

## FINAL



October 22, 2020

The Westport Parks and Recreation Commission held a meeting on Wednesday, October 21, 2020 @7:31pm. 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, Kate Kirby

**Members Absent:**

Stephen Axthelm

**Also Present:**

Jennifer Fava, Director, Parks & Recreation; Rick Giunta, Deputy Director; Carmen Roda, Operations Manager; Todd Salamone, Longshore Golf Course Superintendent; Vince Gilmartin, Northeast Area Director for BrightView, along with members of the public.

Charles Haberstroh introduced and welcomed Kate Kirby. Kate Kirby replaces Karen Hess on the Commission.

**1. Approval of Minutes**

Upon a motion by Charles Haberstroh, seconded by Edward Iannone, the minutes of the Parks & Recreation Commission meeting of February 26, 2020 and May 7, 2020 were approved 4-0-1.

**2. Public Comment:**

No Public Comment.

**3. Reports of:****Boating Advisory Committee – No report**

- The Boating Advisory Committee has not met this year, due to COVID-19 and lack of members.

**Golf Advisory Committee – Jennifer Fava, Director of Parks and Recreation**

- The Golf Advisory Committee met on October 5, 2020, via Zoom.
- Due to COVID-19 the golf course opened approximately 6 weeks late. Tropical Storm Isaias closed the course for 8 days, due to no power.
- Use of the golf course is in high demand, causing difficulty in securing tee times. Golf carts are also in high demand, due to single rider requests, again due to COVID-19.
- As of Oct 1, 2020, rounds were down approximately 2,800 (including the 7 weeks that the course was closed), compared to October 1, 2019.

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## **Parks Advisory Committee – David Floyd**

- The Parks Advisory Committee has not met this year, due to COVID-19.
- Jennifer Fava has been instrumental on removing debris from Riverside Park.
- Jennifer Fava reported:
  - Steve Edwards was brought in as a consultant on this project, as well as some others, due to a shortage of staff.
  - There has been a great deal of cleanup at the park, especially in the front, with the leveling of the area and removal of rocks, as well as putting down topsoil and seed.
  - Aprons were installed by the driveway to assist in water runoff.
  - Guardrails were installed a while ago, and another section will be installed. However, the contractors are having difficulty securing the lumber. This shortage has affected our other park guardrail repairs as well.
  - We are still in the process of hiring an on-call landscape architect to help with different projects. Once we secure an architect, there are several items that will be brought before the Parks Advisory Committee for review and implementation.

## **Racquets Advisory Committee – David Axelrod**

- The Racquets Advisory Committee has not met since February 4, 2020.
- Summer racquet sports went very well, and all facilities were heavily used.
- Paddle tennis had a good summer and is gearing up for the winter season.
- The heaters on the courts are not working properly, but staff are on it.
- The RAC is still interested in the addition of a warming hut and 2 courts.

## **Levitt Pavilion Sub-Committee – Charles Haberstroh**

- The Levitt Pavilion Sub-Committee was established last year, and due to unforeseen circumstances did not meet in April 2019. It is scheduled to meet virtually on November 9, 2020.
- Due to COVID-19, the Levitt Pavilion cancelled their 2020 performance season.

#### **4. Discussion relative to the condition of Longshore Golf Course. (Discussion only).**

Jennifer Fava stated that the course has seen some challenges this year that haven't necessarily been seen in the past. Some of these challenges were:

- a. The increase of people using the golf course.
- b. Increased cart usage owing to single rider usage due to COVID-19.
- c. Loss of power in the area due to Tropical Storm Isaias, lasting 8 days, which affected the ability to fully utilize our irrigation system.
- d. Watering of the course restricted to “only by hand”, with tees and greens taking precedence.
- e. Significant tree damage by the tropical storm.

