

**Stonington Recreation Commission
Regular Meeting
Monday, February 24, 2014 at 6:00 PM
Human Services Community Room**

Present: Chairman C. Michael Crowley and Vice-Chair Frank Prachniak
Commissioners Joe Ciriello, Joe McKernan, and Larry Theadore
Recreation Administrator Joseph Mendonca, Jr.
Human Services Manager Leanne Theodore
Absent: Commissioners Beth Quesnel and Paulla Solar

I. Publics' Opportunity to Address the Commission

Discussion regarding field usage fees:

Paul Keezer, Stonington Seals Lacrosse

Strongly opposes usage fees, believes taxes he pays to the Town of Stonington should suffice.

Debra Dempsey, Stonington Seals Lacrosse

Statement provided for the record:

Recreation Committee Meeting Handout

The current proposal is actually a \$10 to \$20/per child fee per sport in season - In addition, to an hourly rental fee for the fields. Depending on the field and organization classification, the hourly cost is between \$20 and \$50 an hour.

Almost every lacrosse president in our NECLAX (New England Coastal Lacrosse) league shared with us they are not charged with fees for their grass fields as it is covered in their taxes and their kids attend the public schools. We asked presidents from Groton, Westerly, Montville, Haddam-Killingworth and Ledyard, they shared (emailed) that they are not charged. Waterford only charges a fee for their turf. Norwich, East Lyme, and Clinton do not pay any field fees; the towns have turf fields that youth sports use without any fees.

- The use of fields generates additional maintenance, unlike using a classroom, per se. The more fields are used, the more care they need to some degree. The turf fields will need to be replaced in 15 years and there is a huge cost associated with that.
- We understand charging for field use to some degree but not for in-town youth leagues with any fields of their own or town rec. programs. What about clubs with their own fields (such as Stonington Soccer Club and Pawcatuck Little League) or the COMO? Or the YMCA? How do you establish a fair fee?

According to the Stonington Field Usage Outline:

"Request priority goes to Stonington School Teams with Stonington Human Services-Recreation Division will schedule all other field times in conjunction with the School Department. Stonington Youth/Adult Organizations (Youth Football, Youth Lacrosse, Youth Soccer-COMO & Club) will have priority over outside organizations. Also, the sport in season will have priority over sports in non-traditional season."

I. Publics' Opportunity to Address the Commission (cont'd)
Debra Dempsey, Stonington Seals Lacrosse
Statement provided for the record (cont'd):

- Even after the fees are straightened out, there is the whole issue of scheduling. It seems like every program could technically be a 'rec' program. Why do YMCA flag football or Fall Field Hockey and men's soccer have priority over Spring Stonington SEALS Lacrosse? We rallied all our player's parents to vote for safe fields and the construction of the turf field so that this would "free-up" grass fields for youth sports at the high school. We now find that the grass fields at the high school that were mentioned as being "freed up" are being rested for fall sports and some are under going construction. An equal system would be resting some fields in the fall and some in the spring once the construction is finished and root systems established.

The draft also gives the Recreation Administrator sole discretion for allocating field and gym usage.

- We don't think it is appropriate that the Recreation Administrator has sole discretion with scheduling since, in our minds, he has a conflict of interest issue with his soccer kids/adult programs through Mendonca Soccer and associated soccer programs. The "rec/human services" programs were using prime early hours 5-8pm at the middle schools while Stonington Rec basketball (in season) was pushed to 8:00pm on some select days at the COMO. The COMO gyms could have been made available for other programs. (see practice rec schedule 20-24 Jan). All blanked out areas are blocked. In early January SEALS, was told all (non-weekend, no fee) gym space was booked with basketball. As additional Human Services, "Rec" programs started; Stonington Rec

Basketball practice was limited and shortened and moved to other gym spaces to accommodate additional non-basketball programs.

