

September 8, 2020

The meeting of the Board of Park Commissioners was held on Tuesday, September 8, 2020, at 5:00 p.m. This meeting was conducted by Zoom/Teleconference. The public had access to this meeting by calling the following conference line and then entering the conference code:

Dial to join Zoom Meeting by Phone:
1 (929) 436 2866 1 (877) 853-5257 Toll-free

Meeting ID: 960 6138 2032

Mr. Labrador stated that this meeting is being conducted with the authority issued by the Governor of the State of Connecticut and read the following:

Tonight's meeting of the Board of Park Commissioner is the regular monthly meeting for September 8, 2020 and is being conducted by electronic means as authorized by Governor Ned Lamont executive order 7B which was issued on March 14, 2020, and which the Public has electronic access to witness this meeting.

The recording and transcription of this meeting will be posted on the City Clerk's website within 7 days.

Mr. Labrador asked that everyone abide by the Governor's request and directives contained in his various executive orders: 7 through 7J, with additional orders to be forthcoming.

OPENING CEREMONY

ROLL CALL

Present: President Labrador, Vice President Brideau, Commissioners: Wade, Cotto and Hosier, Clerk Ellen M. Gerrity. Also, in attendance were, Craig A. Nadrizny, Acting Public Facilities Director, Luann Conine, Recreation Superintendent, Luis Burgos, Manager of Roadway and Parks Services, and Lee Nastu, Recreation Coordinator with Angel DePara, Database Administrator, presiding as host of the meeting.

After determining there was a quorum, Mr. Labrador called the meeting to order.

APPROVAL OF MINUTES OF AUGUST 11, 2020 PARKS BOARD MEETING

On a motion made by Mr. Brideau, seconded by Mr. Cotto, it was unanimously voted to approve the minutes as presented.

PUBLIC SPEAKING FORUM:

Due to the public health emergency, public speaking will be by written testimony only**
Please submit written testimony to Ellen.Gerrity@bridgeportct.gov by 4:30p.m.on Monday, September 7th***

September 8, 2020

Mr. Labrador recognized Scout Roberto Hernandez-Velez, whom is listening in on the Parks Board meeting this evening. He is a member of Troop 34, the Golden Hill Methodist Church of Bridgeport, and is working on his Communications Merit Badge which is required to earn the rank of Eagle Scout.

PUBLIC SPEAKING FORUM

1. City Councilman Jorge Cruz, 131 District

Mr. Cruz stated that he is hear this evening to speak about the Christopher Columbus statue and that he opposes the decision of the Parks Board to bring the statue back to Seaside Park. He said that he appeared before the May 12, 2020, Parks Board meeting to ask that the banners be removed from the baseball fences at Seaside Park to be removed due to it being dangerous to the public. He said that the Board approved his request. He said that Mr. Torres from the Caribe League appeared at the June 9, 2020, Parks Board meeting and the Board reversed their vote.

He said that he would like the same consideration applied to him that was allowed to the Caribe League in that the Parks Board reconsider their vote to bring the Christopher Columbus back to Seaside Park.

He stated that at the Special Parks Board meeting the Board agreed to have groups from both sides to sit down and talk about the statue; which never happened.

He said that instead the Board voted at the next parks board meeting without it being on the agenda, to have the statue put back up within 45 days.

He said that was the day of the election and he and others were not able to appear at the meeting.

Mr. Cruz wants people to know that keeping the statue down has nothing to do with the Italian people or any other nationality, but has everything to do with Christopher Columbus who committed many atrocities such as genocide, rape and slavery to hundreds of thousands of people including the Arawaks of the Caribbean Islands, Puerto Rican people, Taino Indians from the island of Hispaniola, and also enslaved, killed and kidnapped African people that were brought to America.

He said that we cannot come to the mindset that is so convenient to say that it is okay to honor a killer just because he killed people 400 to 500 years ago.

He said that if he shot someone he would be charged with a crime.

He said that we cannot forget Christopher Columbus for what he did.

September 8, 2020

Mr. Cruz ended by saying that we must find a more practical solution in order to come together without Christopher Columbus because he is sure that there is an Italian individual that can be honored with more grace and put on the pedestal than to put a killer there when Bridgeport has a population of a majority of black, brown and poor whites.

2. City Councilwoman Jeanette Herron, 133 District

Councilwoman Jeanette 133rd district Miss Herron said she is not here to talk about a statue she is here to commend the Board of Park Commissioners for standing up for what the mayor did wrong.

She said that the whole process was done incorrectly across the board we need to sit down and talk and figure things out, but we also don't need electives to supersede or step on the toes of other electives. The Board of Park Commissioners has the sole authority to the Parks and what comes in and out of them.

She said that she is seeing the council and mayor overstepping their bounds and the way it looks now we do not need a council, Parks Board or any sort of commissioner if this continues to happen.

She wants to thank the Board of Park Commissioners for making decisions, some we are not happy about and some that we are, but nonetheless, continue to put in the hard work you do.

She said that Bridgeport is not like any other community and she thinks conversations are needed to be had, we can sit and talk without the yelling and profanity that has occurred from the beginning.

She thanked the community and Parks Board for listening.

3. City Councilman Michael Defilippo, 133rd District

Mr. DeFilippo said he is not here to talk about the Christopher Columbus statue or whether he was a good or bad person, he is here to talk about the chain of events that transpired with the removal of the Columbus statue and who has the power over the parks.

He said that from his perspective and everything that has gone on with this matter as well as public comments from Mayor Ganim and City Attorney Meyer, there is no doubt in his mind that City Hall has exhausted all the stops they can possibly come up with trying to bypass their charter authority and trying to usurp the Board of Park Commissioners and the City Council as a body while trying to find a needle in a haystack to do so.

He said that the Mayor has made a mockery of this issue for two months and he has finally acknowledged that the authority of the parks goes to the Parks Commission, but now he is using the excuse of an emergency in the name of COVID and public safety and public health.

September 8, 2020

He said that he understands the nature of protesting regarding the Mayor's new excuse of public safety and health but where were the Mayor and City Attorney; talking about COVID virus transmission when people were protesting and camping out in front of the Police Department.

He said it seems to him a reach by the Mayor to not put the statue up and basically say that he has sole authority over the parks and take a secondary shot at the Parks Commission.

He said that Chief Perez stated that no one has contacted him on this issue of public safety; he said that this shows that Mayor Ganim will have people say whatever he wants to get his way.

Mr. DeFilippo said that he strongly believes that Mayor Ganim does not have authority to keep the statue hostage especially based on the COVID virus development of events.

He said that it is truly a slap in the face to the Italian people, the Council members that worked on this issue, all the Park Board Commissioners, Police Officers and all of Bridgeport residents at large.

He said that if the City Administration does not want to conform with the Parks Commission's authority and vote on this matter as well as the City Council's desire on this matter, and the statue does not go up then maybe legal council should be sought.

4. City Councilwoman Michelle Lyons, 134th District

Ms. Lyons said that she is not here to get into debates with anyone in reference to the Columbus statue, her concern is what her colleagues have said and how this came about and happened and how it has caused a lot of hurt feelings and animosity with everyone.

She would like to have the continued conversations with what we can do to have things going forward in the City of Bridgeport and how we can work out the statue incident and continue working together as a team.

She said that her major concern is if we allow the Mayor of the City of Bridgeport to tell the Parks Commission or Common Council what to do on any decision they make whether it be the Columbus Statue or anything else, just like City Councilwoman Herron said, "we do not need a City Council or Parks Board."

She said in her opinion we should have respect for whatever decision is made by the City Council or Board of Park Commissioners. Right now, the Parks Board made their decision.

She questioned who has the authority to make decisions, the Mayor or Parks Department. "Does the Mayor or the Parks Board have more rights to make decisions in the Parks Department."

September 8, 2020

She said that Council Members and Parks Board Commissioners must stand up for what ever decisions they make whether it is right or wrong.

She said if we allow the Mayor to override whatever the Parks Board has to say, then we are losing our power and our rights.

Ms. Lyons thanked the Board for everything they do and Common Council members for their personal opinions and beliefs.

