

**RECREATION GOVERNANCE STUDY COMMITTEE  
MINUTES OF MEETING  
May 11, 2016**

**MEMBERS PRESENT:** Raj Chawla, Christine Packard, Lori Houghton, Kim Maiberger, Erika Baldasaro, Max Levy, Betzi Bilodeau, Jason DiRosa.  
**MEMBERS ABSENT:** Michael Smith, Theresa Fletcher.  
**ADMINISTRATION:** Brad Luck, EJRP; Ally Vile, Essex Parks & Rec.  
**OTHERS PRESENT:** Andy Watts, Adam Sollace, Bridget Myers, and Alex Gaydos [via Skype].

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**1. CALL TO ORDER and INTRODUCTIONS**

In the absence of Michael Smith, Raj Chawla called the meeting to order at 6:33 PM. Introductions were done.

**2. PUBLIC TO BE HEARD**

There were no comments from the public.

**3. APPROVAL OF MINUTES**

*May 4, 2016*

**MOTION by Lori Houghton, SECOND by Erika Baldasaro, to approve the minutes of May 4, 2016 with correction of the date for the approval of the minutes to April 25, 2016. VOTING: unanimous (8-0); motion carried.**

**4. REVIEW MEETING AGREEMENTS & COMMITTEE GOALS**

The meeting agreements and committee goals were reviewed. There were no questions or comments

**5. COMMUNITY SURVEY RESULTS**

It was noted the survey was out April 27<sup>th</sup> through May 9<sup>th</sup>. The video was also released. The survey was promoted through the rec departments and the webpages as well as social media. There were 386 respondents. Alex Gaydos compiled the answers to the survey questions into 13 themes.

Ms. Gaydos reported:

- Spread through all age groups were the themes of quality of programs, accessibility and affordability.
- Equity was the chief theme (finance) then accessibility (no change in accessibility to services - people appreciate having baseball camps at Maple Street Park and Essex Town, for example). Those who want change are hesitant of the implications, but recognize change is coming and want to make the change successfully.
- The local newspaper followed by Front Porch Forum and Facebook then the websites and emails were the most used ways people sought information.
- Most of the respondents were:

- In the 25-64 age group
- village and town residents
- income range of \$66,000 to \$90,000 plus
- have at least two children
- are users of the parks and rec programs

Brad Luck suggested the responses to each governance model can be evaluated to determine which model is best. Jason DiRosa mentioned calculating the cost savings with a consolidated rec organizational structure. Max Levy suggested a phased approach could be taken and efficiencies identified. Ally Vile noted the survey results indicated people are fearful of losing programs. There are 20,000 people to serve. Combining the departments will make the largest rec department in the state. Job descriptions can be streamlined and the focus can be on equity, but there are all the facilities and programs to maintain so a cut in the number of positions is unlikely. Brad Luck stated the rec departments do not have a preference of model, but just want to know where they will be so they can get to work. Details on the cost structure will come later based on the model chosen. With the municipal model there will not be legal staff, HR, finance director services. Under the school district these services are available. The rec departments pay for these services.

There was agreement the interest of the school district in having the rec departments needs to be confirmed. Brad Luck noted Martha Heath, Unified Union School District Chairperson, invited two committee members to update the District at the next meeting (May 17, 2016). Erika Baldasaro and Jason DiRosa volunteered to attend the meeting to give an update and get some direction on the position of the school district.

The draft Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) between the Essex Westford Educational Community Unified Union School District and the Parks & Recreation Union Municipal District was reviewed. In sum, points highlighted in the MOU include:

- The rec department has priority after the school to school facilities and schools have priority after the rec department to rec facilities.
- The rec department can disseminate information through the schools.
- The rec department will provide school aged licensed childcare and have access to space in the school. Similar opportunity will be provide to each school in the district if feasible.
- People working in the afterschool rec programs are also employed by the school as is occurring today (i.e. shared personnel).
- The rec department can use Park Street School for preschool space.
- The rec board and Unified Union School District Board will hold a joint meeting at least once a year.
- The MOU agreement has a three year term with automatic renewal for one year. If one party wants out of the agreement the contract exists for two more years.

Jason DiRosa asked if all the children can be accommodated in the childcare program. Adam Sollace noted Summit Street School and Hiawatha School are at capacity due to space limits. Fleming School and Maple Street Park are close to capacity. Wait lists are

anticipated at all locations. Ally Vile noted space is an issue with the town's childcare program as well. The town rec program uses the Y for childcare services and offers classes. There are time gaps between sessions. Parents can coordinate classes for their children. There are some classes with wait lists. Raj Chawla asked about the cost between the two programs. Adam Sollace said the Y charges \$86/week per child. EJRP charged \$72.50/week per child. The cost is competitive with the private sector. Brad Luck stated the rec program provides essential services for the community. All programs are self-sustained. Tax money pays for buildings and utilities.

Ally Vile spoke about park maintenance. The town rec department maintains fields on school property in the town at the expense of the rec department though the school covered some costs for the fields on Foster Road. Jason DiRosa stated conversation is needed on who is responsible for field maintenance and cost.

Andy Watts observed the MOU is essentially the inter-local contract model that was eliminated from the list of choices. Multiple inter-local contracts will be needed as a union municipal district. Raj Chawla said he did not like the inter-local contract model because he wanted a more permanent overall entity. Christine Packard added the public has nothing to do with inter-local contracts which could be an advantage or disadvantage. Jason DiRosa commented having agreements in place is good regardless of the model chosen.

#### **6. EXPLORE/ASSESS GOVERNANCE MODELS**

There was agreement the Union Municipal District is the prevailing option. Existing examples of a union municipal district include the Winooski Valley Park District and Lake Iroquois Park District. Under this model the village rec budget and the town rec budget would be consolidated into one budget. Taxpayer funded portion through the Essex Junction school district as a separate article would now levy taxes and the town rec budget would be eliminated from the town budget and appear as a separate line item on the tax bill.

Further information that is needed on the Union Municipal District model includes:

- Timeline to form the district and types of agreements needed to provide the services people receive today.
- Property and debt transfer.
- Does the school district accept the MOU with the union municipal district and all the provisions including shared staff or does the school board prefer rec to be under the school.
- Does Westford have the option to join or must all three communities participate.
- Estimate of the tax rate needed to support the Union Municipal District.
- Can there be separate tax rates with two separate entities under one Union Municipal District and then proceed with a slow, methodical merging (phased approach).
- Once the umbrella of a Union Municipal District is created there is opportunity to bring other entities in, such as libraries, farmers markets, senior centers.

- If the union is not done in the next two years should the departments remain independent.

The Village Municipality and Town Municipality models are on hold pending reaction by the Unified School District to the two prevailing options (Union Municipal District and WEC Unified Union School District).

**7. PUBLIC ENGAGEMENT AND COMMUNICATION**

Press releases giving a synopsis of the committee meetings continue to be published.

**8. FUTURE AGENDA ITEMS**

Next meeting is June 1, 2016 at 6:30 PM. Brad Luck will Doodle additional meeting dates in May and June.

**9. ADJOURNMENT**

With no further business and without objection the meeting was adjourned at 8:35 PM.

*RScty: MERiordan*