

**RECREATION GOVERNANCE STUDY COMMITTEE  
MINUTES OF MEETING  
April 25, 2016**

**MEMBERS PRESENT:** Michael Smith, Christine Packard, Raj Chawla, Lori Houghton, Theresa Fletcher, Kim Maiberger, Erika Baldasaro, Max Levy, Betzi Bilodeau.

**MEMBERS ABSENT:** Jason DiRosa

**ADMINISTRATION:** Brad Luck, EJRP; Aly Vile, Essex Parks & Rec.

**OTHERS PRESENT:** Andy Watts, Irene Wrenner, Rose Drost, Adriane Martin, Collin Flanders, Adam Sollace, Wendy Johnson, Keely Schell, Pat Scheidel, Abby Friedman, Marla Durham, Bridget Myers, George Tyler, Anne Marie Dennis, Randall Forguites, Martha DiMaggio.

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**1. CALL TO ORDER and INTRODUCTIONS**

Michael Smith called the meeting to order at 6:36 PM. Committee members were introduced.

**2. APPROVAL OF MINUTES**

*April 5, 2016*

**MOTION by Lori Houghton, SECOND by Max Levy, to approve the minutes of April 5, 2016 as presented. VOTING: unanimous (9-0); motion carried.**

**3. REVIEW MEETING AGREEMENTS**

There were no questions or comments on the previously agreed to meeting protocol that includes:

- one speaker at a time
- arrive to the meeting on time
- start the meeting on time
- share the floor
- be prepared
- be respectful of others' opinions
- end the meeting on time
- allow time for public comment.

**4. REVIEW COMMITTEE GOALS**

There were no questions or comments on the meeting goals of:

- Ensuring the current quality of rec services is maintained and enhanced.
- Exploring all avenues and entities before making a recommendation.
- Actively engaging the community in the process and making information easily accessible so the public is informed.
- Being cognizant of affordability and ensuring the funding structure is fiscally responsible and will be supported by the public.
- Reaching a consensus on a final recommendation by mid-June.

**5. DISCUSS HANDLING PUBLIC COMMENTS**

There was agreement the meeting agenda will include the opportunity for the public to comment on items not on the agenda, and to allow three to five minutes per person for public comment.

**6. EXPLORE GOVERNANCE MODELS**

*Union Municipal District & Interlocal Contracts*

Abby Friedman, VLCT Municipal Assistance Center, reviewed state statute for the union municipal district and interlocal contract governance models (24VSA121Subchapters 3&4). The statutes outline formation, authorization, finances, organization, flexibilities, and pro/cons. The following was noted/discussed:

- Examples of union municipal districts include CCTA and Winooski Valley Park District (WVPD). An example of interlocal contracts is police services.
- In essence the Recreation Governance Study Committee will do a report and hold a public vote. The Attorney General approves the governance model before ratification by the legislature. Having the legislature ratify the model is recommended, but not required.
- The agreement for the union municipal district lays out how the organization will operate. The agreement should be clear with all items spelled out including whether the governing board is elected or appointed, number of members, length of terms, and such. An attorney should assist in drafting the agreement. A finance expert should help lay out financial items.
- A union municipal district has a budget voted by the voters, can make assessments or go through the municipality to borrow. With interlocal contracts the budget is under the authority of the town or village. CCTA and WVPD, for example, are funded through town budgets, but can assess taxes.

*Non-Profit 501(C)(3)*

Abby Friedman reviewed the “non-profit” model. EJRP could become a non-profit or there could be consolidation of the two entities into a new non-profit organization. The following was noted:

- One challenge as a non-profit is borrowing funds. Of consideration is the village is presently paying off a bond and there is need for rec facilities that will need bonding. Accountability and oversight with borrowing are also considerations.
- To become a non-profit involves paying the application fee of up to \$125 and securing tax exempt status from the IRS (501(C)(3) with attorney fees up to \$1200. Heart & Soul is a 501(C)(3) organization as an example.

*Unified School District*

Martha Heath and Marla Durham briefed the committee on the RED study committee’s recommendation that the rec program standalone from the unified school district to allow for more flexibility and because the rec programs from Essex and Westford would have to be included so there is equal opportunity for all. The following was noted/discussed:

- According to Attorney Paul O’Brien it is possible to have the rec program under the unified school district provided there is buy-in from all three communities and the program serves all three communities.