- What programs were using the gyms? Who is running your soccer/futsal?
- Southeast Soccer is now using the high school gym. SEALS asked for pre-season conditioning and were verbally awarded, as of today, only two Saturdays in March. Our season is scheduled to start March 15. We still do not have final approval for fields and we submitted our requests before the first week of December to the Stonington School and Recreation Department. Is there an oversight? Who gets preferential scheduling?
- The fields verbally mentioned do not cover our U11 age bracket, we are still short a field. We are thankful the COMO has partnered up to offer their fields to our U9 and introductory teams. The Recreation Administrator explained he is busy trying to get paying outside groups onto the turf fields, even though our Stonington SEALS kids still have field needs.
- We look forward to finding out if we will be able to use the field hockey field at the high school for practices and games, it was mentioned as a slight possibility. We are hopeful that PMS, MMS and a high school field will be assigned to SEALS for the Spring season as this would serve our six other teams boy's and girl's U11-U15.
- We were told the High School Field Hockey field would be lined for lacrosse and soccer as a 'rec' program was going to be offered. SEALS could use the field for "walk through" scrimmages and games. I question if rec. soccer will have to "walk" as well.

I. Publics' Opportunity to Address the Commission (cont'd)
Debra Dempsey, Stonington Seals Lacrosse
Statement provided for the record (cont'd):

Our Questions Today:

How are the fees going to be assessed? At the beginning of the season? Weekly? If we use turf at night do we have to pay for lights?

Is YMCA going to be charged a per player fee if they are running through the Recreation Department? What about adult softball? Stonington Soccer Club? Little League?

What if only one little league team practices at PMS? Is the whole league assessed?

What if Soccer uses the fields 4x a season and lax and football use 4 fields every week, are they all charged the same?

Does Stonington Recreation Committee have the legal right to charge fees?

We would like to suggest a field usage/scheduling committee made up of Rec, BOE, Public Works that meets three times a year to schedule fields in an open meeting so other teams can be there to hear how it is done.

We want a fair, honest system that allows each Stonington youth sports team to have their season and access to fields and gym space with little to no additional fees for our Stonington tax paying families. We are volunteers, working full time jobs, parents and Stonington residents who love to coach and introduce lacrosse to kids from kindergarten to eighth grade.

Commissioner Ciriello asked Ms. Dempsey if the lacrosse program charges fees for participation in order to cover costs; Ms. Dempsey stated fees are charged.

Chair Crowley

Chair Crowley stated that when the Turf Committee first approached the Board of Finance, the question asked was regarding who was going to pay. At that time, initially the plan was to charge some fee to the groups using the fields, however the only way they could raise anywhere near enough money was to bring outside groups in that will pay a lot of money to use the fields. That was their direction and that's what they did. Chair Crowley stated he does not know if everything Ms. Dempsey stated is true, however if there is a problem, why did she not come immediately to the Recreation Commission, or to Recreation Administrator Mendonca?

Recreation Administrator Joseph Mendonca, Jr.

Administrator Mendonca stated the following in response to Ms. Dempsey:

Thank you for submitting your comments but I would like to address some inaccurate statements made in the section addressed to me, the Recreation Administrator. First, in regard to my family business, Mendonca Soccer School, they are contracted to run all youth soccer programs at the Como and within their contract it allows them to utilize Como facilities; if there any further questions in regard to this you should contact the Como Executive Director. Also, at no time does Mendonca Soccer School utilize any school facilities or run any programs through Rec.

I. Publics' Opportunity to Address the Commission (cont'd)

Recreation Administrator Joseph Mendonca, Jr. (cont'd)