5. City Councilman Alfredo Castillo, 136th District – Mr. Castillo was not in attendance.
6. City Councilwoman Maria Pereira, 138th District

I want to commend you for possessing what so few elected and appointed officials in Bridgeport fail to possess; and that is independence, integrity and courage. Four of you are serving an expired term which is a purposeful power play by the Mayor. The Mayor does so that he can hold your expired term over your head should you not do as you are told. I also want to express my apologies to you for the disrespectful behavior demonstrated by the Miscellaneous Matters Committee at the urging of City Council President Aidee Nieves. Several of us made it clear that the resolution submitted by Mike Defilippo & Jeanette Herron directing Mayor Ganim to return the Christopher Columbus statue to its rightful place in Seaside Park was never referred to the Miscellaneous Matters Committee; therefore the Misc. Matters Committee had absolutely no jurisdiction over the resolution or the statue. The original resolution, which was physically signed by 13 city council members, clearly listed that should the matter fail during the Special Meeting called by the Mayor; the resolution was to be referred to the Board of Park Commissioners. I also made it clear that President Labrador stated he wanted to give the opposing sides time to meet and reach an agreement on the statue BEFORE scheduling a Public Hearing after today's meeting as we were supposed to report back with progress. Facts just don't matter when City Council members want to pontificate and put on a show.

She said that both herself and Michael DeFilippo worked the poles on August 11th.

She said she was at Thomas Hooker School from 6:00 a.m. until 8:15 p.m. and made a point of getting on the August 11th Parks meeting as did Michael DeFilippo.

If you have not done so already, I strongly urge the Acting President to draft a letter on your Board of Parks Commission letterhead addressed to the Mayor informing

September 8, 2020

him the commission voted unanimously to return the Christopher Columbus statue to Seaside Park no later than September 25, 2020 with the relevant City Charter provisions referenced. It should be stamped by the City Clerk and sent to the Mayor by traditional and electronic mail. In addition, because the City Council completely disrespected the Board of Parks Commission by holding a Public Hearing on the Christopher Columbus statue knowing full well the Board of Parks Commission planned on holding a Public Hearing after its September Regular Meeting, and because you are allowing a number of speakers to address the Board of Parks Commission on September 8th, I strongly urge you to NOT schedule a Public Hearing on the matter. Everything that both those in favor and in opposition of the statue needed to say will have already been said.

She said finally she wants to offer testimony that Christopher Caruso under the Italian leadership has consistently reached out to the opposition to engage in constructive dialogue with almost no success.

She said that the Italian leadership cannot negotiate with themselves.

Finally, she wanted to commend all the Park Commissioners for doing what few in Bridgeport do that are appointed or elected officials and that showed true independence.

7. Honorable Leonard Paoletta, Past Mayor, City of Bridgeport

Good evening Chairman Labrador and distinguished members of the Board of Parks Commissioners:

In my capacity as Mayor of Bridgeport serving from 1981-85, I knew what any good Mayor knows. It was ultimately my responsibility to unite the City regardless of race, ethnicity or religion even if it meant sitting down with those individuals who opposed me or brokering a meeting with members of the community that held opposing views.

To that end, my administration organized the very first interfaith prayer breakfast to include every denomination with over 400 attendees as a forum to encourage dialogue, and to insure peace and tranquility with the ultimate goal of unifying Bridgeport.

On December 7, 1982, an arsonist set the Christmas Village building on fire practically burning it to the ground and destroying all the toys. I ordered that the village be rebuilt and ready to go in three days - December 11. We never put out a call for volunteers or donations, but we knew if we "built it they would come," and hundreds of carpenters, electricians and other trades people along with volunteers of every race, creed, ethnicity and religion showed up to work around the clock for three days to rebuild the Village.

September 8, 2020

It's been referred to as, "the Miracle of Christmas Village" because in three days it was opened. President Ronald Reagan personally called me to congratulate everyone on the job well done. Bridgeport made national news for uniting around a common goal for the greater good.

As Mayor, I never disrespected one race or ethnicity at the urging of another. Simply, it was not leadership then, and it's not leadership now.

At your August 11th Board meeting, you met the challenge and leveled the playing field. Through your unanimous vote, you made it possible for the Italian American community to enter into dialogue with those opposing the return of the statue. It's never easy to make the right decision, but that's what leadership is all about - putting aside political differences and allegiances to bring a divided community together in order to reach a meaningful resolution.

Thank you for your courage and good night.

8. Honorable John Fabrizi – Past Mayor, City of Bridgeport - was not in attendance
9. Cynthia Infante

I wish I could say I was surprised by the sudden outrage over the Columbus Statue in Seaside Park, but in Bridgeport, nothing surprises me anymore.

I have heard the argument that the Columbus Statue represents a reminder of systemic racism. And to those who believe that I ask, have you been paying attention in Bridgeport?

Removing a statue does nothing for the betterment of the black and brown children or the residents of Bridgeport.

The outrage that is the sudden cry of some city residents over a statue SHOULD be the outrage over the fact that our public schools are completely underfunded, and the majority black and brown children are the ones who are most affected. That energy of outrage over a statue should be the energy you bring to every single board of education or city council meeting. How many of you can say you have attended either of those meetings?

Every single time a city council member or the mayor does not help fund Bridgeport public schools they are complicit in the systemic racism facing the children of this city.

How many city council members who are so quick to publicly declare outrage over a statue are voting NO to funding public schools? Talk about complete hypocrisy.

I wonder how many times the current politicians in our city will reference this Columbus statue fight in their political literature and mailers next election season. So much for moral standards in Bridgeport.

September 8, 2020

Let's really examine what is keeping Bridgeport down, I can guarantee it isn't a statue.

10. Lisa Parziale

Ms. Parziale wants the members of the Board of Parks Commission to know how proud and privileged she is to know that not only are they exceptional public servants, but they possess the values and integrity that every member of every Board and Commission should have.

Not only have all of you dedicated your time and commitment to your oath as a commissioner you set the bar extremely high honoring your responsibilities. I will not going to the drama that is surrounding the statue of Christopher Columbus erected in 1965 on park property in Bridgeport but she believes that everyone has the right to their opinion as well as an appropriate manner to express them.

The City of Bridgeport is governed by a city charter and she does follow procedure. She spent 20 years as a member of the City Council and 14 years as City Council President.

She said that the city charter is equivalent to the laws of the city she said that she does not care what the City Attorney suggests, no one has the right to violate the charter even if it's done with what appears to be well intentioned reasons. There is a process that applies to everyone in this administration. Don't relinquish your authority, it was given to you by the City Charter take on the City Attorney if necessary, bullies usually back down when there is push back.

Thank you for standing up holding your ground and don't fall for the false reasons given for this egregious act.

11. Maggie McLean

She is a former NY resident who lived in Spanish Black Harlem and came to Bridgeport in 2015.

She said she cannot believe the black and brown community are so worried about the Columbus Statue.

She is a black woman and thinks that Christopher Columbus was a hero.

She said she is standing with the Board of Park Commissioners decision to return the statue to Seaside Park.

She also commended the Parks Board for standing up against those in power and doing the right thing.

She said she was a union steward for thirty-three years and she knows what it is like to stand up for things that mattered with her co-workers.

September 8, 2020

12. James Wigglesworth – Was not in attendance

13. Pastor William McCullough, FaithActs, Bridgeport, CT

Pastor McCullough thanked the Board for letting him speak.

Pastor McCullough said that Christopher Columbus is a deeply polarizing historical figure giving the daily impact in his arrival in this hemisphere on the indigenous population.

It is a history that represents slavery and oppression of Black and Brown people. A monument is more than just commemorative it holds and designates honor, a public statue uplifts literally it's object. In a society still grappling with deep racial discord and tension why would we uphold such figures. Why would we give them such a public space to the detriment and exclusion of countless other historical figures who better deserve commemoration.

We support the removal of all public monuments devoted to symbols of white supremacy and violence like that of Christopher Columbus. This is about inclusion and diversity and we are confronting systemic racism that threatens our very own democracy, what this country was built on and we are going to stand in this city until we have exclusiveness where not just a few people know what it means to be happy but where everyone experiences joy and peace some of our elected officials continue to put poor and marginalized people against one another, racism has allowed a political party in the United States to remain in power as it imperials life on this planet.

White supremacy has a beginning and it will have an end whether in the eternal silence or in habitable earth or on a planet far more just loving free and peaceful than the one that we are trying to save right now our president has failed to protect us from a deadly virus our senators have refused to provide needed relief.