Jennifer Fava shared concerns that were brought up by the Golf Advisory Committee, and shared with Todd Salamone, Longshore Golf Course Superintendent and Vince Gilmartin, Northeast Area Director, BrightView

- a. Condition of the fairways
- b. Bunker maintenance
- c. Cup replacements
- d. Flag sticks
- e. Etiquette of the maintenance staff
- f. Aeration work
- g. Par 3 tee placements

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Jennifer Fava stated that she is holding regular meetings with Todd Salamone, and has begun to have regular calls with Vince Gilmartin, making sure they understand our needs and concerns, as well as working towards a remedy for the current issues and any future potential needs.

The P&R Commission received an email prior to this meeting from the LMGA outlining a list of their concerns, which was also shared with the GAC and BrightView.

Charles Haberstroh stated that another concern, along with the bunkers, were the areas around the bunkers. Charles Haberstroh asked Jennifer Fava to circulate the LMGA comments to the Commissioners. Jennifer Fava also stated that there are two bunkers which need to be completely redone. A car flipped over into a bunker on the 14<sup>th</sup> hole causing major damage. BrightView was able to repair it enough for play. During Tropical Storm Isaias, a large tree by the chipping area/practice green (by the 17<sup>th</sup> tee) fell into the bunker, also causing major damage. Parks & Recreation has reached out to Turco, and they will be coming in to repair them.

### *Commissioner Comments:*

Edward Iannone asked if there were thoughts of relocating the practice chipping green, located by the 17<sup>th</sup> tee. Jennifer Fava stated people use that practice green quite a bit, and currently there are no plans on relocating it. It may be considered a potential change as part of the Longshore Site Plan.

Charles Haberstroh expressed his disappointment in BrightView's maintenance of the golf course over the last couple of years. He would like to make sure that BrightView has all the adequate resources and equipment to ensure that the Longshore Golf course meets or exceeds area and regional standards.

Todd Salamone, Longshore Golf Course Superintendent stated that prior to August the course was in strong shape, with healthy greens and showing normal drought stress, typically seen in the fairways. The struggles began with losing power due to the tropical storm, and not being able to fully water the golf course for eight days. With the course closed, and mowing restricted, the repercussions of not being able to water the course for so long did not show up until mowing began. Aerating and seeding with rye grass are taking place, and the goal is to get as much rye grass seeded as possible to help alleviate this problem. Todd Salamone also stated that he has spoken with the agronomist at BrightView regarding better methods of aerating, to improve the root zone in the fairways. These programs will start this fall with the goal that the fairways will be stronger in the coming years.

Charles Haberstroh asked Todd Salamone to address the damage to the bunkers and the surrounding areas of the bunkers. Todd Salamone stated that due to COVID-19, bunker rakes were not available for the golfers to use, and the bunker machine needed to be used more frequently. They are in the process of moving the sand around and leveling them out. Todd Salamone addressed the watering of the green side bunkers, and lack of watering of the fairway bunkers and how that relates to thinning of the turf. He spoke about how to effectively trim the edge of the bunker without damaging the liner. He and Vince Gilmartin are working on that process.

Charles Haberstroh stated that there had been discussions in the past to limit the number of rounds played on the course, as too much play wears down the course, and more maintenance is needed. He also expressed his thoughts on directing cart traffic along the rough, instead of always allowing carts to ride in the middle of the fairways. He would like to see some recommendations from BrightView.

Vince Gilmartin, Northeast Area Director for BrightView stated that Todd Salamone, Longshore Golf Course Superintendent was accurate with the items he discussed. Vince has a copy of the LMGA memo

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and has physically ridden the course. There are plans in place to remedy all the issues in that memo. Vince Gilmartin also stated that he has all the equipment needed to perform daily maintenance. They are looking into some items to be used for specialty tasks, such as aerification. They will provide Jennifer Fava with that information. Vince also stated that BrightView has always tried to stay in front of the curve regarding turf grass and turf grass varieties. They have a full-time agronomist on staff who is always looking into industry trends. Longshore Golf Course has predominately rye grass, and they have been incorporating different varieties of rye grass that are more drought/disease/wear tolerant. However, at this point they are not looking to make any recommendations to shift away from the rye grass. The technology is just not there.