Second, the Rec/COMO partnership has been going on for many years, and pre dates me holding this position. Three years ago the coaches associated with this league would do whatever they could to find gym time in town which became a nightmare for the program. Some teams would practice three times a week and some would have one. So I then began assisting in allocating gym time for the basketball program without compromising programs that Rec was already running, which leads to futsal at the middle school. The futsal program has been running over the past four years and is not a new program. In regard to Southeast Soccer Club utilizing the gym; this request was submitted by a SHS guidance counselor through SchoolDude. I need to clarify that I, as a Recreation Administrator, do not have the responsibility of allocating gym usage as I do field usage. The protocol is still through SchoolDude and has multiple administrators approving/declining reservations, which starts off with the school principals'. If I did have that control and time did open up, what outside group would I call first, and how would that be fair? Hopefully as we move forward we can come up with a better protocol for gym usage but until then it will still fall under control of SchoolDude. As for all Rec spring programs, regardless if it's in season or out of season, they will not be canceled, or walk as you mentioned, because the priority order still falls in place with SHS events, Town/Rec programs then outside groups. I hope this helps you better understand, and clarifies the inaccurate comments made in your presentation.

Chris Devau, Stonington Youth Football Vice President

In attendance to represent the league, however only trying to get information at this time. Wanted to remind the Commission that as a league they are non-profit, they have a lot of expenses, and pay for all equipment. Scholarships are provided for those who cannot pay, so as a group they are concerned about the added cost.

Paul Sartor, Stonington Resident & Athletic Field Task Force Chair

A lot of work was put into improving these fields, and maintenance was always the biggest concern. Just as organizations have costs, there are costs associated with the fields. Mr. Sartor stated that he believes fees should have been discussed in greater detail during meetings, so there were not so many questions now, however field usage fees were always part of the plan.

Nancy Logel, Stonington Seals Coach
Believes fees should be fair & equitable.

Chair Crowley asked why it is assumed the fees would not be fair.

Commissioner Ciriello

The game plan has changed with the fields. Originally the school district was supposed to maintain the fields, however the Town had to take over the process, which caused the budget process to change, and the Town now has to take on those costs. The Recreation Commission is still in the discussion process, and is trying to come up with a fair and equitable distribution of fees that are both time sensitive and usage sensitive. The Commission has always supported Town based programs having priority; an out of town organization is not going to bump any Town based organization.

I. Publics' Opportunity to Address the Commission (cont'd)

Chair Crowley

The Commission has to have a chance to come up with a fee structure before organizations can state the fees are unfair.

Debra Dempsey, Stonington Seals Lacrosse

We need to know what fields we can use because we have a schedule meeting in a week.

Recreation Administrator Joseph Mendonca, Jr

I met with Paul Kizer two weeks ago providing him with projected time frames and fields that would be blocked off for Seals which you replied in an email thanking me. Unfortunately, at this time I'm not sure when grass fields will be open for play and waiting for word on that.

Chair Crowley

We are waiting to find out if other fields will be ready; we will not know that until April.

Steve Costanza, Stonington Youth Football

Mr. Costanza stated that he is sure the fees associated with field usage are only a drop in the bucket compared to the total field maintenance cost, and he is actually an advocate of scheduling outside organizations because they will hopefully drive down the cost for in town youth organizations.

Chair Crowley

Fees were always part of planning process, and Town organizations will always have priority. The cost of maintaining fields is approximately \$136K, and outside groups will help diminish that cost. There are comments and discussion regarding the fees when fees haven't even been determined yet; the Commission needs to be given a chance. As far as scheduling for lacrosse, those fields have just been built, and the Commission does not know if they will be ready.

First Selectman Ed Haberek, Jr.

Part of the understanding when this process began was that fees would be charged to offset the maintenance costs; the goal is to have scheduling done in a fair and equitable process, and Recreation Administrator Mendonca, Chair Crowley and Bryan over at the school are working as hard as they can to make that happen. First Selectman Haberek stated that a lot of work has gone into determining a fee structure; his Director of Finance has gone to 36 different other towns for information, the Recreation board & Joe has gone to other various towns, and they have talked to other recreation places and talked to other outside organizations.

Paul Sartor, Stonington Resident & Athletic Field Task Force Chair

The fields need to be taken care of so that they are not ruined in 5 years, which is why certain fields will be rested when needed, and you will not see anyone on them. Right now things are on track for fields to be ready in April, but there is no guarantee because it has been a rough winter.

