

West Hartford Parks & Recreation Advisory Board
Meeting Minutes
March 25, 2024
Elmwood Community Center, Room 24

Meeting called to order by Anna Park, Chair at 5:35 PM.

1. Roll Call:

In Attendance: Nancy Gierlich, Kristen Jezerski, Lisa Karam, Anna Park, Narayan Paudel.

Absent: Shawn Daly, Steve Garneau, Andres Lopez, Tanja Low.

Staff in Attendance: Helen Rubino-Turco.

Tanja Low has resigned from the board so there is an open position to fill.

2. Adoption of January 22, 2024 Minutes – passed unanimously (Narayan Paudel abstained).

3. Old Business:

- **New Elmwood Community Center (Mayflower Property Update)**

GWWO Architects has been selected to design the new community center, which will incorporate a library branch, teen center and senior center. The design phase is anticipated to be completed by early 2025. Demolition of the buildings at the property will be done this summer; use of the dog park will be interrupted. A feasibility study for the project is on the town's library website.

- **Golf Course Operations**

Josh Moses has been hired as the new gold pro. Rockledge opened March 13, 2024. At least three events have been planned to celebrate its centennial year: a men's and ladies' club mixer on June 21, a tournament in August, and a fundraiser on September 6 to benefit the Leisure Services Scholarship Fund.

- **Capital Improvements Update**

- Rockledge Driving Range—The Town Plan & Zoning Division tabled the permit application to construct an upgraded covered driving range at Rockledge until April 1. To address neighbors' concerns, an extra net and knee walls will be included, trees will be planted, and closing time will be 8 PM. Revenue from this upgrade will help the facility cover its costs.
- Eisenhower Bathhouse/Pool—The bathhouse renovation is on schedule to be completed by June; the pool will be demolished after the summer and rebuilt by June 1, 2025.
- Wolcott Park Improvements—Work on the restrooms is expected soon, (the spray pad will be closed during renovations), followed by the eastern parking lot next year. "We-Fi" service will be added once the construction is completed.
- Softball dugouts are to be installed at Sterling Field and Norfeldt Field this summer.
- Dock and bridge replacements—New docks are being built for Wolcott and Westmoor. A platform will be replaced at Spicebush Swamp Park to make the site handicap accessible. Two bridges will be out to bid soon for Spicebush and Westmoor.

4. New Business:

- Summer Camps and Spring Programs—Spring sign up was held February 1 and Summer sign up on March 1; many programs are full, including Westmoor. Non-residents comprise less than 5% of users, except at the Skating Rink, a regional rink.
- Budget Planning and Adoption—A proposed budget was submitted in January and presented to Council in March; the Council will vote on the town's budget on April 24, 2024.
- Senior Centers—A proposal to drop membership fees for residents has been submitted. Fees to use the exercise gyms will remain, and non-residents will still pay a fee. Membership is now at 1,430 members, lower than pre-pandemic, though course registrations are up (3,375). The Center recently received an endowment, which will help provide scholarship funds on a discreet basis as well as support free events. Brochures will no longer be mailed but will be available for pick up at the centers. The Center received a grant to purchase a bus to provide transport between the two sites, and the bus is expected to arrive in July.
- Pickleball vs. Tennis—Only one town in Connecticut has more pickleball courts than West Hartford. A request to reline two tennis courts is under review.
- Celebrate West Hartford—This event will be held June 8 (10 AM to 6 PM) and June 9 (noon to 6 PM); 150 artists and 20 food vendors have been approved so far. A road race using North Main Street and the Trout Brook Trail will be held as well. PeoplesBank is sponsoring the event with a \$10,000 donation and other local businesses are also supporting the event.
- Sustainability Projects and Upcoming Events—
 - The Tree Action Group will be designated as the town's arborist group. It has drafted a tree planting policy and has distributed over 1000 seedlings to the public at no charge. A tree inventory has been completed for Sedgwick Middle School and the group facilitated new tree plantings on school grounds. The group will meet at Westmoor at 4 PM on April 4 to review accomplishments and goals.
 - Westmoor Park, which achieved a Level I Arboretum status last year, has now reached Level II; and a ribbon cutting ceremony to celebrate this honor will be held on Arbor Day, April 26 from 4-6 PM. A tree walk has been completed for Westmoor and will be added to local park maps; tree walk concepts are being developed for Spicebush, Fernridge, Beachland and Wolcott.
 - On April 24 the West Hartford Public Library will host a Lights Out program on the Magic and Perils of bird migration in Connecticut, co-hosted by the WH Garden Club, WH Leisure Services and the Hartford Audubon Society.
 - On April 27 the Fourth Annual Tree Project will distribute 1600 tree plants thanks to the generosity of 100 donors and Sustainable Connecticut with contributions from the Town and Eversource.
 - On April 28 the Nepal Day Parade will kick off from Town Hall.
 - April 30 is the grant deadline for the West Hartford Greater Together Community Fund, which offers grants of \$3000-\$6000 to programs or projects

that will improve or enhance the quality of life in West Hartford or address a direct need of the community.

5. Friends of West Hartford Parks Report

- Lisa Karam, a board member of this non-profit (formerly Friends of Fern) whose goal is to advocate for use of the town's many parks, reported that a park cleanup at Beachland or Kennedy will be held April 27 from 9 AM to noon. A summer movie in one of the parks is planned for September. A Walk in the Park is set for October 26, 2024.

6. Public Comment

- Christine Feely addressed the board regarding her desire to change the Wolcott Community Garden to a no till garden to improve soil health. She also noted that mulch leaves will not be delivered to the garden as in years past. Her concerns will be shared with the manager of the gardens.

Meeting adjourned at 7:03 p.m.

Next Meeting: Monday, May 20, 2024; location TBD.

Minutes submitted by Nancy Gierlich.