

**MEETING MINUTES OF THE
READINGTON RECREATION COMMITTEE
January 24, 2024 7:30pm**

Director Gabrielle Bolarakis welcomed everyone at 7:30pm.

A. ELECTION OF OFFICERS

Gabrielle asked for Chairperson nominations. Lisa Routel motioned to nominate Emanuel Bola, seconded by Stephanie Panico. Allison Quintard motioned to nominate herself. There was no second.

A vote was requested on the motion for Emanuel Bola. All in favor.

B. CALL TO ORDER

Mr. Bola **CALLED THE MEETING TO ORDER** at 7:34pm.

C. ATTENDANCE

1. Committee Members: Emanuel Bola, Keith Mitchell, Stephanie Panico, Allison Quintard, Lisa Routel, Carolanne Sherwood
2. Township Officials: Director Gabrielle Bolarakis, Assistant Director Dina Fornataro-Healey

D. APPROVAL OF MEETING MINUTES – November 29, 2023: Tabled until February 28, 2024

E. OLD BUSINESS

1. **Update Holiday programs:** The winners of the Turkey Trail and Holiday Hunt were presented gift certificates to Sorella's Restaurant or the Recreation Department. The Tree Lighting had 150 in attendance. Thanks to the Fire Department for bringing Santa. The 2023 calendar year had 210 programs and 14,551 participants.
2. **Update Travel/Rec Basketball:** The six travel teams are all doing well, and the regular season is almost finished. The Recreation basketball programs are running smoothly at both Holland Brook School and RMS.

F. NEW BUSINESS

1. **Update Winter Programs:** 36 programs resumed this winter. Most started January 6. There are openings in an end-of-winter, four-week programs that begin in March to bridge the gap between winter and spring programs. This also allows people to try programs.
2. **Spring Programs Registration:** 41 programs are open for registration. Some programs like girls' lacrosse and softball have earlier deadlines. So far in January there have been 311 registrations but be advised that summer camp registration was opened earlier this year impacting registration numbers.
3. **Spring Brochure:** The spring brochure was sent out via Constant Contact (email), through the school newsletter, and shared on the Township FB page. Gabrielle mentioned that it will also be sent via direct mail, but the Finance Department has not opened the 2024 books yet to create purchase orders for printing and postage. Mr. Bola mentioned that the links did not work on the Township FB post because the post was created with a screenshot. Gabrielle said she would contact the FB administrator.
4. **Summer Camp Registration:** Registration numbers are up at this point from last year, but Summer Rec Camp was opened earlier this year. Ms. Panico asked about the total number of participants. Gabrielle said 186. Ms. Routel asked if the park (Summer Road Park) will be closed and mentioned that Green Acres says you can only close a park for certain circumstances. Gabrielle said the park can be closed to the public for the program. The program runs for six weeks from 9am-3pm. The park is open before and after those hours and thus, complies with any Green Acres regulations.
5. **Event Updates:** Memorial Day Parade will be held on Monday, May 27, the Summer Spectacular will be held on Tuesday, June 18, the Halloween Event will be held on Saturday, October 26. The date for the Tree Lighting is TBA. Gabrielle said volunteers are needed and to please plan to attend and assist.

G. GOVERNANCE: Ms. Panico stated that there was a backlog of Recreation Committee minutes being posted to the Township webpage. Gabrielle explained that they were sent but not posted and older minutes were taken down to due Daniel's Law. The Township has reconciled those issues. Ms. Panico also mentioned the township code regarding the rec committee and that it hasn't been followed over the past few years,

including the total number of meetings per year. The code lists eight areas of responsibility and over the years things have changed and those eight items may no longer be relevant. The Committee bylaws and the code conflict in a few places and that cannot continue. Ms. Panico recommended that the group or a subcommittee take a look to see what can be changed and make recommendations to the Rec Committee and/or the Township Committee. Gabrielle explained that document was created before she started working here. Mr. Bola said it is township code Chapter 46. Mr. Bola asked if the bylaws should be posted on the website. Gabrielle said she would find out. Ms. Routel asked about annual reports, and who creates them, how they are created and asked for visibility as a committee member would like to see trends, registrations, revenues in real time. Do committee members have access to those financial aspects? Gabrielle explained the committee is advisory and does not have financial oversight, but the items requested are reported upon each month.

H. PUBLIC COMMENT:

Joannie Barrett explained she has lived in Readington 28 years and has volunteered with the Recreation Department for 25 years running field hockey and now pickleball. Ms. Barrett asked the difference between the code and bylaws. Gabrielle and Mr. Bola responded. Ms. Barrett said she has been asked to be on this committee and could not do it as she has other obligations. She said that in recent months the concerns are who is coming to the meetings and the loss of the long-term members. Ms. Barrett asked Ms. Panico if she had attended three meetings and sent a letter of interest. Ms. Panico said that is one of the problematic areas in the bylaws. Ms. Quintard said that she's been on the committee for five years and attended a full year of meetings before being asked to be on the committee. Ms. Routel said that she submitted a letter, and she would present the same questions to the former members as some have missed three meetings in a row. Ms. Sherwood said she has been active with many different groups within the community and also has volunteered for the Recreation Halloween Trunk or Treat and her children enjoy many of the recreation activities. Mr. Mitchell said he plays in the recreation men's basketball league and will be coaching baseball this spring and is also an alternate on the planning board. Ms. Barrett also mentioned that the Recreation Department FB page was taken down without a reason. Having FB available is really important for people to communicate and to have it reinstated. Mr. Bola stated that in November, the previous Rec Committee wrote a memo to the TC to discuss this issue and in his mind, it is still an open item. Mr. Bola corrected himself that was October 2023 and not November, and Ms. Panico asked Gabrielle to put it on the agenda for next month.