I. Publics' Opportunity to Address the Commission (cont'd)

Commissioner Ciriello

That is why it is difficult for Administrator Mendonca to confirm field usage; if it's wet and the field will get dug up, then it can't be used.

Debra Dempsey, Stonington Seals Lacrosse

Ms. Dempsey stated she is worried because she is meeting in two weeks to set her schedule. If she doesn't get her games done she is not having a season of games. Right now she has nothing in writing stating that she has fields for her teams; she can't schedule practices and cant schedule games. What is getting blocked for her for the season, and she needs to know within the next 2 weeks.

Chair Ciriello stated that is a scheduling issue that will be faced every year.

Chair Crowley

Scheduling is the easy part, but no one can guarantee that the fields will be ready; there is nothing that can be done about that. The sports in season will get their slots; the only thing that cannot be guaranteed is if the fields will be ready. It looks like they will, but maybe not.

Ms. Dempsey stated that's great, but she needs to know what they will get.

Chair Crowley stated that they cannot tell her because they do not know; they are being upfront as much as they can.

Administrator Mendonca explained to Ms. Dempsey that he is trying to find her 782 hours of field space, which is a tremendous amount; as much as football and soccer combined this past fall.

Commissioner Ciriello stated that the Town is trying to run a Recreation program as well, so if the Town partners with the Como or YMCA, those programs are going to get space; they have to, so that conflict is always going to occur. Commissioner Ciriello suggested Ms. Dempsey let Administrator Mendonca know what they absolutely need.

II. Secretary's Report

A motion was made by Commissioner Ciriello to approve the Secretary's Report. Motion seconded by Commissioner Theadore, all in favor, motion approved.

III. Budget Report

- a. General Fund
- b. Special Activity

A motion was made by Vice-Chair Prachniak to approve the budget reports. Motion seconded by Commissioner Ciriello, all in favor, motion approved.

IV. Communications

V. Programs

a. Winter Programs - Update

- Tennis: Youth Clinic Beginner / Advanced = 8
- Volleyball: Youth Clinic Beginner / Advanced = 9
- Basketball: HS League = 4 Teams (26 players)
- Basketball: Rec/COMO League:
 - Boys: 3rd - 5th: 9 Teams (81 Players), 6th - 8th: 8 Teams (76 Players)
 - Girls: 3rd - 5th: 4 Teams (35 Players), 6th - 8th: 4 Teams (46 Players)
- Soccer: Futsal HS Boys = 11
- Soccer: Futsal MS Boys = 15
- Basketball: Men's Over 30 = 15+
- Volleyball: Adult Coed League = 8 Teams (50+ players)
- Baby Boomers = 10
- Zumba = 12
- Zumba Toning = 4

b. NEW - Middle School Aged Programs- Spring/Summer 2014

- Archery: Spring Intro Clinic
- Basketball: Summer Camp
- Basketball: 3on3 Summer League
- Football: Summer Camp
- Lacrosse: Summer Camp
- Volleyball: Summer Youth Clinic
- Soccer: Summer Camp
- Tennis: Summer Youth Clinic

VI. Recreation Administrator's Report

a. Field Usage Rental Fee Schedule

A motion was made by Commissioner Ciriello to forward the Field Usage Rental Fee as presented to the Athletic Field Task Force with a recommendation from the Recreation Commission to accept, with an implementation start date of next year. Motion seconded by Vice-Chair Prachniak, all in favor, motion approved.

VII. Other Business

- a. Athletic Field Task Force Update
- b. Tobacco Free Parks
Tabled until next meeting
- c. Middle School Aged Programs – Spring/Summer
Tabled until next meeting

VIII. Chairman's Comments

IX. Meeting Adjourned

A motion was made by Commissioner McKernan to adjourn. Motion seconded by Commissioner Theadore, all in favor, motion approved. Meeting adjourned at 7:43PM.

Respectfully Submitted,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "C. Michael Crowley".

C. Michael Crowley, Chairman