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**Town of Westport
Parks & Recreation**
WESTPORT PARKS AND RECREATION COMMISSION
Longshore Club Park, 260 South Compo Road
Westport, CT 06880

May 7, 2020

The Westport Parks and Recreation Commission held a special meeting on Thursday, May 7 @5:06pm. Pursuant to the Governor's Executive Order No. 7B, there was no physical location for this meeting. It was held electronically and recorded via Zoom.

Members Present:

Charles Haberstroh, Chairman; Edward Iannone, Alec Stevens, Karen Hess, Steve Axthelm

Also Present:

Jim Marpe, First Selectman; Jennifer Fava, Director, Parks & Recreation; Rick Giunta, Deputy Director of Parks and Recreation; Jane Daly, Chair of the Golf Advisory Committee; David Floyd, Chair of the Parks Advisory Committee, along with members of the public.

Charles Haberstroh stated that this is a special meeting and only the agenda items will be discussed.

**1. Review of status of Parks & Rec response to CoVid 19 as it pertains to the Commission.
(Discussion only)**

Charles Haberstroh stated that the Parks and Recreation Commission has not met since February 2020. Tonight's meeting will be a review from the Parks and Recreation Department, as it relates to CoVid 19.

Jennifer Fava stated that this has been a long ongoing situation and is constantly changing. First and foremost, the health and safety of residents and staff is our top priority. The Department understands the need and desires for the residents to have access to the Town's open spaces, but it needs to be handled in a safe and responsible manner. At the beginning of the pandemic, the following modifications were made:

- A) Parks and Recreation office staff began working from home when possible
- B) Parks staffing was staggered, to ensure the health of the workers

Since that time, staffing has been modified.

Due to the continued heavy utilization of all the Parks and Recreation facilities, the following was implemented:

- a) The parking lots at Compo Beach, Soundview and Burying Hill Beach were closed
- b) All playgrounds, basketball courts and athletic fields were closed
- c) Permits were suspended
- d) The Parks and Recreation office was closed to the public
- e) The balance of courts were closed
- f) The Longshore golf course delayed its opening
- g) Additional staff was brought in to monitor facilities
- h) Program registration, beach emblem sales and other handpass sales were delayed
- i) Dogs were required to be leashed on all properties

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- j) Parking at Old Mill and Compo Mill Cove were restricted to residents only
- k) Sherwood Mill Pond Preserve parking lot and Canal Beach parking lot closed
- l) Department suggested that people park at Longshore, to walk to Compo beach or on the golf course, since the golf course was not open for play
- m) On April 1, boat slip holders were allowed to put their boats in their slips

May 15 Opening Update:

Longshore Golf Course Update:

- a) The Longshore Golf Course will open for play on May 15
- b) Walking only and no walk-ups
- c) Tee times will be from 8am to 6pm. Reservations must be done in advance via on-line or through the app, no phone reservations accepted
- d) The driving range, practice putting green, practice bunker, pro-shop, half-way house, handicapped computer room, and locker rooms will all be closed
- e) Staffing will be limited to one person at the pro shop window. There will not be a starter and there will be only one ranger out on the course to ensure social distancing.
- f) Face coverings will be required upon check-in, and if social distancing cannot occur, continued use of a face covering will be required
- g) Port-a-johns will be located at hole #7, #13, half-way house, and at the pro shop
- h) Golfers are allowed to bring their own hand carts
- i) Players must maintain the 6 feet distancing, and while putting, each player must putt until they hole out.
- j) One person will be allowed on the tee box at a time
- k) There will be no touching or removing of flagpoles, scorecards and pencils will not be available.
- l) Foam inserts will be placed within the cups
- m) Bunker rakes and trashcans will be removed
- n) Water fountains and ball washers will be unavailable
- o) Additional signage will be placed at each hole to remind people to keep one golfer on the tee box, also signs to reinforce social distancing, face coverings and one sign on the 18th green to please leave after the round and not gather.
- p) Parking is normal, and emblems will be required in the specific lots. Lots A, B, and F will not require an emblem
- q) At this time, the golf associations will not have blocked tee times

Charles Haberstroh noted that the Inn at Longshore is closed, and the restaurant may not allow use of their restrooms. People will need to use the port-a-johns.

Compo Beach Update:

- a) Compo Beach parking lots will be open to Westport & Weston with valid 2020 emblems only
- b) There will be no Daily Passes, and no sales of non-resident emblems
- c) Parking is limited to 50% capacity, equaling to 400 cars
- d) Emblems can be purchased either on-line or over the phone. The receipt will be valid for 10 days after the date of purchase, and can be used to enter the beach, if emblems have not come through the mail.
- e) The beach parking lots will be manned and open from 8am to 9pm. Marina parking is not included in this 50% capacity cap.
- f) For now, the playground, skatepark, pickleball courts, basketball courts, volleyball courts and beach restrooms will all remain closed. Benches along boardwalk will remain at this time.
- g) Bath house lockers will remain closed and water fountains will not be operable
- h) Pop up tents and tents larger than 10' x 10' are prohibited
- i) If people cannot social distance, they will be required to wear a face covering

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- j) People are allowed to bring chairs, food, and beach umbrellas
- k) Additional signage will be placed at the beach to remind people again of social distancing and face coverings
- l) Games and activities are not allowed

Burying Hill Beach Update:

Burying Hill is anticipated to open on Memorial Day weekend, and will be held to the 50% parking capacity for Westport and Weston 2020 emblems. No daily parking allowed.

