

**JOINT MEETING OF THE TOWN COUNCIL AND THE RECREATION BOARD
WEDNESDAY EVENING - JUNE 10, 2009**

PRESENT FOR THE TOWN COUNCIL: Cordeiro and Barboza

PRESENT FOR THE RECREATION BOARD: Quinn, Mascena, Davis, Horne, Pacheco, Antonevich, Campbell.

ALSO PRESENT: Recreation Director Burke

ABSENT (Council): Marshall, Parella and Herreshoff

ABSENT (Recreation): DaSilva, Rensehausen

Documents Received:

- (Recreation Director Burke) re Talking Points (not dated)
- (Recreation Director Burke) re Attendance Response Sheet

The Council and Recreation Board met in special joint session on Wednesday evening, June 10, 2009 in the Town Hall, Council Chambers beginning at 7:10 o'clock PM, presiding for the Council was Council Vice-chairman Cordeiro and presiding for the Recreation Board was Chairman Quinn.

Council Vice-chairman Cordeiro noted the absence of a Council quorum and explained that the Council would be legally unable to conduct business in consideration of same. It was agreed that the Council would adjourn its meeting and that members present would remain as guests of the Recreation Board so as to review the matter of parking at the Town Beach.

Barboza/Cordeiro - Voted unanimously to
adjourn the Council's part of this
meeting at 7:11 o'clock PM.

Councilman Cordeiro noted that the purpose of this evening's assembly was to exchange ideas relative to the controversy surrounding the enforcement of the parking fees at the Town Beach as specified in the Town Code.

Councilman Cordeiro also suggested that the group consider a time limit on the discussion so as to expect adjournment of the Recreation Board at 8:00 o'clock PM.

Councilman Cordeiro also explained that it was his intention to bring any suggestions that might be presented this evening by any of the various parties to the attention of the Council.

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Mr. Quinn reviewed the parking situation at the Town Beach, noting that parking is available in three parking lots including the paved parking area adjoining the Romano Building which requires a beach pass; the newly constructed gravel-paved lot to the east of the Town property and the so-called horse field across the street from same. Mr. Quinn noted that there are no fees charged to park in the gravel and horse field lots.

Mr. Quinn asked that Recreation Director Burke might explain the Recreation Department's position regarding this matter and further noted that the current policy is essentially an enforcement of a long-standing provision of the Town Code.

Recreation Director Burke informed those present that the Town Code does indeed contain the fees as noted and that these are intended to be collected at the Town Beach between Memorial and Labor Days. Recreation Director Burke noted that the Town Code specifies that everyone should be charged an entrance fee in order to enter the property via motor vehicle and that the past practice has been to charge only beach-goers.

Recreation Director Burke further explained that the policy was amended to comply with the Town Code when the new gravel parking lot was completed since there were few options for those wishing to park nearby prior to the availability of this lot.

Councilman Cordeiro asked to know if the so-called horse field was Town property with Recreation Director Burke responding that the horse field is leased from the State.

Councilman Cordeiro also expressed concern that out-of-towners are monopolizing the facilities at Colt State Park and that he was in favor of the State's instituting of a fee in order to limit use by non-residents.

Recreation Director Burke again noted that the Town Code is specific in that there will be a charge for parking in the paved lot and that the no-charge parking lots are convenient via a short walk.

Recreation Director Burke also noted that the season pass for residents is a modest \$10 and that dropping-off children/elderly persons, at the driveway near the soccer fields, is allowed without paying a fee.

JoAnn Morra, a former member of the Recreation Board, asked to know if that exception to the rule will be policed with

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Recreation Director Burke responding that that the beach booth personnel have been instructed to admit those persons displaying a state handicap placard and to provide persons 62 years of age and older with parking stickers at no charge.

Recreation Director Burke also noted that East Bay Fast Pitch and other groups using the property for athletics have not complained about the enforcement of the parking fee rule. He also explained that the Recreation Department does not benefit directly from the rule as imposed as these fees are deposited to the General Fund. He also stated that he considered producing revenues a responsibility of the Recreation Department since the Town is in "crisis."

Recreation Director Burke also explained that Joe Diaz of the Rhode Island Department of Environmental Management informs him that since the Town has accepted Federal and State funds for the development of the beach/sports complex area, it cannot charge Town residents less than 50% of what it may charge out of town persons.

Recreation Director Burke also stated that the fees are imposed only for parking in the paved lot and not for the use of the beach.

He also explained that the enforcement of the fee ordinance was also predicated upon safety considerations since the parking lot was occasionally misused with persons parking on the grass and that he expected the new gravel parking area will alleviate some of these safety concerns.

Councilman Cordeiro asked to know if the Police Department monitors the parking area with Recreation Director Burke responding that his office provides an annual letter to the Chief of Police regarding same.

Councilman Cordeiro asked to know if the police are also monitoring the new parking lot with Recreation Director Burke responding affirmatively. He also noted that the Town has invested a great deal of money into the maintenance of its parks.

