

*MINUTES SUBJECT TO CORRECTION BY THE RECREATION GOVERNANCE COMMITTEE. CHANGES, IF ANY, WILL BE RECORDED IN THE MINUTES OF THE NEXT MEETING OF THE COMMITTEE.

**RECREATION GOVERNANCE STUDY COMMITTEE
MINUTES OF MEETING
JUNE 1, 2016**

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

MEMBERS ABSENT: Theresa Fletcher

ADMINISTRATION: Brad Luck, EJRP; Ally Vile, Essex Parks & Recreation

OTHERS PRESENT: Adam Sollace, George Tyler, Andrew Watts, Randy Forguites, Paul O'Brian.

1. CALL TO ORDER

Michael Smith called the meeting to order at 6:35 PM.

2. INTRODUCTIONS

Committee members introduced themselves.

3. PUBLIC TO BE HEARD

Mr. Randy Forguites wondered, if Recreation became part of the Essex Westford Educational Community Unified Union School District (UUSD), would the Senior Center be part of the UUSD as well? Ms. Houghton clarified that it would not be possible for the Senior Center to be a part of the school district and that nothing would change for the Senior Center if the Recreation Departments became part of the UUSD.

4. APPROVAL OF MINUTES

MOTION by Max Levy, SECOND by Lori Houghton, to approve the minutes of May 11, 2016 as presented. VOTING: unanimous (8-0); motion carried.

5. REVIEW MEETING AGREEMENTS

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

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.

Mr. Raj Chawla arrived to the meeting at 6:40 p.m. having given notice that he would be late.

6. REVIEW COMMITTEE GOALS

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

Ensuring the current quality of recreation 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.

7. UNIFIED UNION PRESENTATION RECAP – JASON DIROSA & ERIKA BALDASAR

Mr. DiRosa and Ms. Baldasaro, as well as other members of the Recreation Governance Committee (RGC), attended the last UUSD, during which the option of putting the Recreation Departments as part of the UUSD was discussed. Mr. DiRosa explained that his impression was that the UUSD was open to discussing recreation and receiving information from the EGC. He recalled that, at some point, there was some discussion on only having EJRP as part of the UUSD. Overall, he felt that the UUSD Board was not ready to accept any proposal at this time. However, it wasn't strongly opposed to the idea either. Ms. Baldasaro's impression was that the UUSD was focused on education as its mission and were less enthusiastic about the inclusion of the Recreation Departments. She sensed that the UUSD Board's mindset was more in support of the Recreation Departments forming their own district, but that it was happy to continue the relationships that currently exist between the schools and Recreation Departments. The UUSD Board also expressed support for the mission that school space belongs to the taxpayers. Ms. Maiberger, who also attended the meeting, found that the timelines for the UUSD and the RGS were very different. Other RGC members who were in attendance also heard the UUSD Board talk about guaranteeing school space to the Recreation Departments. Ms. Bilodeau expressed concern about having only EJRP under the UUSD and about the different timelines for the UUSD and the RSG. She saw many head nods at the meeting from UUSD Board members agreeing that it would be difficult to have the Recreation Departments as part of the UUSD.

Mr. Luck reported that he and Ms. Vile met with Ms. Judy DeNova, CCSU Superintendent, Mr. Paul O'Brian, Legal Support/Director of Operations for CCSU and Mr. Chris Leopold, Legal Counsel for CCSU and discussed how it would be a long uphill battle for the Recreation Departments to become part of the UUSD. They also discussed that a better road to take would be for the Recreation Departments to form their own district. A letter of intent or Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) was also suggested as a way to set up an agreement between the UUSD and the Recreation Departments to secure the relationship between the two regarding the use of community buildings. However, because the new Recreation entity doesn't exist yet, a formal agreement is premature. As a result, a draft resolution was written and will be presented to the UUSD at its June 7th meeting. The resolution would be in place of a formal agreement, which would occur later.