In the season we as Americans can and must refuse to be manipulated in a nation that promises freedom of speech and we will march when we want to, we will protest we will criticize any elected official who fails to serve the people and we will not succumb to violence and we will not allow our militant non-violent to be criminalized.

We are in a pandemic we are still in a pandemic our government was totally unprepared for and is taking us out of control and we as a black and brown and poor people will stand up against everything that comes up against us because we are deserving and we will fight to the end if that statue gets put back up

14. Clan Mother Shoran "White Fawn" Piper Tribal Leader, Golden Hill Paugussett Indian Tribe, Trumbull, CT

Her father is full blood native American Indian, and her mother is Italian.

September 8, 2020

The Christopher Columbus statue is a slap in the face and just repeats heartache for everything her ancestors and others have gone through, especially what their tribe and the whole east coast endured when they met Christopher Columbus and his people.

She said that she knows what her people endured.

She believes that the process of determining the fate of the Columbus should not be a drawn out one.

She said that a committee should be formed to discuss the statue, and quickly decide what will be done.

She suggested that the statue be kept down and stored safely somewhere and that another Italian hero be put up in its place.

She said that she does not want to go back and forth on the same topic.

Mother Shoran thanked the Board.

15. Gemeen Davis, Bridgeport, CT

Ms. Davis said that hundreds of Bridgeport residents have marched, and since George Floyd died they have marched in the streets allied not just about police brutality but the system in which black and brown people have been subjected to in the United States for years and at the root of that is systemic racism and that is what they are marching against.

She said that across the country not just in Connecticut, cities have been taking down symbols of racism and oppression.

Among those are confederate soldiers and Christopher Columbus statues.

She said that in our own state the statue has come down in Hartford and New Haven and was vandalized in Waterbury.

She said she marched peacefully on July 4th, to take it down there were approximately 70 to 100 people who marched, and they were a multicultural group with multiple ages, and we marched and that is what we demanded

She said that their grievance is not with the Italian American community, their grievance went to the mayor which is where it should be; it went to our city government and we asked our city government to remove the symbol of racism and oppression in a public park.

She said that this is not an argument about process and she does understand that we have a city charter and that the Board should be involved in all the decisions but she is here in a matter of public safety because that's what it's all about it's a larger conversation about racism

September 8, 2020

and public safety and the mayor has jurisdiction over then entire city when it comes to public safety. She does believe that the mayor did the right thing when he took the statue down and she is the first to admit that she had serious problems with this.

She said that their grievance is not with Italian Americans, it is against a system that needs to be eradicated now and not at any other time.

She encourages the Board to step into the 21st Century and to step into what has been happening across the country and do the right thing.

She said this is not about process, it is about the grievance of Black and Brown people that dates back 400 years.

Ms. Davis thanked the Board.

16. Bobby Brown, Board of Education, Bridgeport, CT – Was not in attendance

17. Wayne Winston, Trumbull, CT

Mr. Winston said that what we are talking about is not conjecture it is history.

He said that the City Council took a vote and that is how we got here.

He said that black people have the ability to walk, chew bubble gum and do a number of things at the same time.

You can protest the Columbus statue as well as fight for education for our kids to make sure the books are here and that they are connected to the internet and so forth so, he thinks it is kind of a slight when the implication is that somehow they are creating problems in their own community that is 78% black and brown and an 8% percent Italian community.

He has nothing against the Italian community this is about Christopher Columbus as an explorer getting credit for something that he did not do he would like the following to be read into the minutes:

In an era in which the international slave trade was starting to grow, Columbus and his men enslaved man native inhabitants of the West Indies and subjected them to extreme violence and brutality. On his famous first voyage in 1492, Columbus landed on an unknow Caribbean island after an arduous three-month journey.

On his first day in the New World, he ordered six of the natives to be seized, writing in his journal that he believed they would be good servants. Throughout his years in the New World, Columbus enacted policies of forced labor in which natives were put to work for the sake of profits. Later, Columbus sent thousands of peaceful Taino “Indians” from the island of Hispaniola to Spain to be sold. Many died en route.

September 8, 2020

Those left behind were forced to search for gold in mines and work on plantations. Within 60 years after Columbus landed, only a few hundred of what may have been 250,000 Taino were left on their island.

As governor and viceroy of the Indies, Columbus imposed iron discipline on what is now the Caribbean country of Dominican Republic, according to documents discovered by Spanish historians in 2005. In response to native unrest and revolt, Columbus ordered a brutal crackdown in which many natives were killed; in an attempt to deter further rebellion, Columbus ordered their dismembered bodies to be paraded through the streets.

He said that Christopher Columbus cannot be a hero to the black people when so much was done and not reflected into any history book.

He said that he would stand with the Italian community for many other things but cannot on this issue.

He said if you still think Christopher Columbus was a hero after hearing all of this, please think about it.

18. Lyle Hassan Jones, Bridgeport, CT

He said that Jorge Cruz, Pastor McCullough, Wayne Winston and Gemeen Davis have done a good job in articulating why they are against putting back the Christopher Columbus statue.

After knowing the history of Christopher Columbus and knowing that the issue is not with the Italian community but is with personage of Christopher Columbus and to know he has done and what he has done and if you knew in good conscious no matter what color you are and you still do not see the egregious act and how this affects the black and brown people may god help you all.

It gives him a whole different opinion about people who would celebrate a killer, rapist and murderer who would do this to the indigenous people and you're still trying to fight to put the statue back up.

It makes him ask himself what are you fighting for and what are you saying to the black and brown people.

He said that this is so troubling to him and this should not event be debatable since all over the county, cities are taking down these statues.

Right here in Bridgeport, CT we have a handful of people who do not give a dam about the concerns and feelings of black and brown people.

He does not understand, but it does give him a whole new complete picture of the mindset of the people we are dealing with.

September 8, 2020

19. Barbara Rogo – Bridgeport, CT

I want to express my appreciation and that of the Italian American community for the patience and professionalism of Park Board Commission as we progress through this issue. Because I spoke of my personal ethnic history at your last meeting, these remarks are in the form of a petition with signatories listed at the end:

WHEREAS: In the current climate of national unrest, leaders in both the Greater Bridgeport Italian-American and other Community organizations still are determined to peacefully work together on sensitive issues that have potential to fracture our city; and

WHEREAS: Members of the Bridgeport Italian community spent four decades raising the necessary funds to commission the Columbus statue with its pedestal and installation which was entrusted to the city of Bridgeport in 1965 with the understanding the City would be responsible for its maintenance in perpetuity; and

WHEREAS: In 1992, the Puerto Rican community joined in a celebration and re-dedication of the statue; and

WHEREAS: Understanding that Columbus, an extraordinarily accomplished 15th century navigator who first went to sea at the age of 14, was not a perfect person but rather a man of his time who now is judged 570 years following his birth by 21st century values; and,

WHEREAS: Like others, Italian-Americans' commitment to strong work and education, family, faith, and country allowed our families to incrementally begin to achieve the American Dream despite the cruelty of redlining, KKK harassment, internment camps, and other examples of the systemic discrimination; and

WHEREAS: On Monday, July 6, 2020, Mayor Ganim, without consultation and authorization of the City Council and/or the Board of Park Commissioners and intimidated by small groups of organized protestors in a city of 145,000+ people, unilaterally ordered the removal of the Columbus statue located in Seaside Park; and

WHEREAS: Aware this debate is about respect: respect for constructive dialog; respect for the legal process; and most especially, respect for the Italian-American community;

We, the undersigned, direct Mayor Joseph Ganim to follow the Bridgeport Park Board directive to restore the Columbus monument to Seaside Park; and then, in cooperation with the Park Board and law enforcement officials to preserve and protect the Columbus monument from malicious damage and allow dialogue to continue.

Signed: Under the umbrella of the Council of Italian-American Societies of Greater Bridgeport, independent organizations including, but not limited to, Bridgeport Area Cultural Italian Organization (BACIO), Bridgeport Roma Club, Bridgeport Circolo Sportivo Italian

September 8, 2020

American Club, Bridgeport Chapter of UNICO, Bridgeport Trinacria Society, Bridgeport Duke of Abruzzi Society, Italian Society of Saint Margaret Shrine, Bridgeport, Connecticut Grand Lodge of the Sons and Daughters of Italy and Sons and Daughters of Italy Regional Valley Lodge, request the Board of Park Commissioners restore the statue to its location in Seaside Park, and allow the dialogue to continue.