Councilman Cordeiro asked to know why the Recreation Board has stepped up enforcement of the parking fees at this time with Recreation Director Burke responding that the availability of the new no-fee parking area precipitated the change.

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Recreation Director Burke also stated that the Recreation Board is considering the establishment of a seasonal "sports sticker" at a fee of approximately \$20 but that these discussions are only preliminary.

He also explained that the Bristol Youth Soccer Association has been an "outstanding" partner with the Recreation Department and that the Recreation Department/Board did not enforce its parking sticker policy to 'target' this particular organization.

Stu Gaskell, President of the Bristol Youth Soccer Association (BYSA), introduced his associates Ed DaCosta, Ron Augustus, and Scott Brum.

Mr. Gaskell explained that he did not ask parents of the soccer program participants to attend this meeting in order to expedite the process. He also stated that he had received many complaints from parents concerning the parking fees.

Mr. Gaskell stated that he was concerned that he initially learned of the Recreation Department's plan to institute the policy at the Recreation Board meeting of May 12 this being seven (7) weeks since the commencement of the BYSA's spring program he expressed further concern that he might not have known about the change in policy had he not been in attendance at the Board meeting.

Mr. Gaskell quoted from a letter provided to the Editor of the Bristol Phoenix in which Recreation Director Burke indicated that the reason for the change in fee enforcement was based upon "tough economic times," etc.

Councilman Barboza asked to know if BYSA paid the Town for use of the facilities with Recreation Director Burke responding that the group did not pay to use the facilities.

Mr. Gaskell asked to know why the Board was enforcing the fees at this juncture since most of those wishing to enter the parking area are not participants in the program but are rather those who simply wish to see their children and grandchildren play soccer for one hour and then leave the premises.

He also expressed concern that the rules allowing drop-offs and senior citizen admission were not in place when the controversy began and that he was uncertain if the same will apply to the fall soccer program.

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Mr. Gaskell also expressed concern that there was no consideration for those coming from out of town as participants or seniors despite the fact that these out of town players are representing Bristol.

Mr. Gaskell stated that the Town of Warren does not include boys and that all of the participants coming from the Kickemuit Middle School participate in Bristol Youth Soccer. He also explained that the Town of Warren has six (6) teams and Bristol Youth Soccer has twenty-two (22).

Mr. Gaskell noted that the Spring program always finished in the month of June and that this year was no different. He asked that the program participants/families might be given a fee waiver.

Mr. Gaskell stated that the program includes those persons of limited financial means and that its policy is to have everyone who wishes to participate the opportunity to do so. He also stated that the adults serving as coaches, etc., are doing so as selfless volunteers and that many of these do not have children in the program.

Mr. Gaskell shared that the program serves 235 competitive players and 101 "micro" recreational players. He reviewed additional participant statistics for the information of those present.

Mr. Gaskell also noted that he measured the distance from the new parking lot to the playing field and found this distance to be 1010 feet from "point to point" representing a five to six minute walk. He speculated that this walk may be difficult for some of those who wish to attend the games.

Mr. Gaskell also relayed that during the previous week's program, there were 58 cars in the parking lot and 48 of these were related to Bristol Youth Soccer participants. He also noted that the subject parking lot holds 220-225 cars.

He expressed concern that the new "overflow" parking lot contained approximately 70 cars and many were not parked correctly and that the area was not controlled.

Mr. Gaskell asked to know how many parking stickers were sold thus far this year as compared to last year's total of 100 with Recreation Director Burke responding that there have been 185 passes sold thus far.

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Mr. Augustus informed the Board that he has been a Bristol resident for twenty-five (25) years and associated with Bristol Youth Soccer for twenty (20) years, holding nearly every position within the organization. He also informed those present that he was embarrassed in regard to the parking fees charged since he travels to many other locations for soccer and the parking is provided at these other places for free.

Mr. Augustus also informed those present that he was of the opinion that the often stated "Bristol fields are the envy of every other town" was an overstatement since he was aware that other towns have better fields with clean restrooms and better management. He noted that these are in the towns of Johnston and Middletown. He also claimed that the Bristol Youth Soccer volunteers help maintain the local fields including paying for one half of the cost of the underground sprinkler system; the funds for same raised through candy sales.

Mr. Augustus noted that the "horse field" is a "disgrace" and that referee's have determined that this field is unsafe for play. He also noted that he volunteered to water the horse field and found the Recreation Department's watering equipment to be in disrepair. He also explained that he borrowed watering equipment in order to help maintain the field and that this equipment was "locked-up" by Recreation personnel and that he later refused to volunteer due to the poor treatment he received.

Mr. Augustus speculated that "no one is doing their homework" and also that it is not difficult to determine who is entering into the parking area. He also explained that the parking attendant should be able to establish that a soccer family is attempting entrance if there are children in uniform in the vehicle.

Mr. Augustus informed those present that he was "passionate" about the parking issue because he is embarrassed since other towns do not charge for parking near their soccer fields.

Ms. Pacheco stated that she believed the responsibility of the Recreation Board was to enforce the Town Code and further suggested that the Code might be changed if it is determined to be inappropriate.

