilion is in use. There are already 13 confirmed reservations for the upcoming season. Each weekend usage costs the Town \$157. Each weekday usage costs the Town \$49. The costs include staffing, cleaning the kitchen and restrooms and trash pick up. The rentals usually go until 6:00 p.m. during the Silkworm season. Most users come as early in the day as possible. There is no alcohol allowed. The Pavilion is supervised in case of emergency or facility problems (serving window or grill, etc.). Sometimes the police need to assist. If the Pavilion is not rented, people drop in and use it for short picnics. The grill costs the Town \$63 per use; this includes cleaning and gas. Last year it cost \$7,741 to run the Pavilion. The Town received \$5,600 in rental revenue. With the new fee structure, the Town will receive \$9,000+ in revenue. The Board of Directors approved the new schedule at their January meeting.

Some Commissioners expressed concern that the Commission had not been consulted on this issue. Scott Sprague stated that the issue was raised in December and needed Board action in January as requests for use had been coming in. The Commission does not meet in December and the January Board meeting was before the Commission meeting.

Mr. Sprague said he would make every effort in the future to seek the Commission's recommendations on issues concerning user fees.

Adjournment

Respectfully Submitted,