

**TOWN OF FAIRFIELD
PARKS AND RECREATION COMMISSION
Minutes of July 15, 2020**

A tele-conference meeting of the Parks and Recreation Commission of the Town of Fairfield was held on Wednesday, July 15, 2020 at 7:00 p.m. at the Eunice Postal Recreation Center, Fairfield, Connecticut.

PRESENT: Scott Walker, Chairman; Brian Nerreau, Jamie Benton, Bridget McBride, Chris McCoy, Mary Von Conta, and Jessica Gerber

ABSENT: David Weber, Caitlin Schmidt

ALSO: Anthony Calabrese, Dir. Parks & Recreation and Justin Cathcart, Marina Manager

Chairman Scott Walker called the tele-conference meeting to order at 7:02 p.m. He asked the members to identify themselves when speaking and voting.

I. ACT ON MINUTES OF: June 24, 2020 – Hearing no objections, the minutes were approved as written.

II. PUBLIC INPUT: Will address at the time of the issue.

III. Action Taken Between Meetings:

- A. The Kiwanis Club – A. Calabrese stated that it is not a change of date and this is their 4th year doing the event, and does not need ratification. This is just a Director approved unless a material change in the request.

IV. NEW BUSINESS:

A. Mr. Michael Carter – Push for Entrepreneurship Proposal

Mr. Carter explained that Push for Entrepreneurship was established six years ago with the purpose of providing access to a five star program for low income neighborhoods in our state.

All the money goes to benefit schools in Norwalk, Bridgeport and New Haven. The Event gives the participant two hours to do as many pushups as they can. He had been working with Fairfield University for the past six years however, due to Covid, was told that they would not be able to do it this year. Mr. Carter is looking for a field in Fairfield to hold this event.

Mr. Carter stated that the event would be held on October 17th and it is a two hour event and with speeches and preambles it would go from 9:00 a.m. to 12:00 p.m. A. Calabrese stated that the event organizer needs to make sure that the participants are practicing social distancing. We have signs up in all of our parks right now talking about washing hands and maintaining social distance. They did not need the exact location tonight and if anything gets rolled back by the Governor or with the phases and if Covid starts spiking again, the event could be a contingent approval. J. Gerber asked about the number of participants. M. Carter stated that 80 was most likely number but he worked the numbers with using 100 being the max with square footage of 8 feet between people. J. Gerber asked A. Calabrese if there were 80 people, did he have a site that could accommodate them. A. Calabrese stated that Veterans Park and Sturges are gigantic fields. He stated that Sherman Green could be a location for this size of an event, if you measured out a 15 foot grid, it could accommodate 100-150 people.

J. Gerber asked if there was a contingency rain date. Mr. Carter stated that unless it was pouring they would not need a rain date. B. Nerreau stated that he liked the idea and wanted to make a motion on the October 17th date with a strong recommendation on Veterans Park or Sturges and not Sherman Green. B. Nerreau stated he would like to make a motion to approve the request.

C. McCoy seconded. B. McBride stated that her only concern was that they follow the Governor's guidelines. S. Walker had a question for the Director that assuming any approval this evening, they will adhere to the guidelines in place at the time of the event and it would be shut down if it could not be done. B. McBride agreed with B. Nerreau's motion but said it needs to be stated about the Governor's guidelines, social distance markers, and the volunteers wearing masks. B. McBride stated that the organizer is responsible for maintaining the guidelines. C. McCoy stated that he did not think that the Parks and Recreation Commission should be dictating recommendations not mandated. S. Walker asked B. McBride if she wished to make a motion to amend. B. McBride agreed and stated the section on sports professionals and sports organizations and thought that Mr. Carter should contact DECD for advice. S. Walker asked if there was a motion to amend. B. McBride made a motion to amend B. Nerreau's motion to approve this event for October 17th with the amendment being that the organizer contact the DECD for their approval and follow the Governor's guidelines. C. McCoy seconded the motion. S. Walker asked for a roll call on amendment itself. (B. Nerreau, J. Gerber, B. McBride, C. McCoy, J. Benton and S. Walker in favor). Motion is amended. S. Walker asked for a vote on the main motion as amended.

