



Town of Westport Parks & Recreation

WESTPORT PARKS AND RECREATION COMMISSION Longshore Club Park, 260 South Compo Road Westport, CT 06880

February 14, 2011

The Westport Parks and Recreation Commission held a meeting in Town Hall, room #201/201A at 7:30 p.m. Those in attendance were Janis Collins, Chairman; Jennifer Johnson, George Franciscovich and Andy Moss; Commission Members; Stuart McCarthy, Director of Parks, and four(4) member(s) of the general public.

The meeting was called to order at 7:33 p.m.

Ms. Collins arrived at 7:40 p.m.

1. Approval of Minutes

Upon motion by Ms. Johnson, seconded by Mr. Moss, the minutes of the Parks and Recreation Commission meeting of January 24, 2011 were unanimously approved.

2. To take such action as the meeting may determine to approve a request by the Westport Police Athletic League (P.A.L.) to host the 2011 town fireworks display at Compo Beach.

Mr. McCarthy – This is the annual request of P.A.L for the fireworks. We turn the beach over to P.A.L. at 4pm on the day of the fireworks and allow them to charge the admission for the fireworks display. They pay all the costs associated with the fireworks and they take the money that is leftover and use to support other programs throughout the year.

Upon motion by Mr. Moss, seconded by Ms. Johnson and passed unanimously, it was

RESOLVED: The Parks and Recreation Commission grants approval to the Westport Police Athletic League to host the 2011 town fireworks display at Compo Beach.

3. Discussion of Parks and Recreation Department's policy on the use of Town of Westport Athletic Fields.

Mr. McCarthy - The Parks & Recreation Department staff along with Ms. Collins and Mr. Moss, Commission Member's, have undertaken a review of the existing policy regarding use of town athletic fields (copy of draft attached for the file). The draft has been circulated to the various youth sports organizations and comments have been incorporated into the draft. It is being presented this evening for discussion and will come back for a formal vote at a future meeting with any recommended changes.

This is really a documentation of our existing practices which has never been a written policy. The addendum in the back related to the sports camps and clinics was adopted by the Commission several years ago.

As a practice, Dan DeVito meets twice a year with all the user groups to work out scheduling and any other issues. On an ongoing basis from an operational standpoint we don't have a lot of issues. However, one of the concerns that comes up routinely has to do with private organizations wishing to use the facilities. The trend in recreation is towards for-profit organizations to provide sports activities. An example is the Premier Soccer in which clubs unassociated with the town's recreation department or schools are being formed and recruiting players from all over the region and are looking for some place to play. It has been going on with soccer now for about 10-12 years and is expanding into other sports.

Our current policy addresses who gets to use the fields, under what conditions they get to use them, how they go about applying, and then how we make those decisions on how groups are authorized to use the fields. We did list the existing organizations. If a new organization comes to us, the first thing we encourage them to do is to affiliate with one of those existing organizations. By having one umbrella organization to work with, they can best figure out how to utilize those fields. It takes the Parks Department out of the day-to-day, minute-to-minute decision making.

Mr. Andy Moss - What would P.A.L. have to do if they wanted to do a regional lacrosse league, what would have to happen?

Mr. McCarthy - P.A.L. is one of the sanctioned organizations, so if they wanted to expand their program they would come to us and explain what they wanted to do and we would review and determine under this criteria whether it was appropriate, Criteria would be how many residents are in the program, how it's serving the community, etc.

Mr. Franciscovich - My concern is that this isn't interpreted or meant to exclude people. Situations change, people change and there should be opportunities for new organizations to come up and not be excluded from becoming sanctioned.

Mr. Moss - If this is a policy document I don't think you need to single the Westport Soccer Association out. If the policy covers that you can have this regional participation done through the sanctioned organization then you are covered. Do we allow regional teams in or not based on policy. Either we have a policy that allows it or don't have a policy that allows it.

Mr. Franciscovich – Private Instruction - Does this only apply to the athletic fields or does it apply to the beach.

Mr. McCarthy - This is something that we have had a lot of discussions on with regards to the athletic fields. My staff has conversations about it on a weekly basis on controlling where people go. We have a problem, in that we are running public facilities. Part of it is identifying who these people are. We have our regulations that say you need a permit if you are running a for-profit organization or advertising.

We get dozens of requests to use the fields and under our policy even though the fields may be available we do not make them available. Our fields are for Westport teams and affiliates of Westport teams.

Mr. Franciscovich - The way this reads now it sounds very exclusionary, and I think we want to show if it's a new group there are opportunities to come under our guidelines.

Mr. McCarthy - The question is, the exception to the policy is carved out for the Soccer Association. That is existing practice that has been in place for 15 years, are you ready to put an end to it?

Ms. Collins - We are suggesting that we make that more generic, and available to other sanctioned organizations as well.

Ms. Collins - We need to establish criteria for the affiliates. In order to be fair, we need a transparent policy that treats everybody equal.

4. Old Business

Ms. Collins had done some checking on having a ski trip that had been requested by Will Bitsky at the December 2010 P&R Commission meeting.

Mr. McCarthy - We have some history running some ski trips and it wasn't good. The Town of Westport used to run ski trips (PTA, Youth Adult Council, Schools) all of those organizations stopped running the trips and all for the same reason, which was it is a dangerous activity. Ski trips are great but having a responsibility for other people's children in that environment is difficult. Not only are you dealing with a dangerous activity but you are also dealing with a largely unsupervised activity a long way from home. It is largely unsupervised and the person sponsoring the trip is held responsible for the behavior of the kids

Also, I'm not sure we have the staff to run this type of program. We have two large programs during the winter which are the basketball and ice skating. I only have two program people and each one of them is responsible for each one of those programs. I don't think we have the available staffing for it and I'm not sure we want the responsibility for that trip.

Ms. Collins - I did some research and found that Fairfield/Warde does ski trips. They had a trip a couple of weeks ago with participation of 100 kids. I got the name of the bus company that they use (Ski Tours). They have been doing the trip for years. They are former teachers that have formed a ski tour company. I talked with Tom Owens who is the coach of the Staple HS ski team and he gave me the name of the teacher who is a skier and is someone who is really interested in being a sponsor of something like this.

5. New Business

Ms. Victoria Engh - I have spoken with Jeff Weiser of Interfaith Housing who is doing Castles in the Sand at Compo Beach in May. I spoke with him about having a volleyball tournament in conjunction with Castles in the Sands and wanted to know if this would be a possibility.

Mr. McCarthy suggested Victoria get in contact with Dan DeVito to work through the details and if it they were acceptable it will come back to the Commission for final approval.

Mr. Will Bitsky - Has the Parks & Recreation ever thought about having Rec Basketball during the spring? Mr. McCarthy - We have a summer league and there are a lot of other spring activities so I don't know that we are looking at expanding that. I don't disagree it's a great program but the idea of expanding it to a year-round program is not probable.

6. Commissioner's Reports

None

7. Administrative Update

Mr. McCarthy – Website - The town is in the process of converting its website. This will give us the opportunity to control the contents. The result we believe will be a much more dynamic website. It will be updated more frequently, will be more attractive and more user friendly. It is due to launch at the end of the month and I will send the link and password to allow you to view the website before it goes live. I would ask you to feel free to give any comments or suggestions.

Ms. Johnson - Has P&R ever used in a project like this people that would like to volunteer who might have experience, or is it too hard to oversee them? Mr. McCarthy - Part of it is overseeing and part is controlling the content particularly when you have people doing creative ventures. We do plan on putting out a call for photographs.

The meeting adjourned at 9:10 p.m.

Respectfully,
Sheila Kavey
Recording Secretary