Vince Gilmartin stated that on July 27, BrightView held a virtual agronomic meeting with BrightView's agronomist, Dr. Bunnell regarding the Longshore Golf Course. Overall, BrightView was comfortable with the course condition. Then the storm hit on August 4, and BrightView thought the course came through the situation in good shape. They were back to their routine maintenance the following Monday, the spray fertility program was increased slightly, and they tightened up on the window of the control product program, just in case they were to see any stresses. They began to see a slow decline, and it was consistent through the rest of August through September. However, the pre-emergent application that was on the ground would not allow any new germination of desirable grasses to take place. The focus was shifted from germination to trying to keep alive the grass that was healthy and encourage more growth from the turf that was there. More fertilization bulk application took place, as well as the spray applications. What was on the ground was healthy and growing, but there was no success in germination until the second week in September, when the barrier from the pre-emergent started to break down. From that point forward, more germination was taking place. A tour of the course was taken today, October 21 and strong germination is taking place in the aerification holes. BrightView is optimistic that the course will have good coverage by the end of November. Any areas not filled in at that point maybe sodded. If not, then the early spring weather will get us full coverage by April 1<sup>st</sup>. BrightView acknowledges that the fairways are not desirable right now from a playability standpoint or an aesthetic standpoint, but they are doing everything in their control to get it back as quickly as they can.

Charles Haberstroh inquired whether BrightView could have predicted the ramifications of the lack of racking and using machines as it relates to the condition of the bunkers and the edges of the bunkers. Vince Gilmartin stated that it would have been hard to envision the issues. He doesn't think the bunkers are damaged. The edges of the bunkers are going to be seeded, as well as recovering the turf. BrightView stated they were conservative in their edging of the bunkers, and the lip is starting to grow in and over the edge into the bunker.

### *Commissioner Comments:*

Alec Stevens said this was a very hot/dry summer and was not surprised that the new grass around the bunkers had problems, especially since it wasn't being irrigated. He also said, combine that with the additional cart traffic, drought and heat, he could understand the issues. He feels that BrightView has this under control and we should be fine by early spring.

Edward Iannone stated that this is a public golf course and has a lot of first-time golfers using it and may not know the etiquette of how to enter and exit a bunker. He asked if there was a way to educate these golfers. Vince Gilmartin said that yes, in the past there was signage for some of the bunkers. But the new bunkers are more easily accessible. They are seeing a pattern develop, and it is a good suggestion. BrightView said they will provide guidance, whether it's signage in the Pro Shop, or possibly in the golf carts and/or on the golf course.

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Edward Iannone also said golfers need more education on replacing ball marks on the putting green.

Charles Haberstroh stated that some carts have GPS, which don't permit you to drive near the greens and/or bunkers, however it may be problematic, as the course isn't that big. He also stated that new golf carts will be ordered for next year. Jennifer Fava confirmed that a new lease will be going out next week, but the addition of GPS may not make sense, due to the cost. It would be more cost effective to use other means, such as roping off the area, use of signage, etc.

*Public Comment:*

Tim Romano, 25 Waterside Terrace stated that he claims the golf course is a disgrace. He thinks BrightView has failed the public in managing this course.

Ed Cribari, 1655 Post Road East stated that he met with Todd Salamone, Longshore Golf Course Superintendent and spoke about the maintenance of the course. Mr. Cribari claims that the golf course has a few pieces of older equipment, which he thinks they could sell to purchase newer equipment. He also thinks more staff is needed.

Charles Haberstroh said he would like to see the course looking better sooner than later. He would like to have a follow up meeting next month and in the Spring regarding this issue.

