

**Wallingford Parks & Recreation Department
Parks & Recreation Commission
Minutes for Wednesday, February 10, 2021
8:00 a.m. at Parks and Recreation Department**

Commissioners in Attendance:

Don Crouch, Dave Gelo, Jason Michael, Steve Rossacci, and Mike Savenelli Sr

Recreation Commission Members Absent:

Recreation Department Staff Present:

Kenny Michaels, Director of Recreation Parks & Recreation
Shawn Keogh, Recreation Programs Specialist

Special Guests: Lauren Takores, Record Journal Reporter; Mayor William Dickinson Jr; Sean Doherty, YMCA Executive Director; Eric Skinner, YMCA Sr Director of Youth Development; Rob Newton, YMCA Youth & Camp Coordinator; Joe Kanell, YMCA; Joe Franke, former YMCA employee; Rajan Doering, resident

Opening Remarks: Chairperson Dave Gelo called the meeting to order @ 8:03 a.m.

Minutes:

A motion made by Mike Savenelli; Sr seconded by Steve Rossacci. to approved minutes from the January 13th meeting.

Agenda Items:

- 1. Discussion and action on parks/facility fee and language changes**
- 2. Discussion and action on fee for facility usage by the YMCA and Boys & Girls Club**

Dave Gelo started the meeting announcing this was not a special meeting. This is our standard meeting that meets every seconded Wednesday of the month at 8:00am. We normally meet in a large room, but we made special accommodation for the potential guests that might attend.

Kenny Michaels said we are here today for our regular Rec Commission meeting. One of the agenda items is to discuss the proposed fee changed for non-profit agencies in town parks. This has been a topic of conversation over the years with the Recreation Commission and the Department dating back to my predecessor and resurfaced as a point of discussion this past fall. This ongoing discussion focused on the use of town facilities by private business use with no fee. In this case, the Wallingford YMCA and Ulbrich Boys & Girls Club.

A review of the use of Doolittle Park by the YMCA to host Camp Ulbrich, which occupies Doolittle Park from the end of June to mid-August. Utilizing the park 8-10 hours a day, 5 days a week. A total of 450-500 hours of park time over 10 weeks, hosting between 200-300 kids per session at a YMCA fee average of \$400 per session/every two weeks. Doolittle Park is centrally located and the most heavily used park in town due to its playscape and is impacted for public use by the residents due to 200-300 kids occupying the park for camp.

The next review was of the Ulbrich Boys & Girls Club usage of the Park & Recreation Gymnasium to host their Winter Holiday Travel Basketball Tournament. This travel basketball tournament is

hosted annually from December 26th-December 30th, occupying 8-10 hours a day in both gymnasiums hosting upwards of 25-30 teams. The tournament charges an admission fee of \$5.00 for all spectators attending the tournament. Upwards of estimated 300-400 people attend each day.

Jason Michael said he supports the move to begin to adjust the fee structure. This topic has been discussed for years, but was never enforced. All of the symbolic relationship, we scratch your back you scratch ours, has not happened. When a non-profit privately owned company uses a park that becomes repetitive over time it becomes a product that is sold. The YMCA is a fantastic asset to have in town. Jason said he spent time at the Y as a child. He really looked forward going to the Y. The Park & Rec tries to make the parks as nice as possible with the funds we have. When Kenny Michaels became the Director, the Rec Commission and Kenny discussed what initiative they should focus on.

We focused on getting the new pool design, bids, and price, also clearing the shoreline at Community Lake.

We are looking into how to make the parks better using the park maintenance fee collected from park rentals and not be on the Council's doorstep seeking funds at budget time. The letter on Facebook was misleading and didn't explain that the camp generates hundreds of thousands of dollars per season. To have this department ask for \$8,000 of the Y's program and camp revenue doesn't seem to be unreasonable. The park is there for the people to use. Even with COVID-19 the numbers for 2020 were 190 kids per session. In prior years, the camp drew roughly 450-500 kids to the park over a 10-week period. With on average 200-300 kids register per session (2 weeks) at \$400 per session. We are asking for \$8,000 for the entire summer that is 25% of what the full day's fee would cost. The park becomes unusable for the ball fields, various courts, pavilion and even the playscape. I don't think the fee we are looking to charge is unreasonable.

Steve Rossacci utilized the YMCA for his child and found it to be a benefit when he moved to Wallingford. There has to be something in giving back when you are consistently receiving. The Y has utilized our parks and as a resident I haven't seen that relationship with the Y. The reciprocation back to the town is missing. The Y is a great asset to the Town. The park system in Wallingford needs help for their residents. We can form relationships and utilize the park. It's about a community that we work together and help each other out. The YMCA and Park & Rec are symbiotic relationship to Doolittle. People won't use Doolittle Park when they see so many people there, they think it is closed to a private event.

Mike Savenelli agree with fellow commissioners and this has been discussed for several year. We need to work together.

Don Crouch asked when the fee structure last went up. The fees went up April 1, 2015 and only for a few items.

Sean Doherty wanted to thank Kenny Michaels and the Rec Commission.

Carlos Collazo from the Ulbrich Boys & Girls Club could not join us today.

