

**TOWN OF NEW LONDON
RECREATION COMMISSION MEETING MINUTES
DECEMBER 22, 2020**

PRESENT VIA ZOOM: Recreation Commission Members: Justin Garzia, Carol Kinzler, Lyndsay Harkins, Janet Kidder

Also present: Kim Hallquist, Town Administrator; John Raby, Budget Committee member

Recreation Commission Chair Justin Garzia opened the meeting at 10:00am and called the roll.

The purpose of the meeting was for the discussion of the future structure of the Recreation Department and whether a full-time director is needed.

Addressing an issue raised at past meetings about the difficulty in hiring a part-time director, Lyndsay noted that she had spoken with a member of the Colby-Sawyer College staff and was informed that there are several individuals that would be available to work in either full or part-time capacity.

Lyndsay asked if there was a delineation between her position on the Recreation Commission and a Budget Committee member in terms of discussing positions as people often ask her questions. It was determined that Lyndsay does not have a conflict of interest participating in the planning of the Recreation Department, even though she is also on the Budget Committee. Kim noted that the two positions are independent, Lyndsay can express a position at the Budget Committee that differs from what the majority of the Commission has decided, understanding that it is important not to represent one board at another board meeting without authority of that board he/she is representing. It was noted that the Budget Committee will likely assume she is better informed on recreation matters given her membership on the Commission.

Justin suggested that to better understand whether a full or part-time Recreation Director is needed, the group should review the list of activities and who will take responsibility. Oversight of beaches, facilities, and equipment is seen as solely a Town responsibility. The afterschool programs is seen as an Outing Club (OC), if not, then the Town. Justin feels that if the OC receives funding from the town, they should do after school programming given their facilities. After school programming is seen as very important so if the OC does not do it, the town must pick it up.

Justin noted that in his mind, if OC is given funding and the Commission goes to a part-time director, then some programs must be taken over by the OC. Lyndsay noted that she felt that the OC should be given a list of expectations of programming and activities that the Commission expects them to provide. Carol agreed and noted that this is somewhat transactional, and a list of expectations should be given to the OC that should be followed,

understanding that flexibility would be allowed. The Commission would list the activities that they deem important and want included and the OC can add other activities as well. Justin asked if the OC would need to be given access to Whipple Hall to conduct some of the programming – he suggested that the Selectmen be made aware that the OC will likely need the space if a robust after school program is to be established, whether it is in Whipple or elsewhere. It was noted that currently, nonprofits can use the facility up to four times per month without charge, pointing out that the Selectmen could allow more as necessary. Additionally, the Rec Department, as a town department, can use the facility whenever it needs it. Kim noted that the Building and Facilities Committee is currently looking at the rec space, and Whipple, for police department uses, so it may not be available for rec programming in the future. It was noted that there is a need for space for whichever group does after-school programming. It was noted that it is unclear if the OC has stated where they would conduct the after-school program, although it was mentioned that use of the Green by the OC might be needed. Lyndsay noted that she did not want to step on the toes of the Building & Facilities Committee; Justin stressed that it is important for the Commission should be clear in stating that space is an issue for after school programming. Janet noted that it is important that if the OC is given funding and takes over programs, they must find the space to provide the programming.

Justin noted that he can not make a recommendation on whether the town needs a full-time Recreation Director if he does not know what the OC will be doing and what the town will be doing.

Lyndsay suggested that the OC appropriation, whether it is \$95,000 or some other number, be included in the Rec Department budget and overseen by the Rec Department. Justin noted that it has been his understanding that the OC is making its presentation to the Selectmen and Budget Committee, not to the Commission so that is not what is expected to this point. There was a discussion of whether the appropriation should be included in the Rec Budget and not a separate line somewhere else in the budget. Carol noted that having the funding within the Rec Department budget would allow for more of a partnership between the two groups, as many in town seem to yearn for, instead of gutting the Rec Department budget and just handing the money over to the OC. It was noted that this way would be more responsible in terms of oversight for the taxpayers because the Commission would have a better idea of how the money is being spent and if the spending is appropriate. This will also allow the town to better understand how things are going with recreational programming.