- There is a time constraint to determine a governance model and there may not be time to confirm buy-in by all three municipalities to have the rec program under the unified school district. Residents of Westford may not want to pay for rec services that are so far away from them.
- Further clarification is needed if one of the towns is not interested in having the rec program under the unified school district.

There was discussion of the childcare program through the rec department if the rec program does not stay with the school district. The following was noted:

- To maintain the current village rec program of blended licensed childcare and extended after school supervision would require an MOU so staff sharing can continue (rec and school).
- The town childcare program uses high school students with contracted instructors.
- The school board would want equal programs so it is hoped the new rec program would provide after school childcare in all the schools.
- Clarification is needed on how the childcare program would work in terms of access to the schools and school staff if the rec program is a separate entity. For example, access to Park Street School is a big issue. The rec program provides preschool for 35 families.
- Having the Prudential Committee move rec before June 30, 2017 would be easier than an MOU for the ACE program.

There was discussion of existing bonds on rec buildings and the pool as well as the school. The following was noted:

- Any existing debt of the individual school district becomes debt of the unified school district. Any contracts or binding agreements in effect as of July 1, 2017 must be honored.
- The voters who voted for a bond are responsible for payment.
- If parks and rec move away from the school district the legality of moving ownership of facilities and debt to a new entity must be reviewed.
- The Prudential Committee signed the bond for the rec department. There is a portion of debt and revenue as of June 30, 2017 that will move to the unified school district and shared.
- The issue of ownership versus governance needs to be resolved.

#### *Village Governance of EJRP*

George Tyler said the village can assume administrative control of the village rec department. The goal would be to maintain the department as is. The issue of the budget being separate or incorporated into the general fund would have to be settled. Presently the village and town are on a trajectory of shared services especially administrative services to eliminate duplicate delivery systems and to have a simpler administrative model, but operationally separate entities. Having EJRP under the village would simplify the debt question.

Pat Scheidel reviewed the cost to town and village taxpayers with separate rec departments versus combined operations, highlighting the following:

- Town rec department cost is \$81 for town taxpayers for a budget of \$1,364,944 with an estimated tax rate of \$0.0289.
- Village rec department cost is \$271 for village taxpayers for a budget of \$2,352,223 with an estimated tax rate of \$0.0680.
- Combined department cost is \$164 per town and village taxpayer for a budget of \$3,717,167 and an estimated tax rate of \$0.0585.
- Issues to consider with combining the programs include adding to a program that is at capacity and possibly delineating geographic areas and programs (i.e. Hiawatha students would attend programs at Hiawatha School).
- Regardless of the governance model chosen there will be cost shifts.

There was mention of town residents paying decreased fees if the rec programs are combined and possible impact on the budget. Brad Luck explained non-resident fees are put into an enhancement fund for scholarships and projects. The operating budget is not impacted.

#### **7. GOVERNANCE MODELS TO PURSUE/ELIMINATE**

The committee did a survey using Survey Monkey and eliminated the non-profit governance model from further consideration. All the other models will be further explored. Results of the survey will be forwarded to all the members along with issues to consider with the various governance models.

#### **8. PUBLIC ENGAGEMENT AND COMMUNICATION**

##### *RED Committee Experience*

Keely Schell reviewed the process followed by the Red Committee to engage the public in the unified school district issue. Types of activity included:

- Doing a survey to raise awareness of the discussion taking place.
- Tuning into issues the public may be discussing.
- Publishing information in the local newspaper.
- Using Front Porch Forum to broadcast information.
- Publishing answers to questions by the public.
- Hosting booths or tables at local events to provide information to the public.
- Holding multiple public forums.

Ms. Schell stressed the committee always spoke in a unified voice and approved any information prior to publication.

##### *Rec Governance Study Committee Survey*

The committee reviewed the survey questions on the new governance model and suggested adding demographic questions. There is opportunity to opt out of any of the survey questions.

##### *Video*

The committee viewed the informational video explaining the purpose and goals of the governance committee.

##### *Engagement Strategies*

Suggested methods of engagement include:

- Front Porch Forum
- Facebook (village, town, neighborhoods)
- Essex Reporter
- Rec Dept. email distribution list
- School Friday folders
- School announcements
- Information flyers

**9. FUTURE AGENDA ITEMS**

Next meeting is May 4, 2016 at 6:30 PM. Agenda items include:

- Further discussion of governance models and winnowing the list
- Distributing the survey and compiling/discussing results

**10. ADJOURNMENT**

With no further business and without objection the meeting was adjourned at 8:55 PM.

*RScty: MERiordan*