

**TOWN OF FAIRFIELD
PARKS AND RECREATION COMMISSION
Minutes of August 19, 2020**

A tele-conference meeting of the Parks and Recreation Commission of the Town of Fairfield was held on Wednesday, August 19, 2020 at 7:00 p.m. via teleconference.

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

ABSENT: Chris McCoy and David Weber

ALSO: Anthony Calabrese, Dir. Parks & Recreation

Chairman Scott Walker called the tele-conference meeting to order at 7:03 p.m. He asked the members to identify themselves when speaking and voting.

I. ACT ON MINUTES OF: July 15, 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. St. Paul's Church – Fall Services to be held at Jennings Beach on Sundays in September and October, 2020 at 8:30 a.m.

M. Von Conta asked if they will be asked to keep social distance and wear masks. A. Calabrese responded that yes, they will be following all state guidelines and social distancing. J. Gerber made a motion to approve and B. Nerreau seconded.

Vote: 4-0. (B. Nerreau, M. Von Conta, Jessica Gerber, Jamie Benton in favor, B. McBride and S. Walker abstained). Motion passed and approved.

IV. NEW BUSINESS:

A. Debra Cingari – Request to install a Little Free Library at Veres Park in honor of Dee Herlihy.

Debra Cingari is the sister of Dee Herlihy who passed away in June of this year. Dee ran a school called Curiosity Corner on the corner of Veres and James Streets. Ms. Cingari wishes to have a Little Free Library replica of Ms. Herlihy's school placed in the park near the memorial bench that was dedicated in early August. D. Cingari explained that Bill Henry constructed the waterproof, cedar sided school house with plexi-glass windows and doors. The library would be maintained by five local girls ranging in age from 11-17 who had gone to her sister's school and who have volunteered to take care of it. Her daughter Madison will be the mentor for these girls and the neighbors have said that they are willing to supply books and the girls and their parents are willing to maintain it with weekly wipe downs and replacement of books as needed. She stated that there would be a plaque on the back of the library with an email address to allow people to email any comments or concerns to the committee which consists of these 5 young girls and her daughter. S. Walker asked if there were any concerns about the Little Free Library being placed adjacent to the bench. A. Calabrese said he had no concerns. B. Nerreau made a motion to approve and J. Gerber seconded.

Vote: 5-0. (B. Nerreau, M. Von Conta, J. Gerber, B. McBride, J. Benton in favor, S. Walker abstained). Motion passed and approved.

B. Dennis Nolan/Casey Elliott – Request to move forward with the Lighting project for Fairfield Little League Girls Softball, “FLLGS”.

