

Parks & Recreation Advisory Board
Meeting Minutes
March 30, 2026
Elmwood Community Center

Meeting called to order by Anna Park, Chair, at 5:34 p.m.

1. **Roll Call:**

In Attendance: Patrick Cooney, Mike Fournier, Steve Garneau, Nancy Gierlich, Lisa Karam, Anna Park, and Chris Timmel.

Absent: Shawn Daly, Cara Paiuk.

Staff in Attendance: Helen Rubino-Turco.

2. **Public Comment:**

A motion was made and approved unanimously to move **Public Comments** to the beginning of the meeting. Presentations were made by five members of the Nature-Based Solutions Working Group (part of the sustainable West Hartford Commission) seeking the Advisory Board's assistance to push forward with adoption of a more robust native species policy and pesticide ban for the town. The speakers included Christine Feely, Suzanne Sayers, Andrea Yuliano, Madeleine Hexter, and Kim Hughes; most speakers stated that they spoke on their own behalf, not on behalf of the Group or Commission. To summarize, they would like to see West Hartford ban use of pesticides and compel planting of native trees, shrubs and flowers. Several members praised the work of Doug Tallamy, an author and professor of entomology, who focuses planting to mitigate climate change and who spoke at Town Hall on March 11, 2026, a talk co-sponsored by Leisure Services. While some initiatives have been undertaken—notably a wildflower field at Wolcott and pollinator gardens in numerous parks—the speakers felt West Hartford should strive to be a leader in the state with specific planting policies.

3. **Adoption of January 12, 2026 Minutes** – passed (Cooney, Garneau and Karam abstained).

4. **Old Business:**

Capital Improvements Updates

- *New Community Center*

The Construction Document phase should conclude by early Fall and will go to the Zoning Board for review. Funding of \$5 million is available in July 2026 and \$60 million in 2027. Lisa stated the Friends of the Park are concerned about the proposed road at the Beachland site, but Helen advised it is a driveway, not a road. Speed mitigation practices would be installed. The community will have an opportunity to review all plans through the zoning process.

- *Rockledge Driving Range and Bridge*

The range should be completed in May 2026 as well as replacement of the 8th hole footbridge.

- *Eisenhower Pool*

Work is on schedule for completion in time for pool season this summer.

- *Miscellaneous Items*

Work on the East parking lot at Wolcott will start on April 20. Parklets are being considered in the Center along with improvements to Unity Green. Bids for the Fern Street bridge replacement close April 16. Additional work in Fernridge Park would coincide with bridge replacement.

- *Veterans Memorial Skating Rink*

The rink closed today for extensive renovations and hopefully will reopen by August 1, 2026. Summer camp will be held there, with modifications, since no skating will be available.

5. **New Business:**

- **FY27 Budget Highlights**

Helen gave a brief overview of funding sources for Leisure Services: General Fund (tax dollars), Enterprise Fund (two golf courses, most camps, Cornerstone, Veterans ice rink, which collect fees to cover operating costs), and Community Development Block Grants for programs and improvements in low- and moderate-income areas. Westmoor Park has its own budget, and seeks to be self-sustaining through interest earned, program revenues, and fund raising. The Leisure Services Capital Improvement Plan process focuses on four priorities: code violations, safety issues, savings over time (e.g., using post-tension concrete) and improving the quality of life. Budgets for years 1 and 2 are voted on with the annual budget in April, 3-6 are not yet funded, and 7-12 are long range. Pool and park maintenance are not in the Leisure Services operating budget, but are included in the capital budget as Capital Non-Recurring Expenses (CNRE).

- **Spring Programs**

DEEP's free "Fish with Care" program is set for May 5, 4:30-7:30 p.m. at McGovern Pond at Spicebush Swamp Park. Spring sports leagues will open in mid-April. Parking at the University of St. Joseph has been arranged for the Miracle Field and Little League fields, since the parking lot and bridge will be replaced this year.

- **America 250 Activities**

Twenty-five white oak trees will be planted on or about Earth Day at each public school and in selected parks. Study of trees is now part of the second grade STEM curriculum.

- **Celebrate West Hartford**

The 39th annual event will be held June 6 and 7, and Nancy Gierlich encouraged board members to volunteer.

- **Sustainability Projects**

- The Tree Action Group seeks volunteers to inventory trees in town. Tree tours are being offered at Westmoor with sign up through the Rec Desk.
- Free trees will be distributed by the West Hartford Tree Project on April 25 for those who have registered for them.
- The Board agreed to review and discuss status of various sustainability projects, policies and procedures at the May meeting.

- **Kennedy Park Planning**

A consultant has been selected to lead the process, which will commence soon.

6. **Friends of West Hartford Parks Report**

None presented.

7. **Public Comment**—No further comments were received.

Meeting adjourned at 7:14 p.m.

Next Meeting: Monday, May 18, 2026; location Elmwood Community Center.

Minutes submitted by Nancy Gierlich.