Vote: 6-0. (B. Nerreau, J. Gerber, B. McBride, C. McCoy, J. Benton and S. Walker in favor). Amended motion approved unanimously.

B. Mr. William Teel – Request for temporary reinstatement of boat slip for remainder of the Summer.

S. Walker asked Mr. Teel to quickly recap his request. Mr. Teel stated that he was one of the two that lost their slip this summer. His old slip is still empty and is asking if he could put his boat back there for the remainder of the summer. S. Walker asked J. Cathcart if this request presented any complications and whether he had assigned this slip to a new slip holder. J. Cathcart stated that he has 30 slips open, and 15 assigned slips that have a one year grace period to get boat in. B. Nerreau asked J. Cathcart if placing someone is a slip would pose a problem as he is diligently working with the waitlist to fill vacated spots. J. Cathcart stated there are 11 unassigned spots, but could pull the offer from one of the waitlist members who have not yet replied. B. Nerreau objected to this idea. J. Cathcart stated that he could reach out to the new slip owners who have not yet put boat in and see if there is anyone who will not be using the slip this summer. B. Nerreau stated that under that circumstance, we could do this but did not want J. Cathcart to negate an existing offer. C. McCoy agreed with B. Nerreau that it was the right thing to do and if they were allowing Mr. Teel to use the slip for balance of the summer it would be with the understanding that he would then go back onto the waitlist after the season. J. Cathcart agreed. S. Walker asked Mr. Teel if, under these circumstance, he would be willing to vacate the slip if he was assigned a slip and then the person came in mid-August. Mr. Teel replied yes. M. Von Conta stated that they should at least get something in writing and have it witnessed. S. Walker asked if there were any other questions and if anyone cared to make a motion. J. Benton made a motion to approve Mr. Teel's request. B. McBride seconded.

Vote: 5-2. (M. Von Conta, B. McBride, C. McCoy, J. Benton and S. Walker in favor, J. Gerber and B. Nerreau opposed). Motion passed and approved.

C. Harvey Paris – Request for a Reboot Pop Up Art Show.

Mr. Paris stated that during Covid, the Fairfield community has been starved for culture and art. He is an artist and wished to provide a Covid-safe pop up of a series of art in a social distance manner. The wearing of masks, not handing out any literature and directing people to his website so that they can enjoy culture during Covid. He feels it will be good for Fairfield and can be accomplished in a safe way. He suggested Sherman Green as a location because it would also encourage people to go to the downtown restaurants and shops. He stated that he was not selling

anything and this was just an opportunity for Fairfield residents to enjoy culture in a safe way and support today's movements. C. McCoy thought this was a fantastic idea and likes the spiritual aspect. He asked if there were going to be any other artists involved. Mr. Paris stated that what was being presented was the beginning of a process and for the initial event he did not want to advertise and include others but hoped that it would grow in time at which point he could get more and more artists involved.

M. Von Conta stated that Nancy Lefkowitz had been assigned the job of working on the aspect of today's society and civil rights and asked if Mr. Paris had an opportunity to speak to her. Mr. Paris stated that he had not spoken with Ms. Lefkowitz but spoken to the First Selectwoman who directed him to Parks and Rec.