**5. To take such action as the meeting may determine relative to approving boating fees.**

Jennifer Fava stated this went back to last year's budget process. At that time, P&R met with several members of the Board of Finance. They reviewed the marinas and boating fees and discussed some of the fee increases for the larger sized slips. At that time, the increase was agreed upon and included in the current fiscal year budget (June 1, 2020 through July 30, 2021). The budget that was approved in May, went into effect on July 1. The fee increases proposed tonight were incorporated in the approved budget and would make our pricing comparable to other municipal marinas. Fairfield and Greenwich also had plans on increasing the slip fees this year; however, they have decided to hold off those increases due to the economic impact of COVID-19.

Rick Giunta, Deputy Director of Parks and Recreation stated, that after several meetings with the Board of Finance, it was determined there was an opportunity to adjust boating fees, specifically at the 26' through 40' range. Rick Giunta reviewed boat slip lengths and costs as they related to Fairfield and Greenwich. It is felt that these are fair, equitable and reasonable increase.

*Commissioner Comments:*

Edward Iannone – asked if these fees are in addition to the ones approved last year? Rick Giunta said yes, there was discussion about it then, and there was still room in the larger slip sizes for an adjustment.

Charles Haberstroh asked to be reminded of the increase amount. Rick Giunta said it was 6% to 7% across the board.

Jennifer Fava wanted to point out that the smaller boat categories would not receive any increase, just the larger categories.

Charles Haberstroh also stated that three members of the Boating Advisory Committee sent in letters stating that they were against the fee increases. He asked Jennifer Fava if the Parks and Recreation Department recommends the boating fees. Jennifer Fava stated that yes, the Parks and Recreation

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Department recommends these fees. The question is, is this the time to do this due to the pandemic, or should we hold off?

Edward Iannone asked for clarity as to how the fee increases are already in the budget. He thought the PRC needed to vote on fee increases before they got incorporated. Jennifer Fava stated this takes place during the budgeting process, and we are bringing it to the PRC for voting. If these fees are not approved, revenue will be down approximately \$34,000 and we will need to find other areas to make the money.

Charles Haberstroh pointed out that the fees would be for spring 2021. The last fee increase was in 2020.

Edward Iannone stated that he would not vote to approve the fee increases for two reasons. 1) He doesn't approve of back-to-back increases of 6% average, and 2) He doesn't like policy being set outside of the Parks and Recreation Commission.

Kate Kirby asked if any substantial amount of money was used towards the improvement of the marinas that would justify these increases? Jennifer Fava stated that the Board of Finance has a strong feeling that the marinas are under market value, which is why we are trying to get more to the top of the market for municipal marinas. Also, our wait list is 10 years+, and it is felt that we can afford to change our fees and remain competitive.

Edward Iannone stated that the Parks and Recreation Commission's position is not to maximize revenue, but to maximize utilities to get everyone using the park. If you raise the price of the boating slips, only people with the most money can afford them. It's not what we stand for at Parks and Recreation. Jennifer Fava responded that every year she says the same thing to the Board of Finance. She also said that Parks and Recreation municipal marinas are to provide opportunities for people of all economic levels.

Charles Haberstroh said that it's up to the Commissioners to create a coherent policy regarding revenue.

Alec Stevens stated that he doesn't like the idea of the Board of Finance dictating Parks and Recreation policy's need for revenue. However, the reason for the rate increase initially is that we are below market with comparable places. Getting on par with the fees is a fair request. Compared to private marinas, this is a great deal, even with the rate increase. He is not opposed to raising the rates.

Charles Haberstroh stated he thinks the boaters would argue that the fee increases are not fair, as there is a bigger gap between the revenue raised by the boaters, and the actual expenditures on an annualized basis.

Jennifer Fava wanted to remind everyone that we will be installing 17 new fingers on the "F" dock at Compo before next spring. That project cost is a few hundred thousand dollars. Also, the document that everyone is referring to is only a snapshot, it doesn't encompass the full extent of the "true" costs in running the marinas.

