

New Haven Board of Park Commissioners

Meeting No. 1462

Zoom Conference Meeting

November 17, 2021

New Haven, CT 06513

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Present: President Belowsky, Commissioner Carl Babb, Commissioner Ernie Santiago, Commissioner Hector Torres, Commissioner Kevin Walton; Susan Klein, Alder Salvatore DeCola  
Staff: Deputy Director William Carone, Director Gwen Williams, Deputy Director William Dixon, Tariq Dasent, Katherine Jacobs

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- I. **Minutes of Meeting #1461: Motion to approve Minutes of Meeting 1461. Motion Seconded. Unanimously approved. Closed.**
- II. **Treasurer's Report: Motion to approve Treasurer's Report. Motion Seconded. Unanimously approved. Closed.**
- III. **New Business:**

**Pickleball Standard Rule Sign – Katherine Jacobs**

Katherine Jacobs presented a revised rule sign for the pickleball courts at Scantlebury Park. The new sign will state courts are for tennis and pickleball use only. Commissioner Carl Babb questioned how many rule signs were currently up. Jacobs stated there are two signs up, one at each entrance. Jacobs would replace the existing signs with larger signs. President Belowsky pointed out tobacco was misspelled on the sign. Jacobs will fix the misspelled word.

**Kimberly Field Improvements – Katherine Jacobs**

Kimberly Field is one of the biggest grassy open athletic field locations in the Hill. It is on the site of a historic river which has been filled. It was filled during a time when there was less regulation on what was put in the ground. As a result, it does not drain well and there are issues laying the field regularly which have caused game cancellations. On the southern end of the field, two softball fields have not been used in years. Since the fields have not been used, maintenance is falling behind, and visually, they're in disrepair. Both the basketball court and cricket pitch are used. The basketball court needs repair and hoops. The neighborhood has pointed out that although this is a valuable park for league use there are not great amenities for neighbors.

**Proposed improvements to Kimberly Field:**

- Drainage improvements will improve the quality of park use. Installing subgrade perforated pipes would help bring extra water from areas that aren't draining well into the municipal drainage system.
- Remove the abandoned backstop and dugout on the south side of the field.
- Keep the baseball field and cricket pitch.
- Exploring the possibility of a soccer field.
- Working with URI on the potential of developing a walking route. Planting will be done to make it an increased habitat and create a more aesthetically pleasing experience for walkers.

## Funding Overview:

- Use existing allocated parks capital funds for drainage improvements, demolition of the dugouts and backstops, renovation of the basketball court, and installing some strategically located benches and trash cans.
- Working with URI on grant support for the walking route. Included in that grant application the city is committing about five and half thousand dollars' worth of staff support.
- Interested in using some of the existing tree planting contract with URI to plant additional trees around the perimeter of the park.
- URI is offering about one and half thousand dollars of independent assistance, which includes insurance coverage for the project.
- Pending approval of sixty-one thousand dollars of grant funding from DEEP.
- Ten thousand dollars of grant funding is already secured from the Athletic Brewing Company. This is a company that makes nonalcoholic beer.

## Next Steps:

- Pending approval from the commissioners, Jacobs would like to complete construction documents on the drainage improvements, demolition of unused structures, and renovation of the basketball courts this winter.
- Move to procurement in the spring and have it all installed next summer.
- There is a different timeline for the work to be accomplished with the DEEP grant because it is pending notification of funds.
- Assuming the funds are rewarded Jacobs will move forward with the construction documents, procurement, and installation of the walking loop, benches, and trash cans.

Deputy Director William Dixon asked if the soccer field would be regulation. Jacobs stated that is open for discussion and asked Dixon if he had a preference. Dixon thinks if a full-size soccer field can fit then that would be great. Commissioner Hector Torres would like to keep one softball field so the neighborhood can use it. Jacobs stated it is possible to leave the backstop of one of the softball fields in place the issue is maintenance. Jacobs believes for the quality of the park it would be better to have an open space. It is more flexible rather than having structures that are broken, have graffiti, or are covered with plants. Commissioner Ernie Santiago questioned if money for parks is approved by the Board of Alders, then shouldn't all parks be maintained and not just the ones being rented. Jacobs stated there are some equity issues in only taking care of areas that bring in money.