Ms. Rogo thanked the Parks Board.

20. Peter D. Spain, Immediate past City Council rep for the 130th District

Mr. Spain said that he submitted his comments in writing and asks the Board to refer to his comments.

Mr. Spain thanked Lyle Hasson Jones and his message to the Board.

He said that this is a time to make the right choice based on what we now know about our history and culture and pretending that it is about our City Charter when the Charter has been run over rough shot for years is really is a mis clarification of this critical issue.

Mr. Spain thanked the Parks Board.

21. Maximino Medina - (203) 332-5733 - (Former Chair of the Bpt. Board of Ed.

On the subject of the Christopher Columbus statue, I wrote you on July 14, 2020 and will not repeat here the substance of that letter. I still believe the statue should be returned to its home in Seaside Park. However, I know others disagree. I have watched as your Commission has, in good faith, struggled to arrive at a fair and just resolution to this matter. Obviously, this is a matter on which there are strong opinions on both sides of the issue being expressed by various members of our community, all of whom have a right to be heard.

It seems to me the Commission has three interests:

1. to arrive at the best solution possible under the circumstances;
2. to allow the community a fair opportunity to be heard; and
3. to do all of the foregoing without (a) spending all of your time on this one issue (because you have an entire parks system to administer) or (b) swinging back and forth between answers because such inconsistency would have a negative effect on the public's perception of the Commission and its final answer.

If you believe the matter merits further consideration (after having voted to restore the statue) then, with those three interests in mind, I have a suggestion on a procedural approach you may wish to consider:

1. The Commission can create an advisory committee of five (5) members consisting of one person from each of five constituencies: (a) the Bridgeport NAACP (b) Generation Now (c) the Columbus Committee chaired by Mr. Caruso (d) a Latino representative nominated by a

broad-based community organization such as GBLN and (e) one member designated by the City Council (after consultation with the Mayor's office).

2. Assign the Advisory Committee the task of speaking with each other (dueling press events are not conciliatory communications) to see if there's any way they can reach consensus on a fair compromise;

3. Set a firm deadline by which the Advisory Committee is to report to your Commission;

4. Inquire if there's a member of the community - acceptable to all five members of the Advisory Committee - who would be willing to serve as a facilitator for the committee's discussions;

5. Set a date on which the Commission will render its final say; and

6. Agree that until such process has been completed no action will be taken on the statue.

Ultimately, the decision is yours and yours alone. The committee can only advise. Indeed, it may report back that they failed to reach a consensus.

However, spending a little more time in an effort to allow everyone to be heard all in the hope of reaching an amicable resolution, seems to me to be a worthwhile investment.

22. Chris Caruso - (reading letter into the record on behalf of Gloria Carbone)

There are two things that just about every adult Italian does that resides in Bridgeport. We pay lots of taxes and we vote. I can promise you that the disrespect shown the Italian community by Mayor Ganim will not be forgotten. I want to commend the Parks Board for standing up to Mayor Ganim, standing up to those of the City Council in support of Mayor Ganim's illegal decision to remove the Christopher Columbus statue and standing up to those 25 people calling for the statue to NOT be returned to Seaside Park. What you did as commissioners of the Parks Board took guts; which a lot of our elected officials simply don't have. Thank God the Parks Board has a set of "testiculos" because the City Council certainly doesn't have any. When the City Council had the chance to hold the Mayor accountable by forcing him to put the statue back up; they folded like a cheap suit.

I see these Generation Now people constantly spewing nonsense in the paper and Channel 12 News by claiming ONLY three Italian Americans want the statue returned. Who are these people that think they have the right to speak for the Italian community? As children we were raised to be respectful or our elders, to make a point without yelling, to only stand up to speak when you had something important to say, and to unite behind our Italian leaders, not to made a spectacle of ourselves, use bullhorns and yell at those with differing opinions. I used to take time off from work to volunteer at fundraisers to raise money for the Christopher Columbus statue and improve St. Margaret Shrine. The Italians of Bridgeport worked hard for everything we have while always helping to better the lives of other communities and ethnicities in need with the understanding that improving Bridgeport benefitted us all. We knew what it was like to be discriminated against and looked down upon in this country, yet these loud voices are claiming the Italian community spent 40 years raising funds to the statue as a symbol of racism and white superiority. That's a bunch of garbage. We put in all that effort so that the Christopher Columbus statue would represent our Italian heritage, history and pride.

September 8, 2020

We have a Mayor and his cronies under two federal grand jury subpoenas involving FBI investigations in our taxpayer dollars are being used to pay for their criminal defense attorneys, and the City Council scheduled a hearing on the Christopher Columbus statue. What are they doing about that?

I am a proud Italian American born in Bridgeport in 1929 during the Great Depression raised in an era of extreme poverty where the Italian community united to feed house and care for each. My father had great difficulty finding work as Italians were discriminated against and called racist names like greaseball guinea and wop. My parents raised me to work hard respect others and to take pride in being an Italian. That pride in our Italian heritage is why the Christopher Columbus statue must be put back up on the pedestal at Seaside Park overlooking the ocean where it has stood proudly for over 50 years.

Bridgeport residents are dealing with real problems and removing a statue won't do one thing to help resolve those problems. For those who suddenly can't tolerate a statue that has been peacefully existing in Seaside Park for over 50 years; why don't you lead an effort and raise funds for a statue honoring someone that reflects your heritage and history that you can take pride in just like the Italians did.

23. Bob Halstead, former Common Council Member

He said he appreciates this opportunity to exercise his constitutional right of free speech.

He does not wish to remain silent on this current event regarding the Christopher Columbus statue at Seaside Park.

Mr. Halstead said he would like to start by saying that Christopher Columbus was inaccurately portrayed as a Christian who was a benevolent idealist, however recent scrutiny and research has opened our eyes to his role in promoting slavery and colonist.

He said the opposite side is that both opposing sides of this situation have their merits which we are hearing tonight.

He said that both opposing sides must have a civil discourse.

He said that civil discourse and our democracy are threatened by destruction of public property and by the circumventing of the law by our leaders.

He said that both will do nothing but detract from other more oppressing important issues and will hurt economic development and attraction of new investors into Bridgeport and may lead to a flight from Bridgeport due to a perceived instability and safety concerns.

He said instead we should take this time of high-profile public involvement and engage the following:

September 8, 2020

1. Desegregation of the suburbs and elimination of Jim Crow like zoning laws that prevent high density housing and regional use in suburbs.
2. The poisoning of low-income population of color by the big crude industry in the city that promotes very poor nutrition, resulting in child obesity, Type II diabetes, hypertension and the like.
3. The disproportionate incarceration of the minority population who are arrested for marijuana violations.

He said that these are a few of the more pressing issues that he has been focused on and to not do so would be a missed opportunity by the black and brown populations who should take better advantage of the spotlight being given to them at this particular time.

24. Lynn Cora

Ms. Cora said she is a native Bridgeporter growing up on the east end and currently living on the east side she is also a retired BOE educator serving both Central and Harding.

She supports the Board of Park Commissioners for exercising their absolute authority granted by the City Charter To make decisions especially with input from the community concerning controversial issues as the Columbus statue it is extremely important that all respect and follow protocol as set forth by law because if we do not we are society begin to disintegrate.

In addition I respect the Bridgeport community for exercising their constitutional right for peaceful demonstration in dialogue concerning controversial issues I would like to see the Columbus statue being returned to its side at Seaside Park more for his accomplishments not for his faults because no one is perfect.

Thank you for your attention, God bless Bridgeport and God bless America.

25. Mike D'Onofrio

My name is Michael D'Onofrio and I am an active member and officer of the Bridgeport Circolo Sportivo Italo Americano Club on Park Avenue. Our organization is 100% in favor of returning the Christopher Columbus statue to Seaside Park. The Circolo Sportivo Club is part of the 10 Italian American organizations which formed a coalition to support the return of the statue. We are ably represented by Former Mayor Len Paoletta, Former State Representative Christopher Caruso and Former City Council Person and Bridgeport Educator Barbara Rogo.