The Commission acknowledged that if the town does not do something, there may not be an OC in the future, and no one wants to see this happen, so some support is needed. The question is how much support will be needed and how is oversight accomplished so that appropriate programming is offered, and the town's money is spent appropriately. Carol questioned whether a combined position of Director would be helpful; Lyndsay noted that it is a two-person job so she doubted it would work. The committee noted that the OC does not appear to be receptive to this idea, or to having their Director report to the town, either to the Town Administrator or the town's Rec Director.

The Commission discussed the budget, noting the Selectmen have approved the Rec Department budget and the \$95,000 to the OC. Lyndsay suggested that the Commission make a recommendation to the Budget Committee on the amount that should be given to the OC. Justin noted that the rec budget is pretty slim, and he does not see how it can be cut further, if they plan to hire full-time because of the benefits that must be included. Carol noted that they have not discussed the year-round part-time option.

The Commission discussed whether a full-time director is needed if the town does not have the summer camp anymore. It was agreed that managing the beaches requires full-time person during the summer months. Justin noted that he disagreed with having two full-time directors, one for the OC and one for the town unless additional programming is envisioned. Lyndsay stated that she feels that sporting and after school programs should be OC and beaches and community events and trips should be the town and that two full-time people is appropriate. Lyndsay questioned the amount of funding for the part-time position, suggesting that it should be more like \$45,000 not the \$27,280 listed on the worksheet as provided by Kim. Justin questioned if the position could be paid by salary instead of hourly, without getting benefits.

There was a discussion of whether the Commission could change their budget as approved by the Selectmen. Janet noted that it could, and that at then end of the Budget Committee process, the Selectmen and Budget Committee will get together and discuss any differences. Justin suggested that they continue support of the \$181,000 budget request, they will pursue a part-time director and then if the OC does not pick-up programs, the Commission will change to a full-time position. Lyndsay suggested going with full-time now, and then next year if the OC picks up the programming, the town could switch to part-time. It was discussed that no one would take a job that might go from full-time to part-time.

Justin reviewed his position that the town should support the OC with some funding, there should be some oversight of how the money is spent and the Commission is willing to participate, the Recreation Department budget should be funded so there is enough money to hire a full-time director if the Commission feels it is important. Lyndsay noted that her point is that the OC funding should be within the Rec Budget so that the Commission has the authority to dole out the funds, as in subcontracting with other organizations to do programming.

There was a discussion that the amount of information provided so far by the OC is not sufficient for the Commission to determine how much the town should give to the OC.

John Raby addressed the Commission and noted that he asked two questions: 1) have the OC and Commission arrived an understanding or agreement as to how to move forward together and 2) can we guarantee that recreational activities will be available without regard to ability to pay. It is his opinion listening to the discussions so far that there are many if's outstanding. Justin noted that the OC and the Commission have an understanding that if the OC gets funding, they will take over the summer program, other details like other programming are not definite, but he would not say there are still a lot of if's outstanding.

There was agreement that keeping their budget intact at \$181,697.52 will give them the ability to hire a full-time Rec Director if circumstances require it. Justin moved to approve that amount to present to the Budget Committee, Janet Kidder seconded the motion. All were in favor.

Lyndsay noted that she would like to also include the OC funding in the budget. Carol noted that since she has no basis to say that \$95,000 is the correct amount, she can't agree with putting that amount in the budget; Justin agreed.

Looking at the Budget Committee questions:

1. Looking at the programs that the Town Rec Dept has offered in 2019 by month, which programs do you think should be continued for New London residents? Identify which organization -Outing Club or Town Rec would provide those services.

The Commission felt strongly that the summer camp, vacation programs, and after-school should be provided in town, and that the OC provide those programs as they have better facilities. The Rec Department could also do after-school programs too, and this could be a good area to partner with the OC.

Transfer the maintenance of the ice rink on the town property to the OC , but purchase of the liner will remain with the town.

