

**Town of New London
Recreation Commission Meeting Minutes
December 9, 2020**

Recreation Commission Members Present: Justin Garzia, Chairman; Carol Kinzler; Lyndsay Harkins; Janet Kidder
Others present: Nancy Rollins and John Cannon, Selectmen; Kim Hallquist, Town Administrator; Joe Cardillo, Budget Committee; Peter Hoglund and Colin Beasley, Buildings & Facilities Committee; Pete Smith, Andy Rose, Kate Bidlack, and Chelsea Williams, Outing Club

The meeting was called to order at 11am by Justin Garzia, Chair. Roll call attendance was taken of Recreation Commission members.

Discussion regarding Outing Club/Recreation Department collaboration and existing Outing Club proposal.

Justin announced that he would like to begin by having Commission members ask questions of the Outing Club (OC) and asked that Carol Kinzler begin the discussion. Carol asked Pete Smith, OC President, if there are any duplicative programs between the Outing Club and the town, Pete responded that there are none now.

Carol thanked Pete for submitting materials in support of their funding request and noted that she found them helpful. She questioned the proposed OC Director position; Pete stated that a director would be a higher-level position than what they currently have now. Carol asked about the OC's operating losses as noted in their funding application. Pete responded this past year was challenging due to COVID; Carol pointed out that the OC suffered a loss in the two years reported on the form. Pete noted that they do need additional funds, they cannot proceed at current levels.

The summer day camp was discussed. Carol noted the importance of affordable day camp opportunities for people with children. She asked what the subsidy rate for New London residents is for and how it would work. Pete noted that the plans have not been finalized as to how the subsidy would be allocated to New London residents.

There was a discussion of pre-school and after-after school programs. Pete noted that the programs are included in the Appendix of the material recently submitted. Carol asked for information on the scholarships for the town's day camp so she could get an idea of the need; Justin asked that those questions be saved for the discussion after the OC discussion.

Lyndsay Harkins noted that she did not have any questions for the OC, as she has said and asked all her questions at prior meetings.

Janet Kidder noted that she asked Pete questions at a recent Selectmen's meeting, so she had no further questions.

Justin Garzia informed all that he met with Pete over the past few months to discuss the issue of a town/OC collaboration. He finds the presentation extremely helpful to understand the OC better, noting that the Commission has been struggling to have a grasp of the details of the OC, and the presentation helps to gain an understanding.

Justin asked, for New London residents, will be the subsidy be need based; Pete noted that it will be automatic for all New London residents. Justin noted that if the OC subsidizes their programs for New London residents, what about sports not conducted by the OC (hockey, football, etc.) that are offered by other groups. He noted that other sports' groups are not subsidized, and he felt that it was important to be equitable. Pete noted that the OC would be opened to discussing offering organizational help to those other sports groups, if it fits in their mission – anything that is sports related. Justin noted that equity of treatment is important. Pete noted that the groups would have to go through the allocation process for funding. Justin asked if the OC Board has discussed having a town Recreation Commission member, or other town official, on their board. Pete noted that they would be opened to discussing that, although he suggested that it would not be necessary to ensure good communication between the two groups, pointing out that board membership is a big time commitment.

Justin asked what the OC plans are for more space, do they intend to build at Woodward Park. Pete responded that having a facility there would be great, and it is his dream to have a facility built there; the OC will explore the possibility if the financing could be determined. He noted that if another organization wanted to use some space in a new facility that would be a conversation he would have. Justin asked if other towns would be asked for funding for the OC; Pete stated that they would be asking the other towns for funding; they are a bit behind the eight ball at this point, but they do intend to ask other towns for funds.

With regard to the summer camp, Justin noted that traditionally it runs at a profit, although the time spent by the Recreation Director is not included nor is the cost of the town's rec van. He asked about the summer camp and the OC plans to run it, would they request the use of the rec van. Pete noted that there are a lot of factors to consider on that and they would need the data on the town's summer rec program before they could say for sure how they would proceed. Justin asked if it was the intention of the OC to run the town's Bob Andrews Memorial Ice Skating Rink. Pete noted that they are considering re-opening the rink at Woodward Park as there is a lot of excitement around hockey there, probably not this winter but next winter. He noted that they could take over the town rink, they would just need to know what the town would want. Carol asked if their rink would be used by fee – Pete noted that it likely would not, it would be a way for the OC to give back to the community. He explained that they would like to keep the park open to the community, but they need to be mindful of vandalism; they recently had someone camping on the property who had to be told to leave. He noted that hockey leagues would be charged, but not the open rink for skaters to use. He explained that in

the coming weeks they would be announcing partnerships with New London Hospital for health and wellness programing.