We at Bridgeport's Circolo Sportivo are proud of our heritage and proud to live in USA.

We also share and respect the pride of everyone else from all backgrounds.

We understand the dynamics that are playing out through United States, but we do not condone acts of violence and illegal removal of statues.

September 8, 2020

We are angry and disappointed that the Columbus statue was removed from the site Seaside Park without a conversation, it is our statue and we put it there with our money and we want it back there.

We hear all the things and all the reasons given for not wanting the Columbus statue there, however, we cannot change the fact that Columbus is part of history and nobody can change history, you can only learn from it.

For centuries Columbus was regarded as an explorer and navigator after whom cities and street and organizations were named after.

We Italians have taken to look at the statue of Columbus to represent and signify our heritage and our contribution to America and to the world.

Vandalizing and taking down the statue are not only a slap in the face of the Italians and Italian Americans, but everyone who respects history.

We are not perfect; no human ever was or ever will be, but I believe that most people are working toward improving the society that we live in.

We must work at making society better and I believe that having the statue of Columbus where it belongs will be a big part and a reminder to respect this commitment.

I thank the Board of Parks Commissioners for ordering the statue be restored to Seaside Park.

Good evening and thank you for your time. Ciao!

26. Delfim DeSousa – Was not in attendance

27. Helen Olga Losak

As a pre-school teacher that was born, raised and has resided in Bridgeport my entire life; I understand the importance of being accurate and factually correct. I was appalled when I watched video of a protest on McLevy Green with Board of Education Member Bobbi Brown serving as the M.C. standing right next to a young, Black student on a megaphone stating that 'the Christopher Columbus statue has been at Seaside Park before some of us were even "free." Bobbi Brown did nothing to address this egregiously incorrect statement. The Christopher Columbus statue was dedicated in 1965, not 1860.

Christopher Columbus never enslaved Africans, never stepped foot in Africa or the United States. Christopher Columbus in the Caribbean Islands which mainly impacted the indigenous Tiano Indians. Even Haiti was occupied by the Tiano Indians in 1492. Eventually, France became dominant over Haiti in the 1600's and kidnapped and enslaved Africans to provide the labor to produce vast quantities of sugar and coffee which is why the primary language spoken in Haiti today is French. This occurred long after Christopher Columbus

September 8, 2020

died. So, I am simply trying to understand why the vast majority of those protesting Christopher Columbus are members of the Black community.

The hard working Bridgeport Italians that spent 40 years raising the funds for the statue could not have done so as a symbol of racism, hate or white oppression because it was not until 1977 that the International Conference on Discrimination Against Indigenous Populations in The Americas sponsored by the United Nations began to discuss replacing Columbus Day in the United States with Indigenous People's Day. However, this did not become a reality in the United States until 1992 when the Berkley, California City Council voted to name October 12th as a "Day of Solidarity with Indigenous People" It took another 22 years before the Minneapolis, Minnesota City Council voted to recognize Indigenous People's Day along with Columbus Day in 2014 which started a wave of such actions by cities and states across the country. This is when the mainstream media began to report on the revisionist history of Christopher Columbus.

Christopher Columbus died in 1506 just 14 years after landing in the Caribbean. He died over 500 years ago in an incredibly different era. The point of humanity is that we should constantly evolve as people, humans and as a society, and that includes forgiveness.

The Board of Parks Commissioners authority was unlawfully usurped by Mayor Gamin, and I for one am proud of you for exercising your powers under the City Charter by voting to return the statue back to its rightful home in Seaside Park. If all the residents of Bridgeport have to follow the rules/laws of our city so too should our Mayor.

Lastly, there was a group of council members and Italian meeting with those opposed to the statute to reach a consensus on this matte before the rug was pulled out from under them. As an educator, we teach school children about the importance of conflict resolution, working together collaboratively and respectfully, yet our mayor, some city council members, pastors and so-called leaders of community organizations protesting the statue are incapable of behaving like adults. After all, Bridgeport has a number of races, ethnicities, languages and religions represented amongst almost 150,000 residents, therefore this very finite group of persistent protestors need to comprehend that if Bridgeport residents were so outraged by the Christopher Columbus statute they would have many residents attend their press conferences, rallies and marches, and the reality is they simply don't.

Residents come out and protest when they are outraged and angry, not when they are ambivalent and satisfied.

28. Sonia Kirkland – Did not attend the meeting

29. Maria Pires

I along with many others in the Portuguese Community stand in solidarity with the Italian community.

The Portuguese have a huge connection to Christopher Columbus.

September 8, 2020

Columbus a navigator largely self-taught attended the Prince Henry School of Navigation in Portugal, he married a Portuguese Noble woman Filipa Moniz Perestrelo and had a son Diego while still living in Portugal.

In 1492 his voyage to the New world expanded our view of the world and permanently linked Europe with the Americas. His discoveries and the age of exploration that followed forever changed the course of history. Columbus was a man whose vision and discovery changed the course of world history by connecting the people of the World and the expansion of Christianity.

I as many immigrants understand the struggles of coming to this county, working hard to achieve the American dream.

The Italians as many other European immigrants were also oppressed. In 1888 there were job postings, where it stated no Italians need apply or allowed to apply, In March 14, 1881 11 Italians were lynched, this is known to be the largest single lynching in American History. The Italians were one of the largest ethnic group to fight in WWII.

The Italian Community worked extremely hard for over 4 decade to place a statue of Christopher Columbus at Seaside park, with the approval of the Park Commission. The only government administrator in charge of the public parks.

The Statue was illegal removed from the park on July 6th. Did anything change once the Statue was removed? Did our lives improve, did the crime stop in Bridgeport, did our taxes go down? Was education fully funded? The Answer is a simple NO. Neither a perfect man nor a villain as many critics have sought to make him, did he make mistakes absolutely, mistakes that must be forgiven as many of us have asked for forgiveness, he too should be forgiven.

As evolved members of Society how can we blame a concrete statue of a man that existed over 500 years ago for the current issues of the World.

I would like to thank the Board for their great work on keeping our parks beautiful, and for voting to return the statue back to its proper place, thank you for also giving us the time to voice our concerns and opinions.
Stay well, Stay safe.

30. Adriana Aristy- 203-218-3012 (Reading letter into the record on behalf of Alfredo Aristy)

As the former president of the Dominican American Coalition of CT, I felt it was important to share the feelings of many Dominicans who understand our history.

The vast majority of Dominicans consider Christopher Columbus, known to us as "Cristobal Colon," to be a hero, explorer, navigator and colonizer because he courageously took the really important step for the whole mankind. His arrival on 1492

September 8, 2020

to what he called "La Hispaniola" could be considered as the beginning of globalization. Santo Domingo was built in 1496 and the very first cathedral of the New World was built there. Christopher Columbus Day is a national day of celebration in the Dominican Republic.

Today, the island is divided into two countries that are very different from each other, Haiti and the Dominican Republic. Haiti occupies a third and the Dominican Republic occupies the rest of the island.

The Dominican Republic has many public spaces dedicated to Christopher Columbus including Columbus Park, the Columbus Lighthouse built as part of the 500 year celebration of Christopher Columbus, the Columbus House, and in many of the museums found in Santa Domingo there are exhibits referring to him as "the great admiral, the great explorer," and "the great hero and discoverer of the Americas. " There are many paintings of Christopher Columbus proudly on display.

As a Dominican, I and my family would like to thank the Parks Board for voting to put the Christopher Columbus statue back in Seaside Park. For many of us who live in Bridgeport; the statue helps remind us of our beautiful homeland, the Dominican Republic.

Christopher Colon was a product of his time and a servant of the Spanish Crown. His mission was to claim territories for Spain, to bring the word of God and to convert those whose did not adhere to the Christian faith.

Tearing down statues is more an emotional expression than a rationally well-thought-out process. Should this trend continue, perhaps the continent should not be called America and many other places with names related to the discovery of America need to go, as well many European names that have been honored.