Trail maintenance to stay with the town with assistance by the Conservation Commission as has been in the past. Discussion of maintaining inventory of the town's facilities beyond the beaches and equipment and trail maintenance equipment was not seen as a Rec Director responsibility.

Activities for seniors should stay with the Rec Department. Carol noted that COA would love to keep the programs and expanding them – they need access to the van, but they will do all of the program planning. COA provides its own staff for the trips and drivers, they just need the van. Lyndsay pointed out that if the town continues with a full-time Rec Director, the senior trips would be increased over what COA will do. Justin agreed, noting that Janet's point of new and expanded programming over what previous Directors did would be a possibility with a new Director.

There was a discussion that the Selectmen have already approved the Rec Department budget, Janet noted that it is important to remember that it is the Budget Committee's budget that goes to the voters.

There was a discussion about when benefits must be given to town employees. The town offers benefits to staff that work 35 hours per week or more. Kim noted that a seasonal employee that works 40 hours per week, but part-time for a majority of the year, is not considered full-time for purposes of benefits.

Lyndsay offered to prepare a presentation for the Budget meeting; it will be reviewed by the Rec Commission prior to the Jan. 6th presentation.

- a. Given the programs that the Town Rec would provide as identified above, what is your best estimate of the time [number of hours/month] that the rec director would be employed?

The Commission noted that it is possible that they have underestimated the need so part-time, although it appears to be enough, may not end up being enough.

2. New London had a full-time rec director and rec commission. Aside from any past personnel issues, is there a structural problem with our current model of service delivery? If yes, what are the structural/organizational problems? If problems have been identified, how would you fix them?

There are no structural issues for the full-time rec director. It was noted that if the town keeps the summer camp, there will be a need for additional staff to ensure that the Rec Director is available to adequately supervise the beaches.

3. Do you think having a part-time rec director and a contract with the Outing Club is the best solution going forward?

This is what the current meeting has been discussing, without resolution; there will be further discussion once Lyndsay submits the presentation she will craft.

The Commission questioned if they have the authority to spend the Rec Department budget. Kim noted that yes, unless the Selectmen instituted special rules, a department is authorized to expend its budget, subject to the need for purchase orders that need prior approval. She noted that there has to be someone who is approving the expenditure before the check is cut. In this case, since this is a collaboration, and the Commission oversees recreational programming, they would be the likely group to be able to say that an expenditure is appropriate. The Commission does have the authority to approve expenditures of the budget; generally, it is the Rec Director that makes the initial decisions, prepares the purchase orders or payment vouchers, but he/she would get the direction from the Commission.

Justin asked for the context of the statement included in the questions sent to the Commission and Outing Club: *A second assumption made by the chair of the Budget Committee is that the BC would not support a full-time Rec director and a \$ 95,000 contribution to the Outing Club.* Neither John Raby or Lyndsay Harkins could offer more information on the statement by Rob Prohl.

4. Why is the New London Rec Dept not seeking to unburden the Outing Club by taking selected Outing Club programming and adding it to the New London Rec Dept

responsibilities? (Meaning, why is the New London Rec Dept not seeking additional town money to increase New London Rec Dept offerings?)

Lack of facilities on the part of the town. Lyndsay noted that she has said this many times – the town does not have the facilities; Justin agreed and noted that the town doesn't have the facilities or abilities to do all of the programming.

There was a discussion that it is difficult for the Commission to come up with an appropriate amount of money to support for the OC. Justin noted that one of his concerns with the OC request is the \$33,000 subsidy amount – he finds it hard to imagine that the OC would advertise for a lower amount for New London residents and a high number for non-New London people as this would likely not improve relationships with the surrounding towns. The other numbers did not raise concerns for him, but the subsidy amount concerns him.

Justin noted that he did not feel comfortable presenting a budget that included the OC amount when he could not justify the numbers. Carol agreed, presenting a number that could not be defended should not be included.

The Commission will meet again before the January 6th meeting to review the presentation that Lyndsay will craft. Justin will send an email to members with meeting date options.

The Meeting adjourned at 12:04 PM.

Respectfully submitted,

Kimberly A. Hallquist
Town Administrator