Justin asked about the financial information provided to the town that included operating expenses and revenues, what is included in those numbers; Pete noted that the numbers were compiled before he arrived, so he would get Justin in touch with Sandi to get the answers to his questions. Justin explained that he met with Bob Bowers of the town's Buildings & Facilities Committee and staff from the SAU about potential renovation that could be made to allow the town to use space there for its Recreation Department; Bob would also like to meet with representatives of the OC to discuss the facilities; Pete noted that he would be happy to meet to discuss the facilities.

Carol asked if the town helps to pay for the salary of the OC Executive Director, would there be a dotted line relationship in terms of reporting to the Town Administrator, or how is the OC envisioning the relationship. Pete said that there would be no reporting to the town because other organizations that receive funding don't do that; additionally, for continuity of their HR operations they would prefer to keep it with the OC; the Executive Director would report directly to the Executive Committee.

Kim Hallquist noted that she is not familiar with how the OC is organized and noted that at a previous meeting Pete suggested that there is a Board of 9 or 10 people, she asked for clarification. Pete noted that there is an Executive Board of 5 people and there are four subcommittees of 2-3 members each; Chelsea Williams confirmed that there are 9 total and Sumner Woodward as a lifetime member makes 10. Pete noted that they are currently restructuring so numbers and committees are changing as new people are coming on as terms expire; the annual meeting is in January. Chelsea noted that the information is up to date on the OC website.

Kim asked if Pete could select 5 or 6 OC programs and supply the town with the total number of participants for each program and also how many of the participants were New London residents, similar to the way the summer program numbers were compiled and sent to the OC. This information, together with the town's program numbers, would give all a better picture of the programming needs and participation numbers between the two organizations. Pete noted that information was provided already in the presentation materials that stated 49% of participants are New London residents. Kim agreed but noted that she is interested in looking at a few programs individually. Pete asked how this information will be used. Kim noted that she will be compiling information on both organization's programming related to numbers of people enrolling and the percentage of New London people to demonstrate what programs look like for each organization. Pete noted that he would need to look at how much time it would take to compile the information as he is very protective of his volunteer's time and Sandi's time who works tirelessly in the office, noting that he feels that they have already answered a ton of questions on programming and participation to the Selectmen and feels they are beyond the stage of discussing individual programming and numbers of participants. Kim

stressed that she is not trying to make unnecessary work for the OC but needs the information to complete an analysis for the Selectmen and Budget Committee. Pete observed that that he understood and has no problem supplying the requested information but stressed that if it required a lot of leg work to gather the information then he would not be able to provide it, noting that he did not understand how the information was pertinent to the discussion going forward as they have presented their plan already. Lyndsay clarified the request by suggesting as an example, British Soccer Camp in July is about 200 kids and that her perception is that half to 1/3 are New London kids; she stressed that the programs are not small batches – they have 100-120 kids each. Pete agreed and pointed out that the New London summer programs had less than 30% of New London residents while the OC programs are well over 50%, or double the participating of the summer program.

Kim noted that she understood that compiling this information can be tedious and explained that when public funds are being considered there must be an understanding of how the funds will be used to ensure they are for a proper public purpose. Once she has the necessary information, she can give her recommendation to the Selectmen and Budget Committee. Pete asked if the Selectmen asked that an analysis be prepared; Kim noted that they do not have to ask, it is part of the job of a Town Administrator to provide it. Pete noted that he was curious if any Selectman specifically asked for the analysis; Nancy Rollins, Selectman, noted that she did not ask for an analysis and she feels that she is satisfied with all of the information she has received to date, noting that this is not different from any other non-profit that comes before the Selectmen for funding, noting that she has never seen an analysis on CASA or any other group.

