

New Haven Board of Park Commissioners

Meeting No. 1474

Zoom Conference Meeting

February 15, 2023

New Haven, CT 06513

Present: President Belowsky, Commissioners Kenya Adams, Carl Babb, Sal DeCola, Harvey Feinberg, Ernie Santiago, Hector Torres; Patricia Wallace, Jane Comins, Olivia Martson, Josh Randall, Stephanie FitzGerald, Roxanne Condon, Joy Ford, Geri Mauhs, Jenny Berkett, Adam Mejerson, Tom Breen, Barbara Sivigny, Nadine Horton, Melinda Tuhus, Frank Cochran, Tom Lehtonen, Chris Ozyck, Barbara Lamb, David Schimchick, Sally Tyler, Sarah Ohly, Sandra Shaner, Tracy Blanford, Sylvia Dorsey, Joe Burns, Anstress Farwell, Cordalie, Tamara, Judge Arterton

Absent:

Staff: Deputy Director Stephen Hladun, Deputy Director William Dixon, Rebecca Bombero, Katherine Jacobs, Giovanni Zinn, Tariq Dasent

- I. **Minutes of Meetings #1473: Motion to approve Minutes of Meeting 1473. Motion Seconded. Unanimously approved. Closed.**
- II. **Treasurer's Report: Motion to approve Treasurer's Report. Motion Seconded. Unanimously approved. Closed.**
- III. **Slate of Officers: Motion to approve Slate of Officers. Motion Seconded.** President David Belowsky, Vice President Carl Babb, Treasurer Hector Torres, Secretary Harvey Feinberg. **Unanimously approved. Closed.**
- IV. **New Business:**

Edgewood Park Midbridge Replacement – Katherine Jacobs & Giovanni Zinn:

Giovanni Zinn is seeking approval to begin the process of replacing the midbridge in Edgewood Park. Engineering would like to replace the bridge before it corrodes and fails to an extent where it needs to be closed for safety concerns. Right now, the bridge is still usable but would like to fix it as soon as possible as there is a long lead time item on the manufacture of the bridge, and it is a park safety item.

- The existing bridge and the center pier will be demolished, the bridge superstructure will be removed, and a new apron will be created to bring you up to the bridge.
- The new bridge will sit on new pre-cast abutments that are behind the existing abutments. The wing walls and abutments will remain.
- The new bridge will be slightly longer and about 6 inches higher than the current bridge; it will span from one side to another in one shot, and there will no longer be any central spans.
- There will be appropriate wetland plantings along the disturbed areas, especially on the upper right side where the bridge will be craned in.
- It is a fairly open area so Zinn is hopeful it will have minimal impact on trees. All city ordinances and noticing requirements will be followed.
- Will have to cofferdam and sandbag to divert the river away from the existing rubble walls where they will be repointed.
- All this work requires permits from the City of New Haven City Plan Commission.

Zinn anticipates this project will cost around \$200,000 - \$250,000 and would like to get out to bid as soon as possible. Usually, the lead time on the bridge structure is several months. Zinn does not have an exact schedule of when this will be completed, but the goal is to have it done by the latter part of the year.

President Belowsky would like to see a different style of bridge for the residents of New Haven to enjoy. Zinn understands the request, however, he does not want to distract or detract from the natural beauty of the area. A truss is the most efficient way of spanning something like this (distance). It will look similar to the bridge installed in the West River Open space (off Valley St). There are price differences with changing the specs of the bridges. These bridges are pre-engineered, there are 2 to 3 styles that can be selected, and price points are associated with them. If you wanted to do a custom design you will increase the cost anywhere from 4 to 40 times the cost. Truss bridges have slight variations, and it is the cost regime that can be explored without spending a lot of money on something that doesn't add functionality.

Motion to approve Edgewood Park midbridge replacement. Motion seconded. Commissioner Babb asked if there were means to do this project without costing the taxpayers any money. Commissioner Feinberg responded this is funded by the State. There is \$800,00 earmarked for Edgewood Park and \$200,000- \$250,000 will come from that funding. **Unanimously approved. Closed.**

Introduction of Deputy Director Stephen Hladun:

Stephen Hladun is the new Deputy Director of the Parks & Public Works Department. He joins the team with 20 years of experience as a Special Projects Coordinator in the Parks & Recreation Department in the city of Bridgeport. Hladun looks forward to working with everyone.

Fitlot Outdoor Fitness Parks – Adam Mejerson:

Adam Mejerson is the Executive Director of a national nonprofit organization called FitLot. They help cities go through the process of planning, building, and programming outdoor fitness. Fitlot has facilitated the donation and construction of outdoor fitness parks in all 50 states with the closest being in Newington at Clem Lemire Park. Fitlot makes it easy for people to have access to a safe and welcoming space that they can use to exercise.