Jacobs requested a formal approval of the master plan of improvements. **Motion to approve Jacob's plan to improve Kimberly Park. Seconded.** Commissioner Santiago would like to keep one softball field. Jacobs stated she will look into the configuration so the use of space can be maximized. Commissioner Torres questioned if they were voting based on Jacobs' presentation or Santiago's request. Jacobs suggested the commissioners approve the drainage improvements and the walking trail. Jacobs stated she can come back with information for the commissioners regarding the softball field for approval later. **Commissioner Babb presented the motion to approve the drainage improvements and the walking trail with a softball field update from Jacobs later. Seconded. The commissioners voted unanimously to approve the amendment. A vote was taken on the motion. Unanimously approved. Motion passes with an amendment. Closed.**

## Seawall Park – William Carone

Deputy Director William Carone presented improvements to the Seawall Park guardrail. Currently, the rail is wooden, the posts are not deep enough in the ground, and they are not steel. It is not very sturdy and not built to take the impact of cars. Carone presented an

alternate rail used by the state of Connecticut on the Meritt Parkway. The Meritt Parkway guardrail is a thicker wood rail with steel posts and is rated for large trucks. President Belowsky asked if a speed bump could be placed there so people wouldn't drive so fast. Carone stated since it is a state road it may be a little more complicated to place a speed bump there, but he will reach out to Giovanni. Alder Sal DeCola is in favor of the new guardrails. Commissioner Torres asked if the new rail would go in the same spot as the old rail. Carone stated it would have to be determined how much property the state owns into the park, but it would be easier to install right around the same area where the original posts are since there is already clearance and wouldn't have to worry about underground utilities. Commissioner Santiago asked if the rail could be about 6 inches higher. Carone stated the specs would have to be reviewed to see if it was designed that way for better protection of cars. Jacobs asked if reflectors can be installed on the fence, so it is more visible at night. Carone said yes and it would be good for snow plowing as well. Commissioner Santiago asked what the process for this project is. Carone stated to meet the winter deadline action would have to be taken tonight, then he would reach out to the state vendors to see what they have for inventory. President Belowsky was unsure if the project could start now because it is winter. Carone stated since the ground is not frozen, it may be possible to start. The only concern is if the current rail is removed then the new rail must go in right away. If there will be an installation gap, then the project will be postponed until spring. Carone will reach out to the state to get a price for the material, installation, and an estimate of when inventory will be available. Commissioner Santiago asked if reflectors can be installed in the meantime on the current rail. Carone said yes.

Commissioner Santiago asked Carone if he could get the price for guardrails at Front & Lombard Street. Carone stated he called Atlas Fence and they came out and took measurements and are ordering the replacement parts.

#### **IV. Old Business:**

##### **Little Libraries**

**Motion to approve Maggie Nardini and Marge Ottenbreit's request to install little libraries. Motion seconded.** Commissioner Santiago asked why a vote was not taken last month. Carone stated there was not a quorum at the time of the presentation. **Unanimously approved. Closed.**

##### **Playground Standard Rule Sign – Katherine Jacobs**

Katherine Jacobs presented more background information regarding the rule sign at Goffe Street Park. Parks, Recreation, & Trees are covered in Chapter 19 of the City of New Haven's Code of Ordinances. The ordinance covers vandalism, dogs, littering, and hours but there are no playground-specific rules. There are relevant rules in the state of Connecticut general statute. The state of Connecticut rules regarding playgrounds references the Public Playground Safety Handbook that is published by the US Consumer Product Safety Commission (Connecticut Statue 21A). The Consumer Product Safety Commission is an independent federal regulatory agency that works on public safety related to products sold in the United States. Most jurisdictions including the state of Connecticut reference the handbook in their codes giving it the force of law.

Regarding supervision, the handbook states: "Because all playgrounds present some challenges and because children can be expected to use equipment in unintended and unanticipated ways adult supervision is highly recommended." Supervision is not required but it is highly recommended in their verbiage. Jacobs did a survey, and some parks have signs, and some do not. Several different signs throughout city parks have different playground rules. Jacobs stated it would be beneficial for the city to establish a standard approach to the playground rule

sign. Jacobs thinks it is up to the commission what the approach should be and what should be on the signs.

President Belowsky stated having adult supervision is highly recommended would be great on a sign. We cannot force an adult to be there, but we can highly recommend it. President Belowsky asked if smoking was prohibited in the parks. Jacobs stated as far as she knew there was no ordinance however there is signage that states no smoking. Dixon stated the rule was handed down by the BOA. Jacobs asked if it was codified in the ordinance. Dixon stated she should check with Al Lucas. President Belowsky would like to have no smoking on the sign as well. Jacobs asked if it would make more sense to have a sign that specifically states all the rules rather than the more generic sign that refers to the city's code of ordinances. President Belowsky thinks a sign that states the rules will be better. Dixon asked if this will be throughout the whole park system to which President Belowsky stated yes.