B. Nerreau asked if this project would begin in July, would he start getting other artists in and how often would he plan on having this event. Mr. Paris stated that he thought one or two a week. He would separate the pieces out six feet apart and have the flow go one way through the carvings. B. Nerreau asked how much space would be required at the Sherman Green. Mr. Paris stated that there would be 5-6 easels a minimum of six feet apart. J. Gerber stated that the terms and parameters are vague, which is concerning. A standard request specifies the location, the dates, the space required, etc. J. Gerber asked if he could choose one date to start and see how it goes. Mr. Paris thought he would like to start out with 1-4 dates. J. Gerber asked for specific dates/times/place and would like some guidance regarding specifics. S. Walker agreed that J. Gerber was 100% right. Usually the director can use variables but this is too vague. Mr. Paris said he would be comfortable with an approval of six dates starting at the end of July continuing into August, after which the project would be reviewed with the Commission. Sherman Green, two Pop Ups a week, one in the afternoon around noon and one in the evening for a four week trial period was suggested. C. McCoy had a question for the Director. Mr. Paris, being an individual, even if he came back with formal dates next month, what would prevent him from setting up downtown displaying his artwork? A. Calabrese responded that he does not see what would prevent him from doing so. If he wants Sherman Green, I would be happy to work with him on finding dates where we have no events going on. The request had come before the commission because of the nature of the artwork and the use of Sherman Green. B. McBride stated that they have never approved a Pop Up of this nature, and was not in favor of series of them. She was also concerned about the underlined bias, Abraham's gift and specifically the Jewish faith, and if we are going to be approving religious special request. S. Walker stated that they have addressed religious events on town property in the past which required that the display be accompanied at all times. S. Walker stated that the practical matter is there is nothing to stop him from having a Pop Up display without their consent, and felt Mr. Paris was trying to coordinate with us. He is asking for some guidance so that they can better coordinate the effort. S. Walker asked if no one is opposed, make a motion and move along, asking if anyone would like to make a motion. J. Gerber suggested four days in case the Commission does not meet in August. C. McCoy proposed the motion be as follows: Pop Ups of Mr. Harvey Paris will take place within a 30 day period, one day per week and coordinate with the Parks and Rec and then come before us and address the situation after a month. S. Walker asked if there was a second. J. Gerber seconded. S. Walker asked if there was any further discussion.

Vote: 5-1. (J. Gerber, B. Nerreau, C. McCoy, J. Benton and S. Walker in favor, B. McBride opposed). Motion passed and approved.

D. Jeff Geoke – Fairfield Indoor Tennis – Request to change Rate Structure as done in the Past. J. Geoke was not present. S. Walker asked A. Calabrese if he wanted to present for him on this issue. A. Calabrese suggested they table this request as he was not able to speak regarding Mr. Geoke's process or fees.

E. Al's Angels – Saugatuck Sweets change in approval from the October, 2019 meeting.

A. Diguido thanked the Commission for allowing him speak. As a quick overview, Saugatuck Sweets, himself and Al's Angels made a donation of a tree with approval from the Commission for an ongoing tradition, the tree of hope and made a commitment to donate a similar tree to one of the area public schools. Mr. Diguido was requesting that he be allowed to re-light the tree for the remainder of the year. He stated that he has close to 1750 names on a petition supporting the lights. S. Walker thanked Mr. Diguido and asked if this was a two part request including both the lights and the banners. Mr. DiGuido responded the main focus was the lights and wished that this be strictly about the lighting of the tree. S. Walker stated that the dates of November 30th to January 15th were unanimously approved on October 16th, 2019 and the request now is to keep the tree lit year round. In March, during the pandemic, A. Diguido reached out to A. Calabrese regarding the lights and a verbal agreement was made allowing Mr. Diguido to have the lights and banners until June 30th.

A. Diguido noted that on June 30th they did come down. J. Gerber was concerned about having open ended access to putting lights and signs for an indefinite period of time and worried that if we do it for this worthy organization, there will be others and this concerned her and was worried that they are setting a precedence. She suggested that if done for one organization, while very deserving, approval would have to be granted for others which could become problematic in the future. S. Walker agreed and stated any time we approve a request, we set precedence, like when we approve benches, eventually we will run out of space. And the same way we approved tree placement, we did that with the aesthetic of the green. At some point we would need to say no because there would be no more room.