Dennis Nolan stated that he is the V.P. of the FLLGS and was being joined by Casey Elliot (a member of the Board of Directors for FLLGS). They would like to have lights installed at Dougiello Field. FLLGS has over 350 girls and continues to grow. It is a completely volunteer organization. Dougiello is their home field and has become a destination field for surrounding towns with numerous all-star games and state tournaments. FLLGS has donated more than 100k to the town for improvements and continue to do so. The maintenance of the field is all done by FLLGS. Lighting the field would allow them to get more use out of the facility, including a chance for District 2 to host the 12U state tournament in 2023 or 2024. The request is to have Parks and Rec advance this project for consideration in the budget cycle. FLLGS is willing to take on 100% of the financial cost of the project if the town would be willing to put up the bond. FLLGS would take on the whole debt service. There would likely be fundraising to lower the cost and they expected that they would be able to repay the bond in 17 years. They had been working with Director A. Calabrese over the course of the past few years and received a bid for the project in 2019. They would be in a position to assist the director with all the logistics such as the placement of the lights and the upfront work involved. The electricity is available so that is not an issue. Little league has specification for fields that they would follow: four light posts, an LED system with lower light scatter and lower cost of the lighting. S. Walker asked what the cost/budget for the project would be. D. Nolan stated that the quote they received in April of 2019 was \$125k-\$150k. FLLGS’s offer is to do a debt service and take advantage of the town’s low interest rate. S. Walker confirmed that the net cost to the town would be zero. B. Nerreau asked S. Walker if the request was for the town to bond it, how would the approval process go and how does it relate to push back from the neighbors. S. Walker explained that they have no authority other than to approve and support the lighting at Dougiello Field. After that, FLLGS would have to go through the other bodies for further approval. He also asked A. Calabrese if the timeline fell in line with his waterfall chart. A. Calabrese stated that they received quotes in April, 2019 and that the project was placed on the waterfall chart in September, 2019. The project was considered at the BOF Capital planning summit with an anticipate timetable of two years at that time. A. Calabrese said he liked the project and its net zero cost for the town. D. Nolan had asked A. Calabrese if the project could be pushed up to this September which would require it to be moved up on the Capital Workshop schedule before going before the BOS, BOF and RTM for approval. The approval process would normally begin in January and February with a possible approval received during late February. The project would then go out to bid. Hopefully the bids would come in by March/April 2021. B. Nerreau asked about push back that often happens with lighting projects and whether they had considered any shut off times. D. Nolan said that they do anticipate having a shut off time and noted that since beginning play at Dougiello Field, they had not had any complaints and work hard to be a good neighbor. D. Nolan also stated that the league is made up of girls from ages 5-12 and that they are not a late night organization. The lights will typically be used in early spring and late fall with the exception of tournaments. C. Elliott added that the girls are usually done by 8 p.m. so it is really only a problem in April and May and then again in September. He would anticipate about 3-5 days a year when they would be used until 9 p.m. Also, with the lights at Dougiello, they would be able to give Haydon field back to Parks and Rec to offer other organizations field use on Friday nights. The lights would also benefit the whole town because they would be able to host tournaments that would draw people to local establishments for lodging and eating. S. Walker stated that they should have a hard and fast shut off time for the lights. C. Elliott said that a 9:30 – 10:00 p.m. curfew would be acceptable to everyone. J. Gerber asked that in terms of neighbors, if there was a process for notifying them when the project goes before the other bodies. S. Walker stated that his recollection was that there is no formal process but that they have advised groups if they feel there will be an impact, they can go out and proactively notify the neighbors. J. Gerber wanted to clarify that the purpose here is whether or

not to approve the lights, not any financial matters and should move forward to the next step. S. Walker stated that there is no impact on the Parks and Recreation budget and it would be managed by FLLGS and DPW. It is simply a decision on how that property is being used. Without further discussion, J. Gerber made a motion to approve and B. Nerreau seconded.

Vote: 5-0. (B. Nerreau, M. Von Conta, J. Gerber, B. McBride, J. Benton in favor, S. Walker abstained. Motion passed and approved.

V. To hear and act upon information in Reports:

A. Board of Education Report:

J. Gerber explained that the BOE was asked to present three options to the State on 8/24/2020, (full in school learning, hybrid or distance) and that the plan's first option could not be a hybrid plan or all distant learning. The number one choice was to have students in school five days a week except for those who had health issues. Then on August 27th, the Governor held a press conference and said the decision of whether the plan was a hybrid or full back in school would be left up to the districts. The majority of high schools throughout the state opted for a hybrid plan so that the students can be able to keep social distance. Upon further review it was decided that middle school and elementary would also be a hybrid plan. All of these plans are posted on the Fairfield Public School website. High school and middle school will go full day but not every day. Elementary schools will be going half days every day with a.m. and p.m. cohorts. Parents have been asked to fill out a survey stating a preference for hybrid or full distance learning and based on these numbers, the BOE will be able to determine how this will all work. There is still a lot of details that need to be worked out. The number of school days can be reduced from 180 to 177, if those days are used for Professional Development before the school year starts. The new start date for the school year will now be September 8th for both distance and hybrid. They are still waiting for additional health guidelines from the state and they will have to adjust their plans accordingly. M. Von Conta asked whether the class sizes would be smaller. J. Gerber stated that yes, for elementary school the class sizes would be cut in half. The students would have the same teacher in class, however the distance instructor would be different.