Commissioner Torres asked if no tents can be added to the rule sign. Commissioner Kevin Walton disagrees with adding no tents as this may pose a problem in the summertime when people bring tents to Lighthouse Park. President Belowsky thinks it is best to skip this verbiage of no tents. Commissioner Santiago suggested no overnight camping to which President Belowsky pointed out the park closes at sunset so everyone should be out of the park. **Motion to use sign Jacobs presented with adult supervision is highly recommended and alcoholic beverages & smoking are not permitted. Motion Seconded.** Commissioner Walton asked at what age is adult supervision highly recommended. Jacobs responded the way it is written is a recommendation and not a requirement, so it allows for parental discretion. Jacobs asked Commissioner Walton if he would be more comfortable with an age on the sign. Commissioner Walton questioned are the parents or the parks department deciding the age to supervise a child. Jacobs presented the language from the Public Playground Safety Handbook. Commissioner Walton stated Jacobs referred to specific age groups during her presentation. Jacobs stated she was referencing the rule sign from the playground manufacturer which differentiates between the 2-5 age range which states adult supervision is required and the signs for 5-12 years old which states adult supervision is strongly recommended. The playground manufacturer decided to make this distinction, but we are not obligated to make that distinction if we do not want to. Commissioner Walton asked if there was a legal issue with putting the age or does saying adult supervision is highly recommended cover us legally. Jacobs stated by putting highly recommended we're putting the exact language of the law on the sign. Commissioner Walton asked if that was the law. Jacobs stated the law refers to the Public Playground Safety Handbook. **Unanimously approved. Closed.**

#### V. Director's Report Parks & Public Works:

- There was a 2021 fiscal year audit (July 1, 2020 – June 30, 2021) completed, and over 15,000 park permits were issued and supported. Average permits are usually between 6,000 – 7,000. Carone is very happy with this achievement.
- 3 new full-time caretakers will start next week. There will be 2 retirements next month. Will post for the position of caretaker again and test.
- The Christmas Tree lighting will be on December 2<sup>nd</sup> on the green. The event will start at sunset and will be live from 7 to 7:30 pm.
- Finished prep work on the Pop Smith batting cages and finished putting in the ground post. In the spring will help put hoops up and the project will be complete.

- Fantasy of Lights starts Friday, November 19<sup>th</sup> at Lighthouse. The employee preview party will be tomorrow.
- Safety Training will begin in December and go through the winter months.

**Director's Report Youth & Recreation:**

- Barnard Nature Center update: Director Gwen Williams and the park ranger coordinator Martin Torresquintero sent two emails to the principal to have a meeting and have not received a response. Williams will reach out again and if he does not respond she will reach out to one of the assistant superintendents to figure out what can be done to address the issue.
- The park ranger position will be posted again. There are two positions open.
- The recreation supervisor position has closed.
- Friday, November 19<sup>th</sup> the Youth & Recreation Department will be hosting a turkey giveaway at Roberto Clemente School.
- December 12<sup>th</sup> the Rudolph Toy Giveaway will be held at Lighthouse Park. President Belowsky asked Williams where she received the toys for the giveaway. Williams stated she budgets for it in Youth & Recreations signature programs. Also, working in partnership with Yale-New Haven Hospital Renal Unit, New England Donor Bank, Firebirds of the Fire Department, and the New Haven Police Department. If people have toys to donate, they can contact Williams.

Regarding the earlier conversation about keeping the softball field open rather than going through a permit process, Williams stated permits are issued because when dealing with children they would like people to have liability insurance. Carone stated the softball field does not get prep work because permits are issued for cricket and flag football which overlap the field. There are permits for the hardball field behind the school which the middle school uses.

President Belowsky stated there will be no meeting in December. Also, President Belowsky thanked Commissioner Walton for bringing the donation from Fantasy of Lights to his attention. The donation rate has increased to a \$3,000 base rate and 1.5% of all funds.

Commissioner Santiago requested anything that must go to the BOA regarding parks & recreation please go through him.

Commissioner Babb asked for an update on the throwing cage at Bowen Field. There is going to be a walkthrough with the Board of Education Athletic Director Erik, but the meeting has not been scheduled yet. As of now the hold up is figuring out who would provide the cost of installation. Dixon stated UNH would buy the cage, but the city would be responsible for financing the installation. Carone will reach out to the facilities director at UNH to get an update. Commissioner Babb asked if this has come up in front of the BOA yet. Commissioner Santiago stated no it has not. Jacobs stated she put together a plan and cost estimate and she was under the impression Dixon and Rebecca Bombero were working together to put together a proposal for the BOA. Jacobs suggested a meeting between Parks & Public Works and Youth & Recreation should take place to see which department will pay for the installation.

Commissioner Santiago stated he has not heard anything else on the RWA project at Lake Whitney Dam. Carone stated RWA has decided to do work on the Davis Street bridge and Whitney Ave then circle back to us.

**Motion to adjourn the meeting. Motion Seconded. Unanimously approved. Closed.**

Meeting Adjourned: 7:05 PM

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

Next Meeting: January 19, 2022

Location: Zoom