Finally, history cannot be rewritten or invented and events in history are a reflection of the period in which they take place. History is history. A period from which future generations need to learn from the good and the bad. If most of the people in the Dominican Republic can forgive Christopher Columbus for whatever bad occurred in 1492 and the years that followed, why can't these few protestors forgive him? After all, He has been dead for 500 years

31. Antonio Mendez

I am a Cuban American raised in New York that relocated to Bridgeport in 2009 and opened a business here on lower East Main Street. And you know what? I'll be ready to leave Bridgeport because we have a convicted criminal for mayor and our city council thinks it's important to hold a hearing on the Christopher Columbus statue. There are like the same 25 people on Channel 12 News over and over again who are obsessed with keeping the Christopher Columbus statue from being put back up. Get a life!

September 8, 2020

If Bridgeport residents could forgive Joe Ganim for stealing from the city, selling his office to the highest bidder for cash, wine and home improvements, and making Bridgeport the laughing stock of CT by re-electing him as mayor, why can't people forgive Christopher Columbus for whatever he did 500 years ago? Get a life!

East Main St. is constantly dirty, the city trash cans are constantly overflowing, and the street sweepers come down the street in the middle of the day when cars are parked everywhere instead of at the crack of dawn. And the City Council wants to spend time on the Christopher Columbus statue. Get a life!

I have not had one family member, friend or customer bring up how offended they are by the Christopher Columbus statue. And if they did, I would tell them to get a life!

Who are these people that have so little going on their own lives that they keep going on Channel News 12 talking about the Christopher Columbus statue is racist, offensive and is all about white power? Get a life!

I am paying taxes out of the ying yang on my house, my cars and my business and instead of focusing on the crazy taxes in Bridgeport the City Council held a hearing on this nonsense. Get a life!

The Mayor and the City Council needs to focus on the things that matter to most people who live here, pay taxes here, raise their children here, and send their children to the schools here, not this stupidity. Get a Life!

As a Hispanic man, I am NOT offended by the Christopher Columbus statue. I guess it's been at Seaside Park for over 50 years and now people are suddenly being traumatized by a freaking statue. Get a life!

Christopher Columbus is dead, so just leave him alone, leave the statue that taxpayers did not pay for alone, and leave these whiners that keep complaining about a damn statue alone. Get a life!

You guys are in charge of the parks and already voted to put the Christopher Columbus statue back, and I am all for it. I have no problem with it. You know why? Because I'll be busy running a business, taking care of my family, taking care of my property, and actually having a LIFE!

Now, all the whiners should move on and get a life, TOO!

NEW BUSINESS

1. Christopher L. Caruso, The Council of Italian American Societies of Greater Bridgeport Inc., requesting to speak to the Board to update his progress of dialogue with the opposing side demanding that the Christopher Columbus statue not to be returned to Seaside Park.

Good evening Chairman Labrador and distinguished members of the Board of Parks Commissioners. Tonight, I come before you as one of the three representatives of the Italian American community and as importantly, a lifelong Bridgeport resident.

September 8, 2020

Before I present my report, I would like to sincerely thank each of you, individually and collectively as a Board for the unanimous vote at your legally convened August 11th meeting to restore the statue of Christopher Columbus to Seaside Park.

As a Board, you've taken much criticism for the courage you demonstrated. In effect, your vote righted a wrong – a wrong not committed by you, but by the Mayor. In June of this year, three representatives of the Italian—American community and five City Council Members led by City Council Member Jorge Cruz reached an agreement to keep the statue up, but to continue the dialogue with the larger community and to work on mutually agreed projects that would foster unity. While we were waiting for the Mayor to join us by supporting the agreement, he instead quietly and deceitfully took the statue down under the guise of unsubstantiated threats to damage it, and without the consent of the Board of Parks Commissioners in clear violation of the City Charter, Chapter 12, Sections 10(a), 12(a) and Section 22. But, it's not the first time nor will it be the last time that this administration has violated the City Charter – the City's rule of Law - with immunity.

The Mayor, by his actions, intentionally took sides against the Italian American community and all city residents who believe in fairness and process. He showed no leadership then and none now. Instead of bringing both sides together to reach a meaningful resolution, he fans the flames of division for political gain. Sadly, it's the age-old Bridgeport story. Keep the community divided and rob its citizens of their prosperity.

On Saturday, during a national holiday weekend, the CT Post reported on the City Attorney's comments that the Mayor does not have to honor the order issued by the Board of Parks Commissioners to restore the statue. I happen to personally like and very much respect the City Attorney, but his remarks were "off the cuff" and certainly not an official, well thought out and legally sound opinion. Frankly, his words could be mistaken as those of a first-year law student rather than a seasoned attorney. Of course, I certainly do not wish to impugn the efforts of first year law students.

The remarks of the City Attorney centered on the COVID-19 emergency as for the reason the statue cannot be returned. How convenient but has the City Attorney forgotten that the statue was removed during the same pandemic that has plagued the nation including Bridgeport since late February, and the same protests that have been taking place since the end of June. May be it's time to come up with another excuse, or something even more novel like telling the Mayor to obey the order of the Board of Parks Commissioners - NOW!.

Stay the course Commissioners! Remember, the City Attorney's remarks only advises the Mayor that he does not have to return the statue, but in the CT Post on Friday, July 24, the Mayor stated, " the authority for what happens with the monument rests with the City's Parks Board. The most prudent response is to allow the Parks Board to make a decision on how to proceed." Mr. Mayor, the Parks Board made the decision on August 11th and now you are required to abide by the City Charter and respect the Board's order to return the statue.

September 8, 2020

Board members, through your vote, you showed leadership and integrity. You leveled the playing field for both the Italian American community and the protestors to meet, and hopefully through dialogue, reach meaningful resolution.

When this chapter of Bridgeport's history is written, you, the Board of Parks Commissioners and NOT the Mayor will be recognized for the much-needed leadership that you demonstrated on this issue.

Now my report: At the August 11th Board meeting, you encouraged me to reach out to the opposing side to restart the dialogue that began in June and to work through the issues in an effort to reach a meaningful resolution. As I recall, you asked me to report my efforts to the Board.

To that end, I set out to reach individuals from the opposing side. Here are my results...

- Thursday, August 12 – For the first time, I met Jeff Baez at the News 12 press coverage at Seaside Park over the Board's decision to return the statue. Jeff's wife is a leader of the Golden Hill Paugussett Indian Nation. I gave Jeff my cell number. He said he would call me to set-up a time for him and his wife to meet with me. On August 13, 21 and 22, I posted on his Facebook page for him to call me, but I did not hear from him. Mr. Baez also offered to speak with City Council Member Cruz on my behalf to encourage him to meet with me. To date, I have not heard from Mr. Baez.
- Thursday, August 12 – I spoke with Gemeen Davis (Executive Director of Bridgeport Generation Now) at the same News 12 press coverage. I suggested to Gemeen that we should talk, and she agreed. I asked if she had my cell number and she responded that she did. Since I did not hear from her, I left her a voice message on August 25 at approximately 11:43 am to call me, but she did not. To date, I have not heard from her.
- Tuesday, August 25 – I called and left a voice message for City Council Member Jorge Cruz at approximately 11:45 am. He responded with a text telling me that he would not meet with me. In the text, he stated, "It's time that you adopt a more humanely and empathetic mindset as this dilemma CONTINUES to divide the community." In the text, he continued to refer to "The Killer" Christopher Columbus. Then, on August 27 and August 30, he sent me videos supporting his argument against the Columbus statue. To date, City Council Member Jorge Cruz and I have not spoken.
- Tuesday, August 25 – I called Reverend Stanley Lord, the President of the Greater Bridgeport National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) to introduce myself. I asked if he and I could meet. He agreed and an initial Zoom meeting was set for Thursday, August 27 at 11:30 am. Unfortunately, because of a health-related issue, I

September 8, 2020

had to cancel the meeting, but a new meeting was scheduled for Friday, September 4 at 11:30 am. The meeting took place and the Reverend was very attentive and listened. As a result of the meeting, and at my request, he agreed to set-up a meeting with those on the opposing side. In turn, I would arrange to have members of the Italian American community present at the meeting as well.

- Tuesday, September 8 – I spoke to Reverend Lord and he is working to get a meeting scheduled. With the Labor Day weekend, it was difficult to reach everyone. He will update me once dates and times are firm.

On behalf of the Italian American community, I would like to thank the Board of Parks Commissioners for the time and attention to this issue. I will update you with any and all progress. If any Commissioners have questions of me, I would be more than happy to answer them. Thank you!