B. To hear and act upon Tree Committee Report

B. McBride reported that the Tree Committee has met two times to outline the parameters for the tree slots for various charities and organizations. It was decided that every charity would have a month and a half, which would give them a little more time and less changing of the lights. The main issue in the July meeting was the topic of charities that are applying for a time slot are not necessarily dedicated to helping children in need, such as the pink pledge and we as a sub-committee decided to come before the Commission to possibly change the motion to include families in need instead of just children. They came up with a press release and by the second meeting had already received some requests. The first was the Pink Pledge who requested the month of October because that is historically Breast Cancer Awareness Month. The second request was from the Fairfield Equity Coalition, which is a student led organization with the help of faculty. The Fairfield Equity Coalition is technically not a charity but they are an organization that was established on July 5th of this year. C. McCoy reviewed their social media pages and suggested that they come before the full Commission to hear what they do. The group's mission is to empower the student body and to bridge the gap between racism. B. McBride stated that the press release that J. Gerber created outlines what we are looking for and will be going out to a number of media outlets in Town. They also agreed that the organization could put a temporary sign that would have a QR code for donations and social media details so that everyone would know what the tree is lit for. B. McBride wished to discuss whether they needed to amend the motion which clearly states that the charity or organization must benefit children in need as opposed to families in need. S. Walker asked if they wished to replace "children" with the word "families". J. Gerber asked if it could be even children and families. S. Walker asked

whomever wanted to make a motion regarding the previously adopted motion and move to strike whatever they wished to strike and replacing it with whatever they wished to replace it with. J. Gerber made a motion to amend the motion approved on July 15th to approve the yearlong tree lighting with the stipulation that other charities or organizations serving children in need by striking children and replacing it with children and families. B. McBride seconded. B. McBride stated that the main reason for the change is for charities like the Pink Pledge. While they may not directly benefit children, they felt that they needed to change the language to include everyone. J. Gerber said it should be “Charities and Organizations” not just charities. B. Nerreau stated that this is a slight change but helpful rather than say children and families, it should say children and/or families only because if we say children and families it implies the organization includes children. For instance, Pink Pledge specifically, there are children involved but not every organization is for children. J. Gerber agreed. S. Walker stated that they would strike the word children and replace with children and/or families.

Vote: 5-0. (B. Nerreau, M. Von Conta, J. Gerber, B. McBride, J. Benton in favor, S. Walker abstained. Motion amended as discussed.

Part 2 is a specific request from the Fairfield Equity Coalition “FEC”.

Zoe Gupta, is a 2019 graduate from Warde H.S. She is one of the co-founders of FEC along with Lynnaija Brevard, who is one of the co-presidents. FEC was started in about May or June with a lot of alumni who started a conversation regarding all the race and religious issues going on in the media. They would like to be able to add to the curriculum and change the current hiring practice to improve the infrastructure in schools so that all races are included and represented. She stated that there were significant disparities in the school system and that they are working with the Superintendent, faculty, and parents and will have a report on their findings in a couple of weeks. FEC works on anything that they can do to change the infrastructure with a goal of improving how the students are treated allowing them to feel that they are included. She stated that this organization is nonpartisan and has reached out to all politicians across the political spectrum. This organization and all of the people that have reached out and supported them is the epitome of hope and after hearing stories from students and how they really felt unheard and underrepresented, they would like to see their mission represented with the tree of hope. L. Brevard, also a 2019 FWHS graduate who was part of the Fairfield Warde Voices for Equity while at FWHS stated that if their organization was granted this tree opportunity it would connect with what they are doing through the BIPOC (black, indigenous people of color) and how that can be represented by the tree. They would ask people that make art be allowed to display their works on the tree as well as host ceremonies, keeping Covid in mind, and have speakers come and share educational and positive outlets to be heard. S. Walker asked J. Gerber and B. McBride if now that the motion had been amended to include organizations and charities that serve children and/or families, does this request being made now by the FEC fit within the intent of what we are doing with the tree. B. McBride stated that she struggled to make a decision tonight because one of their subcommittee members is not on the call tonight and had concerns regarding this becoming political. When it comes to the Tree of Hope, we want to make sure that it is dedicated to children and/or families in need and although she was not saying that their organization does not fall under this purview, she would like to pause to get perspective of the missing subcommittee members who has strong opinions on this.