Justin noted that a large percentage of the costs in the budget are for the beaches, which are New London residents only, so while the summer camps may have smaller percentage of New London resident participation, when the beaches are taken into account the percentage will change dramatically. He pointed out that about \$10,000 was spent on the beaches in purchases of picnic tables and other equipment, much of the funding coming from the revolving fund. Justin suggested that using the summer camp to compare local participation with OC program does not present an accurate picture of how the town's allocation of funds are going to New London residents versus residents of other towns.

Nancy Rollins asked what the next steps are. Justin noted that he will need to think more about what he has heard and asked what the next steps are for the Selectmen. Nancy noted that she has enough information from the OC but she wants to hear more from the Recreation Commission as to how they can work with the OC, defining the relationship with the OC that is in the best interests of the New London residents and the surrounding towns.

Joe Cardillo noted that the \$95,000 has already been placed before the Selectmen and it will go before the Budget Committee in January 6th. He felt that there should be consideration by the Commission if the Recreation Department budget will need to be reduced, maybe not by the entire \$95,000 as approved by the Selectmen, but by some number; given that the OC will be

doing some of the programming that was done by the town. Joe noted that he felt more information is needed from the Commission. Justin noted that he does not see a huge savings in the Recreation Department budget and questioned whether they will be able to hire a part-time director to manage the beaches. He noted that even with that, he did not feel the savings would be anywhere near \$95,000. Justin noted that the Commission needs more clarity if they are to think about shrinking the budget. Lyndsay noted that her thought is not to reduce the amount appropriated but to reallocate it. She questioned if the beaches could be managed with half the budget. Justin, referring to the budget, noted that the waterfront staff alone is about \$60,000 – he asked if the expectation is to have them cut the budget by \$95,000. Joe noted that it was not his intention to suggest that the budget be cut by \$95,000, if it could be cut by \$30,000 - \$50,000 he would be amazed. He suggested that it is possible to hire a beach manager, there are names that come to his mind of potential candidates for the job, but it is up to the Commission to come up with what level of staffing is needed. Nancy agreed and noted that it is up to the Commission to come up with a budget for a well-run, professional beach program that has swimming and waterfront activities that will build up the revolving fund, and the Commission needs to focus in on what it needs for finances to accomplish this.

Pete Smith noted that he had to leave the meeting for another meeting, thanking all for including the OC, and stated that he would be in touch with Justin to discuss the matter more. The Outing Club representatives left the meeting.

John Cannon noted that he agreed with comments that this is not an either-or proposition on the budget, he would like to see some options.

Justin restated his understating of what is being asked of the Commission: to come up with a revised budget for FY2022 based on what they feel is needed given what the OC proposal says they will be taking over. Nancy agreed, noting a revised budget and a revised plan with details of what the Recreation Department will do. Carol added that she assumes that they should also include what they will give up; Nancy noted that it's a given that if the plan includes giving up the summer camp that the OC picks it up. Nancy noted that she has been waiting for a community survey to be completed to better understand what residents want in recreational programming.

Justin asked if they would like the Commission to have some oversight of the services provided by the OC, noting that he did not think that the quarterly meetings suggested in the OC presentation would be enough. Nancy noted that in her opinion, she would like to hear whatever the Commission feels is necessary to make the programming successful. Joe agreed that quarterly meetings with the OC would not be enough and suggested that the monthly meetings would be better. Justin noted that earlier in the meeting there was a suggestion that OC board membership might be advisable. He noted that oversight of the transition by the Recreation Commission will be difficult. Joe noted that as a New London resident he feels that as at a bare minimum, board representation by the Commission is needed. Colin Beasley, Buildings & Facilities Committee, urged the Commission that for the first year, not to let the

control issue become a hang-up and interfere with the partnership. He also suggested that along with Commission membership on the OC Board, there should also be OC representation on the Commission.

Justin noted that the Commission will meet with the TA to go through the budget line-by-line to see how much funding is needed and to go over the list of activities again to make sure the Commission agrees with what programming will remain with the Recreation Department. Carol noted that they would also have to consider whether hiring for 6 months is viable, otherwise there will be no saving. Justin noted that in the first-year transition, they will need to see if they can find someone who will work in the spring to prepare for the season and then full-time in the summer. Lyndsay noted that she feels that there will be people who will want the job and this will be an improvement over what has been done in the past.

Justin asked the whether the entire Commission would like to meet on the budget or do they want just the Chair to meet with Kim to discuss budget options. Lyndsay noted that she would like to join in to discuss the options and bring it to the full Commission. Carol and Janet agreed.