Ms. Pacheco further noted that since the area is multi-purpose, it might be considered unique where the soccer fields in other towns might have parking areas solely for the use of the soccer

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participants. She also explained that a "sports parking pass" might be a good compromise.

Ms. Pacheco stated that it may be advisable to provide a waiver for the weeks prior to Labor Day for the fall season with Mr. Gaskell explaining that he had already received a waiver from Recreation Director Burke for the fall season.

Recreation Director Burke noted that it would be difficult to place the onus to determine who would and would not be allowed free admission to the parking area. He also explained that the Town would not have spent upwards of \$40,000 on a new parking lot if the current parking lot was sufficient for all of the various activities taking place at the recreation area.

Ms. Campbell suggested that the DEM regulations might not matter if the public understood that the paid parking pass was a "beach parking pass" and not simply a parking pass with Recreation Director Burke responding that the pass already states that it is a "beach pass" but that it is understood that this pass is for parking since it is not possible to charge for use of the beach.

Ms. Morra expressed concern that the new parking area is not delineated and also a clear path from the parking area to the recreation area is also not marked. She also explained that the existing paths created by those using the parking lot contain the hazards of "rocks, roots and hills."

Ms. Morra also explained that some who attend and participate in events at the recreation area park along Melrose Road in order to avoid paying for the beach pass. She expressed concern that the heavy influx of parked vehicles along that stretch of road may result in an unsafe neighborhood, inaccessible by ambulance and fire apparatus.

Councilman Cordeiro stated that he was of the opinion that the fees derived from the Recreation Department should stay with that department and not returned to the General Fund.

He also stated that he would favor a \$1 sports parking pass for non-residents and that residents would pay nothing for the pass.

Mr. Quinn stated that the rules and fees for parking are not new and that the Recreation Department was simply enforcing existing rules.

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Ed DaCosta informed those present that he considered the leagues to be "stake holders" and expressed concern that these stake holders were not informed when the policy to collect parking fees was changed by the Recreation Department. He also noted that those out-of-town participants in the Bristol Youth Soccer program are "playing for Bristol" and should be allowed the same courtesy as that which is allowed Bristol residents. Mr. DaCosta also stated that he was "embarrassed" by the parking fees imposed and also that the policy "gives us a bad-name." Mr. DaCosta also stated that the Bristol facilities are not "premiere."

Ms. Davis speculated that the funds for those who cannot afford to pay for the parking pass might become available through the Town's Human Services office. She noted that in the past, funds from her office when she was Human Services Director, were made available to those who could not afford membership in the now-defunct Bristol YMCA.

Ms. Davis suggested that anyone who cannot afford the cost of participation in the soccer program due to the parking fee might contact Human Services Director Ed Carusi.

Ms. Davis also noted that the cost of the parking pass was minimal as compared to the cost of attending the Providence Bruins youth program at the Dunkin Donuts Center in Providence. Ms. Davis shared that the cost of parking near the Dunkin Donuts Center is much higher than the cost of the annual Bristol Beach parking pass.

Ms. Davis asked to know who paid for the new \$40,000 parking lot with Mr. Burke responding that the cost of same was borne by the Town.

Ms. Mascena stated that overall communication was lacking in this instance.

Councilman Cordeiro stated that he would review this matter with the Town Council.

Councilman Barboza noted that this meeting appeared to resolve the concern for charging for drop-offs, that the Recreation Board might consider the establishment of sports and non-resident parking passes and also that the new gravel parking lot was in need of better walking paths.

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Councilman Barboza also stated that all involved should consider the cost to maintain the facilities at the Town Beach and that the funds derived from the use of these facilities defray the cost of maintenance. He also stated that he attended a wedding at a Middletown Beach and was required to pay \$20 for a thirty minute stay.

Councilman Barboza also noted that those parking along Melrose Road might receive parking citations or be towed if the vehicles earlier described are parked illegally.

Councilman Barboza also stated that he was of the opinion that the newly paved free parking lot was not inordinately far from the play areas and that most persons should be able to use it and walk the short distance. He also stated that the Town would not have planned, built, and paid for the new parking lot if there was no need for same.

Councilman Barboza also stated that the \$10 charge for a parking pass was minimal and that it was not likely a burden for anyone and that the complaints were "much ado about nothing."

Councilman Cordeiro noted that he was of the opinion that another workshop regarding this matter might be needed and that this should be held when the entire Council might be present. He also stated his plan, as Recreation Liaison, to meet with Recreation Director Burke and the Recreation Board.

Mr. Augustus asked to know the overall amount of the gate receipts received for beach parking with Mr. Burke responding that the receipts totaled \$24,059 for last season and that this year's receipts are running approximately 10% higher.

There being no further business, upon a motion by Ms. Davis, seconded by Ms. Mascena and voted unanimously, Chairman Quinn declared this meeting to be adjourned at 8:42 o'clock PM.

Louis P. Cirillo, CMC, Secretary Pro-Tempore