Programming is a big part of FitLot. As an organization, they facilitate programmatic grants so that local fitness professionals can be hired as neighborhood coaches and offer ongoing cost-free community classes. FitLot works with the city to identify local philanthropic supporters and corporate sponsors that may want to support a public health initiative.

Mejerson is seeking approval to collaborate with the city to help with site selection and identifying potential existing parks that already have a playground where fitness equipment would complement existing facilities. Ideally one per neighborhood is how they like to approach this work. If a park already has a functional set of workout equipment, then the focus should shift to a part of town that does not have walkable access to equipment. FitLot would take on development responsibility and facilitate a donation of equipment, construction, and program funds to the city of New Haven over time. There is no cost to the city for setting up; the city would be responsible for maintenance.

The park is 1,400 square feet (42 feet in diameter), shaded, safety surfaced, and it is designed in a circle so all equipment is intergraded in the shade structure so circuit training can be offered. There are QR codes for instructional videos on each piece of equipment so people can easily view a helpful video on how to use the equipment and the fundamental movements. It is all powder-coated steel. It is produced by landscape structures they are the top-tier playground equipment provider in the US. Equipment in places like Alaska and Buffalo, New York are performing great through the winter. Saltwater is more troublesome, Mejerson would not recommend any

spots within 500 yards of saltwater. The equipment is heavy-duty, and the warranties are top tier. In the ten years Mejerson has been involved there have not been major issues with vandalism. The equipment has been well taken care of and they are standing up well.

Tabled.

Parks Friends – Stephanie FitzGerald & Nadine Horton:

Stephanie FitzGerald and members of New Haven's Parks Friends presented to the commission their views on the status of the Parks Department.

- 1.) They advocated for more funding to support New Haven parks especially for increasing the number of well-trained parks maintenance workers and programming.
- 2.) They want more information on the specifications of the funds the Parks Commission oversees and how it relates to the city budget.
- 3.) They want to understand how work is done now that the Parks Department has been folded into Public Works and Recreation has been folded into Youth & Rec.
- 4.) Review if the commission follows the city charter which says the Parks Commission will work together with the Parks Director on park policies.
- 5.) Create a separate department for Parks & Trees. They believe the merger of Parks & Public Works is complicated organizationally. It is not working to have the two departments together.

President Belowsky mentioned there were some issues with the Parks Department as there was no Deputy Director for months. Jeff did a good job in the interim, but it was difficult to manage two departments with limited staff. For historical information regarding Parks Commission's past meeting minutes, there are three places other than 720 Edgewood to find them (New Haven History Museum, the City Plan Department, and the New Haven History room in the Ives Branch of the Public Library.)

V. Old Business:

Playground Policy – Patricia Wallace

Patricia Wallace reviewed her playground policy for commissioners. This policy calls for one fully equipped public playground meaning a splash pad, playscape, and mature trees in every neighborhood. Wallace believes this is feasible based on how the city has funded things over time. The city has been solely reliant on the city budget for its parks and playgrounds, however, there are other sources that can be tapped. Wallace recommended the city do strategic planning to include what members of the community would like to have in their playgrounds and a workshop to look into all possible sources of funding. Wallace believes this would be possible to put together an excellent multi-year phased-in plan to give all neighborhoods and children in New Haven equal access.

There is a cost associated with this policy however engagement with the community would be the best way to find out what each neighborhood needs and wants, taking into consideration the state of existing equipment. There is a brief list of the kinds of funding that can be tapped in the presentation given to commissioners.

Wallace would like the commission to commit to establishing a policy that would commit the city to a multi-year plan to make the case that every city neighborhood has one fully equipped public playground as defined by Wallace.

Commissioners need additional time to review the material provided by Wallace and to do their own research. Tabled.

VI. Director's Report Parks & Public Works:

- Actively prepping for the spring season; focusing on equipment maintenance and repair.
- Litter control and leaf clean-ups are ongoing.
- Tree crews are doing priority removals and continuing their pruning of Elms and Oaks.
- Prepping for stump grinding in the spring.
- Training is scheduled for the parks division.
- Working with other departments such as Engineering and Youth Services to coordinate for the upcoming season.
- Actively street sweeping as this winter has been mild.
- Supporting the Golf Course renovations – parking lot improvements, tree and stump removal, asphalt repairs, and curb installation.
- Supporting the Wilbur Cross Athletic Field.

VII. Director's Report Youth & Recreation:

- Prepping for spring – permits, programs, activities, and summer jobs.
- Bauer is donating equipment and will host 2 middle schools for a hockey program.

Meeting Adjourned: 7:10 PM

Minutes submitted by: Tariq Dasent, Executive Administrative Assistant to Parks & Public Works

Next Meeting: March 15, 2023

Location: 720 Edgewood Ave, New Haven, CT 06515