Jennifer Fava stated that all these restrictions can be modified, and as the progression moves to the next phase, it will be based on guidance from the Governor, Federal, State and local authorities, as well as community compliance. If it is determined that people are not following guidelines, facilities may be shut down or reduced in capacity, etc.

Department Programing Update:

The Department is working on many different options, and waiting to receive more information from the State. What has been issued is quite restrictive, and we are expecting more restrictions. The State will also be issuing information regarding beaches and lifeguards. The Department has been involved with many different discussions, meetings, conversations with State and local officials, Department of Health, DEEP, and the Town's Health District. We are using all this information to make decisions, as well as looking at the different associations, state organizations, etc. Some scenarios may be virtual programs. The Programming staff has been utilizing social media for different ideas on activities to engage children, such as virtual tours of the San Diego Zoo, etc. The Department is also looking into alternative programming, or replacement programs.

Questions have been raised as to what impact this will have on the Parks and Recreation budget. Funds have been used for Covid-19 related expenses, i.e., staff, various services, products, signage. This is all being tracked for FEMA, for reimbursement to the Town. Note that while revenue as usual is not coming in, certain expenses will not occur either.

Reopening plan:

Jennifer Fava stated that she, staff and other town departments are all working on phased reopening plans. With many intricacies, plans need to be phased in, reviewed and adjustments made.

Next, to be phased in will be tennis. The Longshore courts are in the process of being refurbished, which is done every year, and should be completed by the end of this week or early next week. Both the Doubleday and Town Farms courts have cracks. Due to Covid-19, the company, which handles the repairs, is held up, as they are deemed non-essential. Hopefully, they will be opening up in the next couple of weeks and the courts can be repaired and open for play. Play will be limited to *singles only* to start. "Best Practices" will be implemented.

In terms of reopening, Jennifer Fava stated that she is on the internal "Reopening Team", and the "Reopen Westport Advisory Team".

Our spring sports are done for the remainder of the year, due to CIAC cancelling the spring season now that schools are closed for the remainder of the school year.

In terms of "Best Practices", Jennifer Fava stated that she is in regular contact with her local counterparts in our neighboring communities. She is constantly in meetings, on the national and state level to assess how things are being handling. She and staff are also constantly reviewing information from the CDC, CT Recreation and Park Association, National Recreation of Parks Association, American Camping Association, and various organizations, such as USTA.

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We will continue to phase in modifications, and opening new facilities and amenities as deemed appropriate, while following Federal, State and local guidelines and “Best Practices”. This is a very fluid situation and we are working hard to do this in a safe and responsible manner for people.

Charles Haberstroh thanked Jennifer Fava and her staff on this endeavor. He offered a couple of observations. 1) What we are doing is not revenue driven and 2) This is all about public safety and health driven.

Commissioner Comments:

Edward Iannone asked several questions:

- A) How is the health and morale of the Parks and Recreation staff?
- B) Is the golf practice range and pro shop open?
- C) He asked if the senior class could use the turf field before the crews were brought in and before the kids went back to school in the fall. He said there would be increased demand to use the fields in the next 8 to 10 weeks.
- D) Why are we using port-a-johns and not the restrooms?

Rick Giunta answered his first question by stating that the staff is working extremely hard. Staff would typically have two months to process, print and mail out beach emblems. This year, the window has narrowed considerably and staff is processing hundreds of emblems in a very short amount of time.

Jennifer Fava responded to the balance of Edward Iannone’s questions.

- B) The golf practice range and pro shop are closed at this time
- C) The fields will remain closed to discourage social gathering, along with following the Governor’s limitations and guidelines for groups gatherings
- D) Using port-a-johns limits use to one person at a time making it is easier to disinfect vs. disinfecting multiple surfaces and areas.

Steve Axthelm stated that he feels the disappointment of the kids not being able to use the fields to play with their peers before they head off to college.

Karen Hess thanked Jennifer Fava and her staff. She asked if a contractor could be hired in CT vs. NY to repair the courts? Jennifer Fava stated when looking for a vendor, several were contacted, but they referred us back to this company. With restrictions loosening, that company should be able to make those repairs in a couple of weeks.

Jennifer Fava stated that when the golf course opens on May15, people should discontinue parking at Longshore to walk the course for exercise or to walk to the beach. It is a dangerous area and people could get hurt.

Charles Haberstroh asked if the other parks were free to walk around in and the role of the police vs. Parks and Recreation personnel. Jennifer Fava said that yes, the parks are open, remembering to use social distancing and face coverings when needed, along with keeping dogs leashed. At Compo Beach there will be police officers patrolling at all times during the day and staff will be walking the beach as well. We will start off giving people reminders to cooperate vs issuing a ticket. The hope is not to get to the point where more restrictions are needed or the issuing of fines.