Mr. Luck circulated a draft of the Resolution of the UUSD, which recognized the long-standing relationship between the municipal recreation entities and the schools and that the UUSD would be "committed to a spirit of cooperation, the continuation and development of relationships, and

working in the best interests of the students and community with the municipal recreation entities (existing and any to-be formed) that serve the communities in our school district.”

Mr. O'Brian explained that, since the new Recreation entity didn't exist yet in order to have a formal agreement, a resolution would be appropriate for the UUSD to express a continued belief, mission and spirit of agreement with the Recreation Departments. Mr. DiRosa asked for further clarification about the benefit of having a resolution from the UUSD. Mr. Luck explained that the signing of the resolution commits to the relationship between the Recreation Departments and the UUSD. He agreed that the resolution has no “teeth”, but that it was public acknowledgement and was a little more specific about the UUSD's intent to support the Recreation Departments. Ms. Vile added that it is difficult to have a more formal agreement because there is no formed entity yet for the Recreation Departments. Mr Luck explained that, according to Mr. Leopold, when the Union Municipal District (UMD) is formed by August, 2016, the UUSD would be able to understand the entity and could continue the conversation about an MOU between both entities. Ms. Houghton added that, ultimately, a decision has to be reached about Recreation before an agreement can occur between the Recreation Departments and the UUSD. Mr. Levy commented that the RGC needs to discuss a back-up plan if the vote for a UMD fails. Mr. DiRosa raised the issue of sharing staff between the UUSD and the UMD. Mr. Luck confirmed that the UMD would contract staff out to the UUSD.

With regard to a UMD, members discussed tax equalization and the best way to present this option to the voters and emphasize the long-term benefit to the community. Mr. Luck pointed out that the PC was meeting next week to discuss an agreement with the Trustees and the use of Park Street School. The focus of the discussion is to maintain and sustain current programs. One member wondered about making Park Street School a new UMD central office, but it was pointed out that, since it was a school building, the decision would need to go to the voters. Another option, however, would be to work out a 4 or 5 year agreement for the space. Mr. Watts asked if having only the preschool under the UUSD was an option. Mr. Luck felt that scenario would dismantle the programming and change what exists today. Mr. Chawla raised the value of maintaining services. Mr. Luck added that the UUSD hasn't expressed any interest in adding another program like a full-time preschool to its plate.

June 6 Prudential Committee Meeting

There will be a Prudential Committee (PC) meeting on June 6th at 6:00 p.m. in the Essex High School Library. Topics on the Agenda will include the PC's agreement with the Trustees and use of Park Street School.

June 7 Unified Union Meeting

There will be a UUSD meeting on June 7th at 6:30 p.m. in the cafeteria at Essex High School. Members of the RGC were encouraged to attend as the UUSD Board would be discussing the Resolution from the RGC.

Outstanding questions or issues related to Unified union.

Mr. Levy thought that a draft MOU could be written now even though it wouldn't be signed yet. Members and staff discussed this suggestion, and it was decided to wait until a recreation entity was formed. However, it was discussed that the intent is to have a formal agreement with the

UUSD in the future and that the RGC should remain involved and keep communication on-going with the UUSD in between the resolution and a formal agreement. It was determined that, in the scenario of a favorable vote for the UMD in November, the UMD does not need approval from the Legislature to exist and operate.

8. EXPLORE AND ASSESS GOVERNANCE MODELS

- A.1 Village Municipality (currently on hold)
- B. 1 Town municipality (currently on hold)
- B. 3. Union Municipal District.
- B. 4. EWEC Unified Union School District.

Mr. Smith introduced this issue and felt that the discussion thus far tonight seems to be in favor of the UMD. However, if members haven't reached that conclusion, then he would like to hear from them. Members suggested taking a straw poll to see if everyone was in favor of the UMD. A straw poll was conducted and one person from the Committee was not confident in supporting the UMD at this time. Ms. Bilodeau was very concerned about getting the UMD passed in the Town and with "selling" it because it would mean a larger increase in Town taxes. As a result, she questioned the benefits to Town taxpayers for merging with the EJRP at this time. Members and staff deliberated on this issue extensively. The following benefits for merging and becoming a UMD were identified and discussed.