A letter was received in December about the fee usage of Doolittle Park. There is a significant impact to the Y. The letter had a sliding scale with the fees increasing over the years. The fee structure was for years 1-3 and increase years 4-6 and then it would be 100% of the fee goes into effect year 6.

Kenny Michaels interrupted Sean and Kenny corrected Sean and said Years 1-3 is at 25% of the fee, Years 4-6 is at a 50% of the fee. In Year 5, a meeting will reassess and discuss the fee structure.

There was no mention of a 100% fee charge. Kenny said he is very cognizant that if they charged the full fee (\$800 a day) that would close the park.

Sean said they don't want to have exclusive use of the park; they want others to be able to use the park.

Jason Michael stated if we charge the full fee it would close the park and give the Y exclusivity to the park.

Sean Doherty said the YMCA is a 501C and have been in existence for 76 years. They focus on youth development, healthy living, social responsibility, swim activities, and activities around wellness and obesity.

They provide financial assistance and coleader with the Wlfd Health Dept emergency food drive, warming/cooling center.

Camp Ulbrich has been in existence for over 70 years and is a state license program running a full day. The home base is 81 South Elm Street and we have approximately 300 kids a day prior to COVID. Our pool is used for swim lessons. Being a state licensed camp there are requirements, including staffing requirements that can not overlap in duty. Included in the day camp we also offer Race4Chase, a program aimed to provide kids 6-12 a safe, healthy, non-competitive environment to help them with running, bike riding, and swimming.

The Y has worked collaboratively with the Rotary Club and in the past with the Park & Rec to build the low rope course at Bertini Park.

The Camp fees goes right back into different Y activities.

Sean said he and Kenny had a very good conversation yesterday.

Don Crouch said Ulbrich Boys & Girls Club has helped the BOE with distance learning. The OEC guidelines make it very difficult. The summer camp money helps the club with expenses through the fall.

Mayor Dickinson said a major concern for government is the community, the people, own the facility the government is a custodian that takes care of the facility and monitors the use of the facility.

We can set fees and that is the correct way to go. If we are not logical in how we set fees it could be viewed unfairly and potentially discriminatory. Whatever the impact of usage is and any special equipment all needs to be taken into consideration. Just taking the number of days times an arbitrary dollar amount is not how it should be done. We should not be setting fees based on someone/company income. The parks are a place to be enjoyed and not a revenue stream.

Improvements need to be reviewed and if it is unique to a certain group then maybe that group needs to fund the initiative.

How do we justify park management as it is not for everyone and it can be discouraging as money is always an issue? The Town has to be careful not to become a monopoly if we are going to change our fee structure. We do not have individual park fund for most of the parks in town. Our fee structure can become arbitrary and capricious when there is nothing to point to the impact on the park. We can't legitimately without justification rational schedule when we impose fees on the public, we are not performing in a manner of nondiscriminatory it is arbitrary and capricious.

Jason Michael rebutted that the line is being blurred. This is for an entire season; summer and the park can't really be used by others. Community Lake generates the most revenue and that money is used for all the parks. Jason agrees the parks are not revenue producers but the parks decline each year we want each park to be a great place to be with interesting things to do. Especially with COVID, we can go outside and hopefully one day we can be outside without a mask.

I don't think we are arbitrary or picking on the Y. I think it is fair and we need to be careful how we proceed, Mayor. I don't see how this is so negative on the Y we want to make the park beautiful and nice. I understand the Mayor's view point, I don't think what is being asked the lines are being blurred when you look at the residents. I don't think it crossed lines other towns either Y owns the property for camp or they pay the town for usage of the park.
The discussion on money came from the Facebook post.

Joe Franke asked if there are a lot of people inquiring about renting the park during the time the Y is there. **Kenny Michaels** said there have been on average 8-10 residents inquiring, **Shirley Barillaro**, Office Manager, said there has been upwards of 12-15 people who have inquired. The Park & Rec has received a number of calls during the summer that families find it difficult to use the playscape area with the number of children running around. **Joe Franke** stated their goal is to leave as little a footprint as possible in the park.

Joe Franke has picked up bottle caps and swept the gravel from the pavilion not only for the Y camp, but also for residents using the pavilion. In 2019, the bathrooms at Doolittle were used and again they left as little footprint as possible.

Don Crouch questioned how many events pay the day rate. **Kenny Michaels** said he would need to review the permits to know the exact number. **Kenny Michaels** said a lot of the tournaments pay the day rate and the additional fee when they want the park into the evening hours and using the lights. There is also a maintenance fee.

Kenny Michaels said the fee for parks, facilities, and room rental goes into a revolving account that allows us to use the money for park renovations, updates, and equipment that need to be done. Examples would be painting the gym, clearing the shoreline at Community Lake, or Grant Street Park that we offset the cost using facility money to pay for boarders and playground surfacing. John Gawlak, past Director of Parks & Rec, created this fund to offset the expense to taxpayers and we will continue to do this moving forward. If we need new swing seats, we do not have to wait for budget time, we can pay for that out of the Facility Funds. Another example is the backstop at Westside Field was replaced using the Facility Funds.

