

New Haven Board of Park Commissioners

Meeting No. 1482

Commission Conference Meeting
720 Edgewood Ave
New Haven, CT 06515

November 15, 2023

H9iPresent: President Belowsky, Carl Babb, Harvey Feinberg

Absent: Commissioners Kenya Adams, Ernie Santiago, Emily Sigman, Hector Torres

Staff: Deputy Director Stephen Hladun, Director Gwen Williams, Katherine Jacobs, Tariq Dasent, Anastasia Mixsell, Felicia Shashinka, William Dixon

- I. **Minutes of Meetings #1481: No Quorum**
- II. **Treasurer's Report: The Treasury report was sent for September, but financial information was not available for October. No Quorum.**

Ann St Park Signage – Katherine Jacobs

The neighbors of Ann St Park (located in the Hill) are very involved in monitoring what goes on in the park. They have requested a playground rule sign that is visually the same as the standard rule sign but includes two rules that are not standard city-wide.

- 1.) **No dogs at all due to people letting their dogs off-leash in the fenced-in playground area.**
- 2.) **All children under 10 must be accompanied by an adult. Currently, they intervene when a child is not accompanied by an adult.**

Katherine Jacobs stated that there are no other signs like this throughout the city but over time park signs have had a variety of different languages which has set a precedence for variation in signs depending on the park and the park friends/groups.

Commission Babb asked if there is a particular reason for them taking this stance against children under 10 not entering without an adult. Jacobs stated she believes it is because they are concerned about the safety of the children and to let parents know it is not okay for children to play alone on the playground. Commissioner Babb would like this to be implemented in all parks throughout the city then because it would prevent people from suing them if a child is hurt. Commission Babb is in favor of the change of rules because it reduces liability. However, he is not comfortable with it only being in one park and not others.

Commissioner Carl Babb pointed out this may create problems with people who are accustomed to letting their dogs off the leash at the playground. Jacobs stated that other park signs refer to the city ordinance regarding dogs in the park. Commissioner Babb pointed out you cannot eliminate the dogs in the park, but you can eliminate them from the playground because kids are playing there to which Jacobs stated this park is so small that it is just a playground. Jacobs will send the requested sign and the existing signs to the commissioners for review.
Tabled.

Fairmont Park Playscape Improvements – Katherine Jacobs

The neighborhood has requested a play area in the park. The location of the park is Fair Haven Heights. The play area will be enclosed by a 4-foot fence and include a playscape, splash pad, and a swing set designed for the ages of 5-12. The splash pad is small enough that a mechanical controller can be used, which is helpful because an electrical connection does not need to be

installed. A small water service will need to be installed but it is built into the cost. Funding was secured through a state grant. The grant is 100K, but improvements are estimated to be more than that so the remaining cost will be paid for through ARPA funds
There is an active friends' group in the area who have requested the runoff from the splash pad be sent into a rain garden they will maintain rather than go into a sewer.

The location of the playground was selected due to a desire for accessibility and visibility. There is no desire to remove trees and this area is treeless and grassy. Also, there is an existing asphalt path that runs along the street and the neighborhood would like to have the asphalt path replaced with a concrete sidewalk which meets city standards. This will keep the play area ADA compliant.

Tree Division – Anastasia Mixsell

Anastasia Mixsell is the Tree System Coordinator and Tree Warden for the Department of Parks & Public Works. Mixsell has been in private tree care for nearly 20 years and has been with the city for about 2.5 years. Mixsell received a grant through the U.S. Forest Service to create an urban forest management plan.

An urban forest management plan gives a strategic view to equitable and sustainable urban forestry for a city. An RFP will be issued to hire a consultant who specializes in creating these for municipalities. Input from stakeholders and community members will be used to provide resources and recommendations for the path forward.

Some things that could come out of this information are:

- Canopy development
 - Management plan for forested natural areas
 - Policy and Ordinance updates
 - Programming currently in place such as pruning cycles
- Getting urban forestry environmental education into the schools

This is a five-year grant totaling \$360,000 which will mostly be spent in the first year. Mixsell has allocated money from the grant to hire a publicist to help with a website and branding to push the word out. The remaining funds will cover professional development for the tree division. There is annual reporting. The Arbor Day Foundation will be the manager of the grant which will cut down on the number of forms Mixsell has to fill out. Urban Forestry has never been given a grant opportunity. This was historical funding (1.5 billion) from the Inflation Reduction Act. They have funded over 300 projects nationwide, of which New Haven received 2. The other project was awarded in combination with URI to plant more trees. Equipment cannot be purchased with this grant!

URI is the lead applicant on the grant awarded to the city for 2.6 million to be used over the course of 5 years to double tree planting from 500 trees to 1,000 trees a year. It will also grind all the stumps in EJ neighborhoods (Fair Haven, the Hill, the Annex, Dwight, Dixwell, and Newhallville). EJ (Environmental Justice) neighborhoods are communities that have been identified by the census block as not receiving the same environmental benefits as other neighborhoods based on different criteria. The area being addressed will include school yards, parks, and streets.

There is a huge probability that there are not enough full-time staff to water and care for the trees as the number increases however Mixsell is hoping that seasonal help will fill in the gaps.

I. New Business: NONE

II. Old Business: NONE

III. Director's Report: Parks & Public Works:

- The parks division has received (3) zero-turn mowers.
- Leaf season is in full swing. Crews are using the leaf vacuum and box to collect leaves.
- Winter season prep is underway.
- The Fleet division will acquire additional vehicles for the department.
- Carpenter started October 30th.
- A caretaker has resigned but the position will be posted.
- The plumber has completed the winterization of the public drinking fountains, splash pads, and restrooms.
- Caretakers completed East Shore soccer field grass restoration projects.
- Field grooming training has been completed. (synthetic turf)
- Just completed the Lighthouse playground demo.
- New Haven Green prep is underway – The Christmas Tree lighting will be Thursday, November 30, 2023.
- WeLoveU Foundation will be planting trees at English Mall the Sunday after Thanksgiving.

IV. Director's Report: Youth & Recreation

- Season of Giving will be tomorrow. Planning on giving away 1,000 turkeys.
- On Saturday, December 3 the annual Friends of Rudolph event will take place in conjunction with Southern Connecticut State University and other partners.
- Trunk or Treat event saw about 3,000 people at the event.
- Commissioners are welcome to attend the events and Director Williams looks forward to seeing them there.
- Programming at park facilities is in full swing.
- Hired another Recreation Specialist.
- Still looking to fill the supervisor for the Park Ranger position. The process will begin from scratch with the hopes of having the position filled by February 2024.
- Posted and closed on the ARPA positions (4 Programming persons) They will specifically focus on scheduling programming.
- Started the Youth@Work program this past Monday. There are approximately 48 young people who will be working for the school year.
- Maintenance facility has been completed at Lighthouse. Williams hopes the Lighthouse project will finally be completed so she can have a great facility for her camps.
- Staff from both departments are doing their best to upkeep the properties, residents also need to be mindful and treat the spaces with care.
- Looking for one facility to house the entire Youth & Recreation department. Hopeful to move into a building within 2 years.
- There is a contractor interested in installing the throwing cage at Bowen Field. Possible spring completion.

Meeting Adjourned: 7:04 pm

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

Next Meeting: January 17, 2024

Location: 720 Edgewood Ave, New Haven, CT 06515