- ⑩ efficiencies that could be realized later through merger
- ⑩ tax equity
- ⑩ non-resident fees for the Town
- ⑩ one-stop shopping for both communities
- ⑩ consistent programming across the community
- ⑩ combined brochure and programming that is united
- ⑩ shared staff, maintenance and equipment
- ⑩ another step in bringing the community together

Members were reminded that the public chose this direction of slowly merging and not everybody in the community is going to be in favor, but that the Heart and Soul process identified the combining of services as a value in the community. Additionally, members were reminded that the role of the RGC was to explain why it came up with a recommendation as opposed to "selling" the recommendation to the public. Members discussed how the UMD had the potential of becoming a cultural district to include the senior center or even the libraries. Ms. Vile talked about how employees in both recreation departments are thrown together for similar programming, somewhat uncomfortably, and then they go their separate ways again after an event. She talked about how many people in the community are confused and go to the wrong office to sign up for events and programs and to pay for after school care. A UMD would be an opportunity to have joint oversight and control over the budget, programming and decision-making as one district.

Ms. Houghton wanted to know if Ms. Bilodeau preferred to keep the Recreation Departments with their respective municipalities. She noted that eventually, with the current gradual merging of services between the communities, the Recreation Departments will merge. She asked whether Ms. Bilodeau was in favor of the RGC merging the departments or waiting and having the municipalities merge the departments. Ms. Bilodeau felt that the discussion has been Junction-centric, with a lot of talk about keeping the EJRP preschool programs the same, and

she wanted to make sure that the recreation needs of the Town were included in this discussion. She asked about the role of the Senior Center and how it is funded. Ms. Vile explained the history and origin of the Senior Center and that the Center is housed in the Village and receives insurance coverage through the Trustees' insurance policy. At the same time, the Town pays for the part-time Senior Center Coordinator and for the Senior Van in the Town General Budget.

Another straw poll was taken at this time, and the RGC was unanimously in favor of pursuing a UMD for the Recreation Departments. Mr. Luck circulated a Draft process and timeline for the forming of a UMD, which had been reviewed by the Town Attorney. Mr. Luck read through the timeline with the RGC members and pointed out the attached relevant sections from the State Statutes. Mr. DiRosa felt that a plan for the organizational structure of the UMD was missing in the timeline. Mr. Luck agreed with the need for that discussion, but that it was one of the many transitional issues and actions that would take place after July 1, 2017. Major areas proposed to be discussed in July of 2016 included, but were not limited to, the purpose, composition, election, terms and budget vote for the UMD. Ms. Baldasaro asked about press releases during this process. Mr. Luck felt that communication to the public would look similar to the Regional Education District process which included holding public forums, submitting information to the Essex Reporter, etc. He stated that if the current members stay involved with the process after the recommendation to the Trustees and Selectboard, then they would also be responsible for writing the MOU with the UUSD. Otherwise, another approach would be to have a RSG II, which would begin work in August. This would be similar to the approach taken by the Police Facility Committees when making a recommendation regarding a new police facility for the community.

Is there any further information or answer to questions that members would like in order to make an informed recommendation on June 8th?

None were identified.

9. FUTURE AGENDA ITEMS & NEXT STEPS

- RGC members will take a formal vote on a UMD recommendation at their next meeting on June 8th, which will be after the PC meeting on June 6th.
- Ms. Baldasaro will put out another press release for tonight's meeting.

10. BRAINSTORM FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS (FAQ'S) TO DATE

- If the vote fails, what is the back up plan?

11. COMMUNICATING WITH THE PUBLIC

- Ms. Baldasaro will send out a press release tomorrow about tonight's meeting.

12. ADJOURNMENT

With no further business and without objection the meeting was adjourned at 8:23 PM.

Respectfully submitted,

Saramichelle Stultz