

**MEETING MINUTES OF THE
READINGTON RECREATION COMMITTEE
March 27, 2024 7:30pm**

A) Chairperson Emmanuel Bola called the meeting to order at 7:43pm.

B) ATTENDANCE:

Emmanuel Bola – present
Ken Groel - absent
Keith Mitchell - absent
Stephanie Panico - present
Allison Quintard - present
Lisa Routel - present
Carolanne Sherwood - present

TC Liaison Vincent Panico - present

Recreation Director Gabrielle Bolarakis - present
Recreation Assistant Director Dina Fornataro-Healey - present

C) APPROVAL OF MEETING MINUTES –

Ms. Panico motioned to accept the meeting minutes of February 24, 2024. Ms. Routel seconded. All in favor.

D) Community Communications & Correspondence

Open Space Advisory Board Chair and Township Committeeman Juergen Huelsebusch presented a brief statement about the Open Space planned monthly walks and had the trail map posted as a visual aid. He stated that 30 years ago there were no trails and now there are 25 trails with multiple trailheads throughout the township. The monthly walks last 1.5-2 hours and the group would like to extend the walks to more of a 5 mile walk with two different loops to serve people who are beginner to advanced. He would like the Recreation Committee to assist in the walks. Gabrielle Bolarakis asked to have the Pickell Park paved walking path to the map/list when it is revised. The program will start in April, skip May, and come back in June. Both groups will cross-promote the events and programs.

E) OLD BUSINESS

i) Update March Programs – The adult basketball program ended last week, and recreation basketball also ended earlier in March. A four-week mini session of 10 different classes was held in March to bridge the gap between winter and spring.

ii) Spring Program Registration - We are currently registering for 48 spring programs. There are 10 men's softball teams, girls' lacrosse and girls' softball are also starting. A lot of programs will begin at some point in April.

The Why Walk Readington program will begin on April 3 through June 18 as a mostly self-guided program. There are 5 scheduled walks with township employees and officials. There will be weekly incentive drawings and a final grand prize drawn at the Summer Spectacular.

iii) Summer Camps Registration - Summer Rec Camp registration is closed, and we are hiring staff. Summer specialty camps are accepting registration. Summer programs have not yet opened for registration, and we will do so when we close spring registration.

iv) Bylaws Update – Chairman Bola shared the draft Bylaw document and a 26-minute conversation ensued with revisions and wording being discussed. Ms. Panico motioned to accept the document and Ms. Sherwood seconded. All in favor.

v) Goals 2024 – Chairman Bola shared the draft Recreation Committee Mission Statement and Goals. An 18-minute conversation was had with revisions and wording being discussed. At the end of the discussion, the Recreation Committee members present agreed with the document. Chairman Bola said it would be posted to the website.

F) NEW BUSINESS

i) Summer Spectacular – It is scheduled for Tuesday, June 18, 2024, and we are re-instating the volunteer coaching awards being presented at the event. A survey was sent to parents, and we are already receiving responses. We have contacted vendors and ordered giveaways. We have heard from the Environmental Commission, and they want to participate with non-profit tables and also expand the tables so they can hold a Green Fair to get credit for the Sustainable NJ certification. Gabrielle explained that they may not get points because the event's purpose is not green fair focused but can possibly be used as a test case. Gabrielle said they can run a Green Fair at the tree giveaway and Adam Mueller said the tree giveaway is not happening in 2024. Gabrielle said it must be non-profit.

ii) Corporate Sponsorship – A package was put together and sent out pre-COVID. Since then, the package has not been revisited. However, in 2023, the Summer Spectacular had some sponsors: Wegman's and ShopRite. This year Bishop's was added to the list of sponsorship request. As for the formal package, the Committee was asked to review the document and send in any feedback. Gabrielle would like to send the package out in the upcoming months and asked the Committee to assist in the process as there is more buy-in with face-to-face contact.

iii) Open Space Walks Cross Promotion – this item was covered in the earlier portion of the meeting.

iv) Park Facilities Update -The park bathrooms are ready to open on April 1 with possibly the exception of Summer Road. The floors at the Summer Road were refinished and the toilets need to be reinstalled. If DPW can put the toilets back in place all the bathrooms will reopen on April 1. The Recreation office will send out an email and post on social media about the bathrooms. The tennis and pickleball courts are open. The fields are being lined for play. New tennis nets have been ordered but all courts are playable for the time being.