*Public Comments:* None

Charles Haberstroh asked Jennifer Fava, if the Commissioners opposed this rate increase, is she prepared to increase fees elsewhere by \$35,000 to compensate? Jennifer Fava said this is something that will need to be reviewed. She also said she doesn't know what the Board of Finance will be looking for

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or requesting. Our budget last year and this year is completely off. Charles Haberstroh asked whether it is off on the revenue or expense side? Jennifer Fava said it was both sides. We were short \$1.6 million dollars the last fiscal year, but we also didn't expend approximately \$620,000. And, about \$1.3 million of the shortfall was directly related to COVID-19. We are still experiencing this, and we don't know about the summer.

Charles Haberstroh said he doesn't like back to back increases. He would like to defer this for a year.

Edward Iannone suggested if we wanted to increase the number of boaters, he suggested we carve out a handful of slips and allow the boat share companies to use them. This would help with the waitlist, as 6 to 8 families may be able to use the slips.

Charles Haberstroh this is an idea, however, they would need to be Westport families as required by the Rules and Regulations.

**RESOLUTION:** the Parks and Recreation Commission recommends to the Board of Selectman approval of boating fees as presented.

**The resolution was unanimously rejected by a vote of 4-0-1 (4-opposed, 0- approved, 1-absent).**

## 6. Review of the summer 2020 season. (Discussion only).

Jennifer Fava reported that she had been sending out Administrative Updates to the Commissioners throughout the summer updating them regarding openings and closings. The summer of 2020 was not a normal summer due to the pandemic. It hit the Parks and Recreation Department harder than other departments. With every decision made, there needed to be new protocols, signage, and sometimes a whole new operating procedure. She believes that the department worked together to meet the needs of the community, by offering recreational opportunities, in as safe a manner as possible. Unfortunately, there were several programs that were unable to run, such as Camp Compo, RECing Crew, and the Longshore pool complex was not opened. Beach parking areas were limited to 50% capacity, and no daily parking was allowed. Also, non-resident beach emblems were not for sale this year. All this was done to protect our community. We never stopped people from being dropped off or walking onto the beach. Also, this summer, permits for events at the beaches, and the Ned Dimes Marina building were not issued. Conversely, the marina, tennis courts and golf course had substantial use once they were opened. Plus, fuel sales at the marinas were above average. We had a variety of user groups utilizing the fields, with proper protocols in place. Included for review were memo's regarding the summer from: Carmen Roda, Operations Manager; Cyndi Palaia, Program Director; Maxwell Robbins, Program Specialist; and Michael Giunta, Dock Master.

### *Commissioners Comments:*

Charles Haberstroh said he feels that Parks and Recreation did an outstanding job.

Jennifer Fava stated that up until June 30<sup>th</sup>, an extra \$92,000 was spent on extra staff. This was needed to police the fields, beaches, tennis courts and golf course by keeping people off the property or using the property.

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## **7. Commissioners Report – No Report**

## **8. Administrative Report: Jennifer Fava**

- Oval Tennis was awarded a 3-year contract, with an option to renew for another 2 years for the annual reconditioning of the Longshore Har-Tru tennis courts.
- Replacement lights at Greens Farms field is in process. They will be LED lights. An appropriation for \$310,00 was approved, and Steve Edwards was hired to oversee the project. Installation will begin the first week of November.
- Clean up along the Riverwalk is in process. Steve Edwards is also on this project.
- Doug Smith the architect for the golf course has been brought in to create a plan to replant trees that were lost in the storm. That plan should begin in November. Also, a row of trees will be planted along the 18<sup>th</sup> green, as a screening and safety measure.
- Conceptual plans for Barons South are being submitted by the architect and should be arriving by the end of this month.
- Working on getting the ice rink up and running. Registration for ice skating lessons began today, and we were sold out within a few hours. There may be an opportunity to add additional classes.
- The concession at Compo Beach opened the end of August. Their last day will be November 1. During the winter they will be retrofitting the space at Compo, in preparation for next year's opening.
- All four of the turf fields have been resurfaced and are being used.

**Upon a motion by Edward Iannone, seconded by Kate Kirby, the meeting adjourned at 9:59pm.**

Respectfully,

Debbie Detmer, Recording Secretary