Dave Gelo said this topic will be tabled for a future time. No action taken.

3. Advertising Signs in Parks – Jason Michaels and Don Crouch

Jason, Don, and Kenny attended the Zoom Ordinance meeting. The Committee had no issues with the advertising in the park. The next step would be to meet with Planning & Zoning and see if there would be any objection to posting advertising signs in residential areas. Janis Small, Town Attorney, said if this program was run by the town there is certain language that is required for any government activity. Kenny or Jason will need to confirm with Janis.

The next step would be to configure the program. There are a couple of groups that already has a document in place. The Rec Commission and Kenny will create a document for Wallingford Park & Rec when they have the approval to proceed.

4. Wallace Park Legacy Gardens – Reschedule Presentation (2020)

The replacement stone has been delivered. We had 2 2020 Nominees
Wallingford Historic Society
Wallingford Community Women

A. New Nominations for 2021

Dave will send the list out for Kenny and the Rec Commission to review and nominate two groups at the next Rec Commission meeting. The dedication will be for 2020 and 2021 nominees.

5. Corn Hole Leagues – Mike Savenelli

Mike Savenelli was doing some research and notice Corn Hole is a sport. Anyone can participate in this sport. Especially, with the COVID pandemic there are more people who gather outside. This is a sport that anyone can participate. There are some towns that have leagues that play year-round.

Shawn Keogh, Park & Rec Recreation Programs Specialist, spoke on his experience running leagues when he was employed by the north Branford Park & Rec. The big draw was the cash prizes and alcohol being served. This is something that the Park & Rec doesn't want to get into doing this. Park & Rec will look into possibility providing a corn hole program.

6. Community Pool Opening for 2021 – Mike Savenelli & Kenny Michaels

Mike Savenelli said there was a meeting with the Mayor to discuss reopening the pool in the current state and what that might cost. This was also discussed at the council meeting. Consensus was no one wanted to spend the money to open the pool as the unknown of what also might be wrong could become even more expensive.

Kenny Michaels asked the Mayor if a new bid for the new pool should go out to see if the cost would be lower than in 2020. The Mayor was concern with spending so much on a new pool with the economy still suffering from COVID. He is concern for some of the local businesses surviving through this.

With the vaccine being distributed that might ease some of the concerns for individuals.

7. Open Discussion: (2/3 votes required to discuss item)

Directors Report: Ken Michaels

1. **New working project with Lyman Hall Vo-Ag Department and Conservation Commission LH**

Vo-Ag Department Faculty Rob Kovi (Curriculum coordinator) and Emily Picard (Wildlife Biology Teacher) reached out to Kenny about designating an area in the town owned property between Pat Wall Field and LHHS as a land lab for the Agricultural Students. Mary Heffernon, Rob Kovi, Emily Picard and myself will be meeting on Thursday, February 11th to walk the grounds to look at the area they are looing to designate for the land lab. Scope of work at the Land Lab:

- Field observation
- Water quality monitoring
- Habitat management – establish management goals, research techniques
- Partner with natural resource professionals (technical assistance, grants, equipment, etc)
- Present plans to the town Environmental Planner for approval
- Implement and track goal progress (long term)
- Mapping – use map and compass, GPS, GIS, drone aerial footage, triangulation for radio telemetry simulations (wildlife tracking)
- Wildlife monitoring game cameras, acoustic monitoring, track casting, nest box installation, etc

2. Winter Programming Update:

Weber and Gannon Youth Basketball is underway. We have a great support from coaches and most importantly the parents in following the state mandated guidelines for indoor sports.

Weber: 334

Gannon: 113

Total: 447 (48% of 2020 season)

Adult Volleyball Sunday nights season kicked off January 31st and is running with 12 teams.

Ski Bums has completed 4 weeks of the after-school ski program at Mt Southington, with final week concluding Wednesday, February 10th. There were 47 kids in the program which is right at our 3-year average for participants.

3. Spring Brochure

The spring brochure is out and registration is underway. For April vacation we lined up some specialty camps indoors and outdoors. The camps are STEM, Skyhawks Sports, Outdoor Nature Half Day program with Mary Cole. We are currently working on our summer camps/specialty camp schedules to have out at the end of the month.

4. Facilities:

Public Works will be using the old ball field at Lufbery Park for snow dump site due to the large snowfall we received and in preparation for the upcoming forecast.

Doolittle Park Tennis Court Pre-bid walk through is on Thursday, February 11, 2021. We hope to have the project underway early spring.

5. Budget Prep:

Beginning the process of 2021-2022 budget preparation. Plan on meeting with Rob Baltramaitis, Director of Public Works, next week to discuss capital items. Some potential projects:

- Community Lake Pavilion Roof
- West Side Field Softball Fencing
- Lufbery Park Pavilion
- Fence repairs at various ball field locations
- Grand Street Basketball Courts

Next Commission Meeting – Wednesday, March 10, 2021 @ 8:00 AM

Meeting Adjourned at: 10:15 a.m. by Mike Savenelli Sr and seconded by Steve Rossacci

Respectfully submitted,

Shirley Barillaro, Sr Clerk
Wallingford Parks and Recreation