Mr. Caruso said that he is encouraged by Reverend Lord's conversation in that he seems to be very fair and reasonable and willing to try sit down and bridge what divides this community as it concerns the Christopher Columbus statue.

Mr. Caruso said that he has said to him that there has to be a common ground, there has to be a middle to everything and by having a discussion we can hopefully get to that middle.

He is encouraged by their conversation with him and he waits for him to try to work out arrangements for a meeting.

He said that make no mistake about it, the actions of the Board are what is trying to bring both sides together on this issue.

He said that as he spoke to Reverend Lord, Bridgeport does not benefit by a divided community and if they can bring both sides together to try to reach the middle of this, he thinks it would be beneficial.

He said as what the Italian Community has said from the beginning, they are more than willing to sit and discuss the issue as they did back in June by invitation with Councilman Jorge Cruz.

He said that they are more than willing to sit down and talk.

Mr. Labrador has listened to everyone and will take everything under consideration.

Ms. Wade asked how come none of the Park Board commissioners are not included in any of the meetings.

Mr. Caruso said that if the Board wants to be part of the discussions, they could.

September 8, 2020

Mr. Caruso said that as an Italian community, they were invited to a meeting with Councilman Cruz who was going to put in a resolution in to remove the statue and he asked if he could put together a few of the Italian American leaders.

He said their goal was to talk and an agreement was reached.

He said that he was in touch with the Mayor's Office on July 3rd, and he asked them if they were going to take down the Christopher Columbus statue.

He was told that they were not, but on July 6, 2020, the statue came down suddenly and unexpectedly.

He said that at that point it polarized the debate and the people who opposed the statue felt a victory from the Mayor and then the Italian community was left out.

Mr. Caruso said that at the August 11, 2020, meeting, the Parks Board's vote brought back the prospective of the whole argument and by voting for the statue to go back up again brought back both sides to meet each other again to hopefully work through this issue.

He said that in any negotiation if both sides do not have skin in the game and are not going to lose something or be pressured than only one side can't meet, so both have to feel that way and the pressure of the statue going back up puts pressure on the opponents and well as the Italian community.

Mr. Caruso said that they are not tone deaf to what people are saying and the concerns they have raised.

The Italian Americans also have their reasons to honor Christopher Columbus, but that discussion has never taken place to discuss it further.

He said that the opposition wants the statue down and the Italian Americans want the statue down up and somewhere in the middle lies the answer.

Mr. Caruso said that the Italian, African, Latino, and other ethnicities helped to build this this city, everyone is a part of it.

He said that just because the Italian American's do not have demographically have the numbers that they once did does not mean they should be shut out of the conversation.

Mr. Caruso said that the Italian American's constantly help the community by providing turkey's for Thanksgiving, toys for Christmas, book bags for the youth etc. and they do it because it is their community also and they want to be part of it.

He said that they deserve their voice to be heard as well as others do.

September 8, 2020

2. James Meszoros requesting to permission to use Seaside Diamond # 1 for a Baseball showcase for players that are the age of 20 years or older to try out for the Rocky Mt. Grays and the Southern Shores Professional League. Requesting the use of Seaside Park's Diamond #1 on October 3, 10 and 17, 2020.

Mr. Meszoros said that he's been a Bridgeport resident for over 55yrs. He has coached in the Bridgeport Schools for 13yrs with the Bassick High School Baseball Program and in the summer, he coached and ran the Bridgeport Legion Baseball program for over 25yrs and last year he closed the Legion Program.

He said that this summer in 2020, he was asked to coach a US. Military Baseball team out of San Antonio, TX which was a big honor to coach the team. He said that they played this summer in Vicksburg, MS and the team that they played was call Black Sox from Hattiesburg which was a Negro league team back in 1940.

He said that he has been asked to coach a new team call the ROCKY Mt. GRAYS out of the Rock Mt. of North Carolina.

Mr. Meszoros that that he is coming before the Bridgeport Park Commission to request permission to use Seaside Diamond # 1 for a Baseball showcase for all players that are the age of 20 years or older to try out for the Rocky Mt. Grays and also the Southern Shores Professional League.

He said that he would like to use Diamond #1 on either October 3, 10, or 17, 2020.

Mr. Meszoros said that they will follow all of the COVID guidelines.

Ms. Wade asked what time of the day the games will be held.

Mr. Meszoros said they will be held in the morning.

Mr. Meszoros thanked the Park Commissioners for allowing him to come speak before the Parks Board

On a motion made by Mr. Cotto, seconded by Mr. Hosier, it was unanimously voted to approve the event with the usual stipulations.

3. Johnny Wargo, Boy Scout Troop 103, Salem Lutheran Church, 3160 Park Avenue, Bridgeport, CT and Scout committee representative, Wes Murphy, 174 Trelane Drive, Bridgeport, CT, requesting permission to create a map and paint tree markers for trails at Veteran's Memorial Park on September 12th and !3, 2020, to mark trails with paint and use chain saws to clear trails.

Mr. Murphy said that he is the Committee Chair of Boy Scout Troop 103, which meets at Salem Lutheran Church which is his own church.

September 8, 2020

He said that Johnny Wargo is one of his scouts who is presenting his project proposal before the Board this evening which is limited to trail markers for a couple of the trails and the posting of a map for guidance of hikers at Veteran's Memorial Park.

Mr. Murphy said that he is scheduled for September 12th and 13, 2020, but may be delayed if they are not able to get the required signatures from the City of Bridgeport and the Connecticut Yankee Council of Boy Scouts.

He said it would be rescheduled for the following weekend of September 19th and 20, 2020.

Mr. Murphy introduced Johnny Wargo.

Mr. Wargo said that he is a life scout and an Eagle candidate for the Boy Scouts Troop 103, and they meet at the Salem Lutheran Church, 3160 Park Avenue, Bridgeport, CT.

He has submitted his Eagle Scout project proposal and Park approval request to the Board of Park Commissioners for their approval.

Mr. Wargo said that the Eagle Scout is the highest achievement or rank attainable by the Boy Scouts of America.

He said that the requirements include earning at least 21 merit badges. The Eagle Scout must demonstrate Scout Spirit, an ideal attitude based upon the Scout Oath and Law, service, and leadership.

He said that this includes a service project that the scout plans, organizes, leads and manages.

He said that his project is marking a couple trails through Veteran's Memorial Park for people that would like to take a leisurely walk.

He said that he personally chose this project because he noticed that the trails throughout the park could be a little confusing and hard to navigate through, particularly where it intersects with the disk golf course.

Mr. Wargo said that the trails he wants to mark will help alleviate this problem since there will be tree markers which are painted symbols indicating the correct trail to follow.

He said that any use of saws would be limited to removal of dead branches preventing the clear line of site for the trail symbol's on trees and is expected to be minimal.

He said he will also post an updated map at the beginning of the trails, so people know about the trail symbols.

Mr. Wargo also noted that the project date would be on September 12th and 13, 2020, but may be pushed back to September 19th and 20th.

September 8, 2020

Mr. Cotto was concerned about the use of chain saws on the trail and who would be using it.

Mr. Wargo said that he has an adult leader would be operating his own chain saw.

He said that they would only use them if a tree or truck would be blocking the tree marks visibility.

Mr. Cotto said to check with the Parks Department before anyone cuts any trees or trunks.

Mr. Nadrizny said that the gentleman scheduled to use the chainsaw is most likely skilled, but the City cannot have the liability in doing so.

Mr. Labrador asked Mr. Wargo to do a pre-marking of anything that needs to be cut and have it approved by the Parks Department.

Mr. Murphy said they would be happy to cooperate with that and on the workdays, they would identify any obstruction, leave it in place and confer with the Parks Department and not do anything until they have their approval or assistance.

On a motion made by Mr. Cotto, seconded by Mr. Hosier, it was unanimously voted to allow the project with the stipulation that they notify the Parks Department if anything must be cut down or removed.

Mr. Wargo thanked the Park Commissioners.

4. Marion Livingston, The Baha'is of Bridgeport, 264 Saunders, Bridgeport, CT, requesting to hold a community service event at Newfield/Jessup Park, on Saturday, September 26, 2020, from 11:00 a.m. to 1:00 p.m., where they will distribute non-perishable food items.

On a motion made by Mr. Brideau, seconded by Mr. Cotto, it was unanimously voted to table the request due to lack of representation.