S. Walker continued stating that the Commission is taking precedence every time we make a decision and he was not sure how different this is as opposed to the benches and how many people we let into the Marina. In this case, when we approved it we said "does this meet the aesthetic of the green, and at the time we said yes, it did meet the aesthetics of the green" and approved it.

J. Benton made a point that when approving an independent or business who wants to make a donation for the community to enjoy, as a Commission we need to be careful that we are not offering a sort of competitive advantage to someone when taking advantage of their donations. We can't monopolize a key town asset.

C. McCoy stated that at Mill Hill, the golf course, and the baseball fields see commercial signage and public signage and asked A. Calabrese how do we reconcile this as a town when we have public parks and fields in town with public signage? A. Calabrese stated we sell advertising on tee boxes, gossip spots, adopt a park, memorial trees, memorial benches so the precedence is already set if you just drive around town. S. Walker asked if these were all on town property, to which A. Calabrese responded that that was correct. B. McBride asked whether a sign or plaque was part of the approval, which A. Calabrese stated he did not believe that it was part of the original approval. S. Walker also stated the Commission did not approve any type of signage at the time. B. Nerreau recalled that he made the motion and there was never any discussion about a plaque to go along with the tree. He also stated that he applauded the work Mr. Diguido does including the Covid food drive and loved the idea of the tree lighting from November to January but not continuing, whether red/white/blue or any other color lights because that kind of tree is more of a symbol of Christmas even though it is a tree of hope, anyone going by would think it is a Christmas tree. Another issue is we have very generous people in town who make donations in town and Sherman Green is one of our jewels and it is hard for me to say Al's Angels would control it. A better idea would be to put it out to other charities and would not want to see this jewel being controlled by Mr. Diguido even though he knows that he is doing wonderful things for the town.

J. Gerber stated that there were so many great organizations in town and a lot of people enjoy the lights on the tree, but different charities and businesses should be able to light the tree. October could be pink, Operation Hope, Save the Children, and others could share the wealth and celebrate other wonderful organizations in town and put it out to the entire community.

C. McCoy said stated that if an organization wanted to light it up for whatever cause and they came before us, we as a town would get behind them. Al was first to come here, this is nondenominational and anyone who wanted to come before us and discuss what is near and dear to them, we will support it and I believe Al will too. J. Gerber asked C. McCoy if he was in favor of other organizations to come before us for permission to light it up for a month at a time, to which he stated maybe not a month at a time, but said you would have to come in front of us to present their intention. C. McCoy stated he would support it. B. McBride had a follow up question for S. Walker that if they were to approve a year-long lighting of the tree, the time block of November 30 – January 15 would stand and the remainder of the year would our discretion to approve additional time blocks? S. Walker replied that whatever we approve will be the policy and that you could make a motion for that. A. Diguido stated that it takes hours to put the lights on and take them off the tree. Al's Angels would work with the town and the organizations to maintain the tree with whatever color they want. A. Calabrese thought if sounded like a viable solution. B. McBride wanted to be very clear that if between March and May, nobody wants to do it, what is the default color, white?, red/white/blue? A. Diguido stated that if there was not another group wanting to jump in, they could keep it red/white/blue, since we are all citizens of this country, especially during this time. He would serve as interface with these charities to facilitate this. All of these organizations can showcase on Tree of Hope for all groups.

B. Nerreau suggested that they form a subcommittee to meet with other town bodies and/or other charities to put a schedule together. A. Calabrese, J. Gerber and C. McCoy all agreed that this would be a good idea.