Steve Axthelm asked if people do not comply or honor the guidelines, are there other means of enforcement, i.e, issue a warning, and if you are asked a 2nd time, you lose your parking emblem. Can we consider that? Jennifer

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Fava said that is something we have in mind. The goal is not to close the facilities. The first option is to deal with the individual. Steve Axthelm asked if we should publish an enforcement policy to help with public compliance? Jennifer Fava said that this would be an opportunity, should people not follow the guidelines.

Edward Iannone asked if it is required to use every other court? Jennifer Fava said as of now, this is the recommendation from the local clubs. They are utilizing every other court, and we need to space people out as best we can.

Edward Iannone asked if the gas docks were open. Jennifer Fava said yes, they are open.

Alec Stevens asked about summer camp and limited numbers at the beach. Jennifer Fava said this is a fluid situation and we are looking at all different scenarios, and we are waiting for information from the State. We need to make sure we can comply with all the guidelines and decide how and if we should move forward. We will also be speaking with the Health District for their input to ensure we can host camps in a safe manner.

Public Comments:

Jay Walshon, 67 Roseville Road asked if tennis was going to open on the 15th of May? Jennifer Fava said that tennis will not be opening May 15. Once we have an opening date, we will announce it.

Jay Walshon, 67 Roseville Road asked if Pickleball courts could open? Jennifer Fava said at this time, we are looking strictly at Tennis, and the others to follow. Jay Walshon said that the USTA and the USA Pickleball Association has guidelines and offered to send them to Jennifer Fava. Jennifer Fava said she has that information already.

Nancy Rosen, 67 West Parish Road asked about the use of port-a-johns instead of using the restrooms and hand washing. Jennifer Fava stated this decision was made in consultation with the Health District. We can better disinfect by spraying down the port-a-john, versus having to disinfect multiple stalls, multiple surfaces and multiple fixtures. Jennifer Fava said each port-a-john will have hand sanitizer. Nancy Rosen also asked about life guards, and emergency situations where they may put their own health at risk. Jennifer Fava said that it has not been decided if we will have lifeguards. We are waiting on further guidance from the State. This is a topic of concern for the Department, as well as other colleagues, as to whether it is safe to put our lifeguards in that position.

Nancy Rosen, 67 West Parish Road also asked if the Commissioners knew that there are over 600 concerned citizens that have signed a petition, believing that the Compo beach parking lot not be opened. They feel that an incredible risk is being taken with people lives.

Charlies Haberstroh stated that the Town never closed Compo beach. We are trying to open the beach to a limited capacity of people and cars. Park personnel and police will be patrolling. If we find a wide disregard of obeying the social distancing guidelines, the Town will close the parking lot. We can only control the vehicular emblems entering the parking lot. The petition doesn't really address the issue.

Holly May Brooks, 65 Westport Road asked about masks. Would it make sense to require everyone in a vehicle to show that they have a mask? She is concerned people don't have masks handy. Jennifer Fava said she would take it under advisement. Holly May Brooks also asked if the Town could rent portable hand washing stations? Jennifer Fava said it has been looked into, the problem is limited resources, and items not available. We are on a wait list to get some. Ms. Brooks also asked about the restaurant at the beach, would they be bringing food out to the people? Jennifer Fava said that hasn't been decided.

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Charles Haberstroh said that there are limited things that staff at the gate house can do. Just because people have a mask, doesn't mean they will wear them.

Jay Walshon, 67 Roseville Road wanted to let the Commissioners know that Yale did a study where it was found that the virus will linger in the air for up to 3 hours. The most dangerous spaces where you can become infected will be in a small space with poor ventilation. Public restrooms and portable johns are one of the highest risk places to go. Please take this under advisement.

Commissioners Comments: None

2. Administrative Update

- Turf field replacements are still on track
- The concession at the beach has not gone through the entire process. P&Z and Board of Finance approved. The next step is the Board of Selectmen, with a date to be determined.
- The Parks and Recreation budget was approved on Monday night for fiscal year 20/21
- The Parks and Recreation team is doing a great job. Most of the work is Covid-19 related.

Charles Haberstroh asked about the original Selectmen's budget, how much was cut? Jennifer Fava said about \$16,000 in cuts and the rest of the additional revenue items, will be coming before the Commission at a later time.

Charles Haberstroh asked if the Parks and Recreation budget is in doubt due to Covid-19. Did the Board of Finance offer any guidance on how to move forward, past July 1st? Jennifer Fava said not at this point. The budget needed to be determined and voted upon to move forward to assist in setting the mill rate. It is hard to figure out what July will look like, or even August and September. The original budget was done back in November.

Charles Haberstroh asked if any projects were put on hold or side-lined? Jennifer Fava said nothing has been said at this point to hold off. Delays are due to dealing with the Covid-19 virus.

Upon a motion by Karen Hess, and seconded by Stephen Axthelm, the meeting adjourned at 6:51pm.

Respectfully,

Deborah Detmer
Recording Secretary