The Cornhuskers Master Plan is being worked on and the Committee will be able to assist in the process. A grant was received in 2023 to do a survey of the property and the wetlands information is being worked upon and once received, we can begin to discuss renovations to the park. In 2018, a public survey was sent out and the feedback will also assist in the process. Part of that survey was the need for a splash pad but due to the amount of sediment in the water a splash pad is not feasible. One component is a four-season facility that can be used for programs and rentals. The playground also needs to be replaced. We are not looking to increase the footprint of the existing park, but we are looking to increase the usage of the park and to alleviate the high use of the other facilities.

G) COMMENTS FROM THE PUBLIC

Jennifer Ziemba asked about the monthly report and to verify the accuracy of the data regarding participation numbers. She stated that Township Committee members said that some of the rec committee members were replaced because of declining participation numbers. She also stated that the bylaws discussed tonight made no provision for committee member attendance requirements and previous documents had attendance requirements. She stated that in January meeting that some of the board turnover was about missed meetings and attendance. Vinny said the committee can make recommendations to the Mayor based upon committee members' absences. Ms. Ziemba said that this should be the case because it was made a large factor in removing previous members. Ms. Ziemba said that during the February meeting it was mentioned that a current member missed two consecutive meetings and a recommendation was made to replace that member and currently there is no language in the current document that address this situation.

Melissa Adams said that as a previous committee member who was not renewed for 2024. She said that the bylaws were not asked for until two weeks later and she and another member were maligned for missing meetings.

Carolanne Sherwood asked any of the previous members present submitted a yearly application to be reappointed. Ms. Adams stated that a letter was sent to committee members from the Township Administrator asking if they would like to be reappointed.

Mr. Bola stated that the person who is being replaced has not attended a meeting in two years. Ms. Bolarakis stated that members informed her prior to missing meetings, and no one was just not showing up.

Ms. Ziemba stated that there is a current member who has not shown up for the last two meetings.

Matt Doherty – It was mentioned that part of the reason the language was being removed about attendance requirement was in conflict with the Mayoral appointment. That is not a conflict. Mr. Panico said he would clarify with the attorney.

Mr. Albanese stated that there are state statutes with language on boards and committees that refer to absenteeism.

Melissa Freese (Hunt) had a question about the volunteer handbook and the harassment policies within the handbook. Mr. Panico said the volunteer handbook is under review at the township committee level. Ms. Freese said that there has been harassment of community members based upon their support of the recreation department and the turnover of the committee. There were things said on her personal Instagram account that were horrible. It was done by someone in this room, and she was able to find out who that person was. She said she would be uncomfortable bringing her children to any recreation programs and events that this person would be present. She has turned the documents over to the police department. She provided Gabrielle with a copy of the documents.

Bill Quinn asked why the volunteer handbook was circulated without being approved. Mr. Panico stated it was circulated and concerns arose after the fact. Mr. Quinn stated that background checks are done for coaches and perhaps there should be for other members.

Melissa Adams stated that she heard the word attorney in this meeting multiple times and in the last 15 years that word was not used in meetings. Mr. Panico stated it is prudent to have the attorney review the bylaws against the ordinance.

Adam Mueller said he is happy that summer programs are full and on their way to being full. He asked if the department is tracking resident vs nonresident. Ms. Bolarakis stated there is no way to track that at the current time. She stated that rentals for fields and facilities are tracked. Mr. Mueller said that is part of performance data and that is the point Ms. Routel made about Readington residents. Mr. Mueller said that his daughter's soccer team being removed from a field by an adult team. Ms. Fornataro-Healey stated the field schedule is sent to the Readington Police Department and should the Recreation Department not be available the police can be called to sort out an issue. Mr. Mueller asked that the coaches be informed.

Mr. Quinn stated that Readington residents may be playing in a travel league that consists of having others who are nonresidents at the parks. He stated there are Green Acres rules.

Betty Ann Forte said the door swings both ways and as participation numbers dropped in girls' softball our residents who wanted to play went to Branchburg to join their league.

Melissa Adams said that the language of community encompasses neighboring towns.

Ms. Routel stated she has seen New York and other states at the park and asked for Readington residents being prioritized.

Mr. Panico stated that at no time is there a prohibition of others in the park.

Matt Doherty said that once a handbook is approved that members be held to that standard and people removed if necessary.

H) COMMENTS FROM THE BOARD

Lisa Routel asked if the annual report is ready and if so, can it be discussed at the next meeting. Ms. Bolarakis said that the December information is on the current report, so it is a four-month review. She said that the Finance Department has not completed the 2023 figures. Mr. Panico stated that other committees may have had their annual reports done as they do not have any budgetary items included.

ADJOURNMENT

Ms. Routel made a motion to adjourn at 9:52pm. Ms. Sherwood seconded. All in favor.

Next Meeting April 24, 2024 at 7:30pm