For discussion next time, Justin asked members to consider what are the thoughts of the Commission on the rec van since the revolving fund likely will not be available for maintenance. Carol noted that the needs of COA should be considered as well.

Lyndsay asked about the hourly rate for the rink maintenance person. Kim noted that the hourly rate is in the \$17.00 per hour range. Lyndsay will have the person she feels may be interested contact Kim directly. Kim noted that getting someone to manage the rink is important as the rink is very popular once the ice freezes.

Justin asked if there are any other questions on the OC plan that needs discussion. Carol asked if the long-term solvency of the OC is an issue that should be considered, noting that she was alarmed to see the OC has an operating loss for the past two years. Kim noted that financial questions are part of the "social services funding request forms" because financial stability is something town's consider in committing public funds. Justin noted that this will be important point to consider when deciding which programs they want to remain with the Recreation Department as if a program has to be discontinued for a year due to insolvency, would the Commission be asking if they should have kept that program, but otherwise it is outside the scope of what he felt the Commission is responsible for or what they should spend time on unless asked to do so. Kim agreed, noting that the issue of financial stability is more for the Selectmen and Budget Committee to consider.

Carol noted that the \$33,250 in New London subsidy puzzles her as to why the town would want to subsize programs when it doesn't now. She noted that there is a camp scholarship fund. Kim noted that when you consider that the town pays for a full-time Recreation Director and does not charge for all programs, and ones that are charged do not include the expenses related to the Recreation Director salary, there is a town subsidy currently. Carol agreed but pointed out that the town would continue to pay for a Recreation Director so the OC would be

an additional subsidy. Justin noted that there are other sports like hockey and football that are 100% self-funded, why would basketball and soccer be subsidized. He noted that the Commission has not been asked to comment on it but he may as a private citizen. Lyndsay suggested that they will have trouble progressing if they keep saying what-if and examining each and every item in minute detail, suggesting that if hockey and football want to ask for funding, they should. Justin noted that \$33,000 is not an insignificant amount of money but noted that it is not a topic the Commission has been asked to address.

Update on discussions with other organizations in the area (Center for the Arts, COA, etc.)

This item will be discussed during the Commission's review of the Budget. Carol noted that she spoke with Kelley Keith of COA and will be prepared to report on the discussion.

Update on Bob Andrews Rink

Justin noted that Bob Harrington would like to put up the rink when the ground is frozen, which is consistent with advice of rink manufacturers to encourage the most complete freezing of the ice. Bob has had a few emergencies come up but the rink is high on his radar for set-up. Justin will follow-up with Bob.

Morris trail winter maintenance

Peter Hamel has offered to groom the trails; he needs to contact Kim to get access to the snowmobile.

Snowshoe and Skate "rentals"

Justin noted that he does not think the OC has room to store the skates and hand them out. There was a discussion of how the skates could be made available; Justin suggested that in the past Scott would leave a laundry basket with skates for people to take. It was noted that leaving the building open for people to access without staff present is not an option. Lyndsay pointed to the challenges of cleanliness of the skates and suggested that not providing skates is an option for this year. Justin suggested that perhaps they could set up a few days where people could come in and sign out skates for the entire winter season. The Commission agreed to allow the Conservation Commission to have control of the snowshoes since they have events scheduled. This topic will be revisited by the Commission at a later date.

Update on space at SAU building

Justin noted that he toured the SAU with Bob Bowers and SAU officials. He sees issues with access to the bathrooms, there are pillars in the room that are load bearing, it is a brick building

so it won't be easy to put in permanent changes. The SAU wants a different access point so no one is walking in their area when they are open. Justin suggested that the cost for doing the work would be more than a placing a basic building in Woodward Park. The SAU does not appear to be an appropriate space for the Recreation Department.

Additional Commissioner

Lyndsay Harkins suggested that Drew Drummond would be a good addition; he is on the OC Board. She has some other ideas and will check on and get back to the Commission on them. Carol suggested that getting someone who has a family that uses the beaches would be helpful. Kim will provide the names of people who commented on the beaches during the time when the beaches were closed during COVID.

The meeting was adjourned at 12:31 PM

Respectfully submitted,

Kimberly Hallquist
Town Administrator