J. Gerber asked A. Diguido since the November – January costs fall on him, would he be willing to take it on year round. A. Diguido stated that this was a mission of love and he has a group of people with talented skills who are willing to help to get this done. B. McBride wanted to make sure that there was no cost to the town if this goes year round. S. Walker stated that there was an electrical fee that the town pays for and asked A. Calabrese to confirm. A. Calabrese stated that this was correct, it was not metered. A. Diguido offered to pay whatever cost the town was incurring. B. McBride motioned to approve a yearlong tree lighting of the tree with the stipulation that other charities and organizations serving children in need may sponsor the tree of hope with the color of their choice subject to Parks and Rec Commission approval between the dates of January 16th through November 29th. J. Gerber seconded.

Vote: 6-0 (C. McCoy, B. Nerreau , J. Benton, J. Gerber, B. McBride and S. Walker in favor, no one opposed). Motion passed unanimously and approved.

V. To hear and act upon information in Reports:

Board of Education Report: Ms. Gerber reported that the Board of Education had met last night to discuss the enrollment projections stating that as of now, they were about where they were last year but with the influx of people moving in from NYC, it is a work in progress. A huge part of the discussion last night was the returning to school plan. A draft plan needs to be submitted to the State by next Friday, July 24th and will come back to the Superintendent and the board to review. It is a work in progress driven by the numbers but if there is a spike in Covid numbers, there will be a change to the plan. The plan now is 5 days a week and it will be up to families to decide whether their children will be attending school five days a week in school distance learning 5 days a week. There was a survey which is posted on the Fairfield Public

School's website which shows the results. It is also a work in progress. Prior and new numbers of people considering distance learning is growing. Another survey will go out on the 27th and in that survey, the families will be able to let the Superintendent know their decision. There has been discussions regarding some sort of a hybrid if cases go up. Earlier in the summer, there was a restriction of no more than 10 to a bus would mean 77 new buses and then that would restrict attendance. Some would do Mon/Tues some Thu/Fri and Wed would be all distance. There will be a plan that will be formalized as things change. Now it is either 5 days either in school or distant. The will be meeting again on August 4. The state got rid of 180 school day allowance and they reduced it with the exception that the days be use as professional development prior to the start of school. That would mean that instead of starting September 1st, they would be starting the following Tuesday, because Monday is Labor Day. This will come up at the August 4th meeting and if there are any changes to the calendar they will vote on that and it will be posted.

B. Director's Report:

Mr. Calabrese presented a written report summarized below:

Our Summer Concert Series, Peanut Butter Jam concerts, and our Sand Jam Movie Nights. All have been well received and the crowds have been following social distance guidelines and wearing masks when appropriate. Our staff will continue to monitor these events and make any adjustments that are needed.

We are currently in the process of planning our fall programs and events. Things are all still very fluid due to the COVID pandemic. We are doing our best to plan programs within the Governor's guidelines and keep are participants and staff as safe as possible. The majority of our sports leagues in Town have started back up with many safety restrictions in place. We are monitoring the situation as things unfold.

Our skate park has reopened as of July 6th with new resident only restrictions in place. We have asked all skaters to come to the Parks and Recreation Department to verify residency and sign a waiver prior to using the park for the first time. This has been well received and we have over 100 waivers on file. Since our reopening we have had no issues and no calls to the police department. This is a welcomed improvement! We will continue to monitor the park and keep you up to date.

As I'm sure most of you heard we have been asked to work with the Emergency Management Team to devise a plan to help reduce the crowds at our beaches. We are currently looking at ways to secure beach access points and potentially examining ways to legally charge people who walk on to our beaches. I will keep you apprised of any action that is taken or enacted by the Emergency Management Team.

I'm excited to report that we currently have two open positions here at the Parks and Recreation Department. We expect to start the interview process next week for our Recreation/Aquatics Coordinator and then the following week for our Account Clerk. Both positions have had many applicants and we are excited to have two new members join our team.

ADJOURNMENT: S. Walker stated with no further business to come before the Commission, the meeting was adjourned at 9:47 p.m.

Respectfully Submitted,

Kelly J. Brown, Recording Secretary

Tele-meeting location for audio: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wifcrwuoQhl>