Harold Jones stated he lives in Whitehouse Station. He said he wanted to address governance and that the communication problems that have caused financial difficulties are all a function of governance. The township liaison is not present and that is unfortunate as the Rec Committee is an advisory body and has no fiduciary or functional purpose and is only here to advise. Mr. Jones asked if a recommendation was made by the previous committee for the seven people to be appointed this year. Gabrielle stated the Mayor asked for a list of reappointments and that list was provided. Mr. Jones asked if the committee had a chance to review the applications. Gabrielle said no. Mr. Jones asked who reviews those applications. Gabrielle said there was a recommendation for a person who has been attending for two years to become a member. Gabrielle stated our liaison asked for the recommendation. Mr. Jones asked who looks at the applications, to whom they are submitted, and who reviews them. Mr. Jones stated the reflection is on the Township Committee for the poor way they failed to recognize the long-term service of those not reappointed to this committee who deserved better. He said this committee should recommend to the Township Committee to create a plan to recognize volunteer service of 5, 10, 15 etc. years.

John Albanese said he is a member of the Township Committee, and he was the liaison to the Recreation Department for the last 6 years. He was not asked for recommendations and was not consulted at all about placements onto this committee.

Jennifer Ziemba stated she has been a resident for 10 years and she has three children who have participated in programs. She does not know any former or current members of the committee. She thanked the Rec Dept staff, Ms. Quintard for her help, and Mr. Albanese for his service. She stated that she apologized for what has

happened to those involved in the last few weeks and is disappointed in the local leadership and government that this has happened. She thanked Ms. Sherwood for her candor, and she was also asked to be on the committee but declined. Ms. Ziemba stated she would feel terrible if she said yes and thus displacing someone with so much experience. Ms. Ziemba asked Ms. Panico if there is a conflict of interest given that she is related to the Township Committee liaison. Ms. Ziemba said for updating bi-laws and guidelines she recommends to add a conflict-of-interest item and also recommends taking into account former participation as a volunteer and attending meetings as well, and lastly, processes or guidelines about communication as it is embarrassing that long term people were let go and others were appointment without their knowledge.

John Albanese stated that the purpose of the rec committee is to support the Rec Department. He stated he was late in getting to this meeting and is hearing the committee ask for budget, policies, and procedures. He stated that the current group was appointed three weeks ago and there are rec programs going on every night of the week and Saturdays. He asked if anyone had been to a rec program? Mr. Mitchell stated he plays in the rec men's league and Ms. Panico said she is signed up to take a class. Mr. Albanese stated that they should attend a program to see what camp looks like, how rec basketball or art classes runs, etc. Mr. Albanese said to focus on the mechanics of things before focusing on things they have no jurisdiction over.

Melissa Adams and she was one of the people who used to be on the committee. She asked Mr. Bola if he filled out an application last year. He said he did and was also on other Boards/Committees. Ms. Adams stated that it would have been nice if someone asked Ms. Quintard about her experience and allowed her to be the chair because she is the one with the most experience.

Ms. Barrett said that there is a lawsuit out there and after the township committee declined the settlement the Rec Department seems to be a target. This committee is a volunteer group and now that she knows that everyone submitted applications but asked who the application went to. Ms. Routel said she submitted it online and everyone on the board stated the same. Ms. Barrett said the town is going to learn a lesson as taxes will go up due to lawsuits.

Bill Quinn stated he was on the committee for a few years. He stated he attended meetings for a few years before being appointed. He said he attended every meeting last year, but it is unfair to use the COVID years against former members.

Melissa Frese said she has been a resident for 12 years. Ms. Frese stated this meeting started with jumping into discussion about bi-laws and how things need to be changed. Ms. Frese asked Ms. Panico if she has coached, volunteered, has been a part of anything. Ms. Panico stated she has not coached but has been on the open space hikes, attended the summer spectacular, and is in the parks almost every day. Mr. Bola stated he had not participated in rec programs but there was a spot open. He stated that his son was getting of the age to participate.

David Lutzsky stated that now the committee has heard how people were appointed and others were not reappointed would anyone on the committee consider stepping down to allow those who were not reappointed the opportunity to continue to serve?

Melissa Adams stated that it is nice to have new blood on the committee and not to step down but to dig in and help the department. Ms. Adams said that no one knew what was happening and that made it bad. Ms. Adams said she thanked everyone who said nice things.

Carol Hample stated that they have similar bylaws for HCBMX in Flemington. She said they are valuable and helpful to understanding what you are getting into and then for the current committee to get to know you. She recommends that the FB Page goes back as it is a different audience and to make a recommendation to support the Readington News.

Carolanne Sherwood thanked all the volunteers for their time. She said she hoped that they can move forward and work together because it is all for the kids.

I. ADJOURNMENT

1. Ms. Panico made a **MOTION TO ADJOURN** the meeting. **SECONDED** by Ms. Routel. **VOTE: YES:** All present.
2. The meeting adjourned at 8:56pm.

Next meeting of the Recreation Committee: February 28, 2024 at 7:30pm

Prepared and respectfully submitted by: Dina Fornataro-Healey, Assistant Director of Recreation