S. Walker stated that part of the request that was made by Lynnaija was to decorate the tree as well. That does not fall under the parameters of the approval. Only lights are approved in the color of choice of the organization who is sponsoring it. If the subcommittee wants to discuss this with C. McCoy then you would have to bring it back before us and say now you want to decorate the tree. J. Gerber agreed that they need to stay with the original intent of just having lights. S. Walker asked if there were any questions for the subcommittee regarding any issues with the subcommittee, and asked if he could get a sense from the commission as to their feelings towards

approving political organizations or for profit organizations, as opposed to only nonprofit organizations sponsoring the tree. Z. Gupta stated that they were not a political organization. B. Nerreau stated he was not comfortable approving or supporting any political organization for the tree of hope nor a for-profit organization but would wholeheartedly support FEC. S. Walker asked J. Gerber and B. McBride to reconvene and if they want to approve the FEC to sponsor the tree, they would have the support of the commission to do so. If you did feel uneasy with it and felt that it is political in nature, then they could come back before the commission. J. Gerber said she did not think any political organization should be approved for the tree of hope and that Zoey was very clear to explain that this was not a political organization. To be clear, barring any concerns from commission member this can come back to the subcommittee and if they felt there was no issue they would not have to come back before the full commission for any approval. J. Gerber stated that she would send the recorded version of this meeting to Chris, and if he had additional questions, they could have a discussion.

C. Director's Report:

Mr. Calabrese presented a written report which is summarized below:

Our summer has been lighter than usual with less programs and events due to the worldwide pandemic. The Summer Concert Series and our Peanut Butter Jam sessions have been well received by those who have attended. Most attendees have followed the State guidance regarding social distancing and wearing masks.

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 while keeping our 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 continue to monitor the situation as things unfold.

We have a couple of projects that are going to start in the coming weeks. One is a complete rebuild of the Tomlinson Middle School tennis courts. We are moving forward with our project to convert them to post-tension concrete. They will have a 10 year warranty on the lines and a 20 year warranty against cracks. This project will be a nice upgrade to the neighborhood and school facility.

The second project that is taking place is the fence replacement at the Jennings Beach Skate Park. The current 4 foot tall fence will be replaced with an 8 foot tall fence. This will help the Police Department enforce the no trespassing rules when the park is closed. It will also help our park attendant monitor accessibility.

As I mentioned last month, the Emergency Management Team had asked our Department to devise a plan that would limit the number of non-residents accessing our beaches on the weekends. I am happy to report that the plan we implemented has been extremely successful. We are currently planning to staff our beaches until Labor Day as we do each year.

Finally, I'm excited to announce that we have filled both vacancies in our Department. Please join me in welcoming our new Recreation/Aquatic Coordinator Noreen Wilpiseski. Noreen comes to us all the way from New Jersey where she was the Recreation Director in Middlesex. Noreen will be tasked with managing our waterfront team and will work closely with Gaylen on our events at the Pavilions at Penfield Beach.

We have also hired Linda Hilliker as our new Account Clerk. Linda is a Southport resident and has been a part-time employee with our Department for the past year. Linda has a strong background in finance with over 20 years of experience. We are excited to have both Linda and Noreen join our Parks and Recreation team!

Please don't hesitate to contact me if you have any questions or concerns.

ADJOURNMENT: S. Walker stated with no further business to come before the Commission, the meeting was adjourned at 8:32 p.m.

Respectfully Submitted,

Kelly J. Brown, Recording Secretary

Tele-meeting location for audio: [youtube.com/watch?v=AqS0w56dNYE](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=AqS0w56dNYE)