5. Pastor Oseias Reinheimer, New Jerusalem Church, 40 Silliman Place, Bridgeport, CT, requesting to use the Seaside Park Bandshell on Saturday, September 26, 2020, from 11:00 a.m. until 3:00 p.m. to provide entertainment which will comprise of 10 people playing instruments and 10 people providing people with pamphlets about COVID-19 and how to be safe.

On a motion made by Mr. Brideau, seconded by Mr. Cotto, it was unanimously voted to table the request due to lack of representation.

6. Tamatha Falcon, 150 Highland Avenue, Bridgeport, CT, requesting to use McLevy Park on Wednesday, September 16, 2020, from 5:30 p.m. until 8:30 p.m., to hold an AFSME Local 2311 union meeting.

September 8, 2020

On a motion made by Mr. Cotto, seconded by Mr. Brideau, it was unanimously voted to table the request due to lack of representation.

7. Officer Stacy Cascante, Sergeant Marlon Campo, 1085 Connecticut Avenue, requesting to use Johnson Oak Park on Saturday, September 19, 2020, from 10:00 a.m. until 3:00 p.m. to hold a Kids Back to School Cutz and Coat Drive.

Officer Cascante said they would like to hold a coat drive and will be cutting hair for free and will have distribute food that is wrapped up individually due to COVID guidelines.

She said that they will have a maximum of 100 people, and will have hand sanitizing stations, and will keep everyone socially distanced and will keep the groupings away from each other.

Sergeant Campo said that Johnson Oak Park is the perfect place because of the gazebo because they have four pillars and with electricity and outlet available at the gazebo.

He said that they have 400 coats in stock, and this should be a great event.

Mr. Labrador said that he thinks it is a beautiful thing that they are doing by reaching out to a community that needs the help and he respects and applauds them for something they do not have to do but understands the need and if more of us had the heart like them the City would be greater place.

Mr. Cotto also thanked them for the work they are doing.

On a motion made by Mr. Brideau, seconded by Mr. Cotto, it was unanimously voted to approve the event with the usual stipulations.

8. Kristy Brown, Barnum Foundation for Life, Inc., Shelton, CT requesting to begin their 5-10K road race event from Seabright Beach in Black Rock on Sunday, October 18, 2020, from 9:00 a.m. until 3:00 p.m.

Ms. Brown said their headquarters are in Shelton, CT, however they focus also support programs throughout Connecticut that focus on families and children.

They are partnering with Wakeman Boys and Girls Club in the Bridgeport area, and would like to make it an annual one to be able to support what they are offering to the children of the Bridgeport community.

She said that because people have been having virtual races due to COVID, Wakeman and her organization went out to their networks to get feedback on how people would feel on coming out to a community event and they received a lot of positive responses.

She said that the event will be held with Connecticut guidelines in place and she have provided a copy to the Board.

September 8, 2020

The State of Connecticut has outlined a section dedicated to road races.

They are partnered with a run company that has already run one in the area and is familiar with implementing them in a safe manor for everyone

The have 500 employees, so they guarantee they will have plenty of volunteer on hand to make sure all the practices are kept in place.

They have already done a ride along with Captain Lougal since they started planning this in 2019 which was canceled.

She said that they will keep the count to 150 and will follow all the COVID guidelines.

Mr. Brideau asked if she was already in touch with the Police Department.

She said that she has been in touch with them and has already been told how many police they would need for their route.

On a motion made by Mr. Cotto, seconded by Mr. Hosier it was unanimously voted to approve the event with the usual stipulations.

COMMISSIONER'S REPORT

Mr. Hosier moved that the proposed moratorium be discussed at the October Parks Board Meeting.

Mr. Labrador said that they could discuss the moratorium at the next meeting.

REPORTS – CRAIG A. NADRIZNY, ACTING PUBLIC FACILITIES DIRECTOR

Mr. Nadrizny said that the Parks and Recreation employees are out in the parks every day giving it their all, cleaning and doing maintenance and recently picking up after Storm Isaias.

BJ Brown Park – Removed old bushes, trimmed trees and fixed fences.

Manila Park – Finishing the upgrade of Manila Park.

Newfield Park – Went out to bid, they have a vendor to redo the restroom which will be ADA compliant.

Mr. Labrador complimented Mr. Nadrizny and said he is so proud of what the Parks Department has accomplished with the storm damage and on a daily basis.

REPORTS

Recreation Department

September 8, 2020

Ms. Conine wanted to speak a little about the positive aspects of the Parks and Recreation and spoke about the

Luann Conine, Recreation Superintendent, said she would like to say a few things about the wonderful job her staff did at the parks this summer.

She said that she knows there is a lot of negativity pro and con about the statue, but she would like to say something positive about her Lifeguards.

She said that her lifeguards worked seven days a week all day during a heat wave and were so diligent watching the water and so proactive for the safety of our Bridgeport residents.

She said they did everything including picking up branches in the park that came down during the storm.

She also commended her Checkpoint Attendants who went through a lot during this COVID time due to not allowing non-residents in the parks and who had to close the park when the quota of people was reached.

She said that her entire staff and herself had to endure a lot of hostility from people that were not being allowed into the parks due to the guidelines set by the City and State of Connecticut.

Mr. Labrador wanted to say that he knows sometimes the Lifeguards and Checkpoint staff have been overlooked for the great job they have done during these pandemic times with protests going on and having to keep people safe and social distancing and going above and beyond what their job description entails.

Mr. Labrador encouraged the Parks Board to observe the Parks and Recreation employees while they are at work to see firsthand the great work they do.

He wanted to thank Luann Conine, Recreation Superintendent, Craig Nadrizny, Acting Public Facilities Director, Lee Nastu, Recreation Coordinator, Vaughn Sims, Recreation Coordinator, Robert Valeri, Forman, Fernando Dias, Forman and all the Park and Recreation staff.

Mr. Hosier said that he appreciates everything that Luann Conine and her staff does and apologies for not speaking up.

Mr. Cotto said that he cannot thank Luann Conine enough for what her and her staff has done and will continue to do for us; including Lee Nastu and Craig Nadrizny who oversees everything and he said that the time will come when Luann gets her just due but for tonight he appreciates her with all his heart.

Ms. Wade said that she appreciates everything Luann and her staff has done and is sorry for the terrible ways some of the park patrons have treated her and her staff.

She said that they have all done a fantastic job.

September 8, 2020

Mr. Brideau appreciates Luann and her staff and wanted to commend her and her staff for a job well done.

Mr. Nastu said he wanted to echo what Ms. Conine had mentioned and agrees with everything she said and that it was a very difficult year to maneuver with everything going on, but the Lifeguards and Checkpoint Attendants handled everything very well.

He also wanted to commend the Maintenance Department for the great job they have done and how they are always willing to help with things they need done and for answering any call they have no matter how small the request may be.

Mr. Labrador thanked Lee Nastu for all that he does in the Parks and Recreation Department and especially all the scheduling headaches he goes through just trying to do his job.

He also said that his grandchildren also appreciate him, and they know what kind of person he is because of the way he has treated them and others

Mr. Labrador said that as the Parks Board Chair, he has Park Board members with him that are here because they are volunteers and they do not get anything out of it but sometimes negativity and abuse.

He said that as the Parks Board Chair, he will support every single Parks Commissioner.

He said that what they should be doing as a Board is serving the people of the City of Bridgeport, not because of political influence, but because when they decide to make a motion on something it is based on reality and on the right thing.

He said that there are a lot of emotional issues going on these days but as a Parks Board Commission up to today, they have run a Board that is strictly for the people of the City of Bridgeport.

He said that he hopes the Commissioners will continue to work this way and in no way will he be looking for any negative attitudes from our Board members, and if they do have any issues to talk about, we can talk about it.

Mr. Labrador said, remember at the end of the day our actions, words and emotions that we put in to play should be done strictly by the thoughts of us doing it the right way, not the way others want us to do it, but what we feel is the right thing for the City of Bridgeport.

He said that the Department works hard from 6:00 a.m. until late at night and no one picks up the phone to let them know how much they appreciate their work.

Mr. Labrador said that he appreciates the Parks and Recreation employees and wanted to say that he has received only positive things about Luann Conine and Lee Nastu.

September 8, 2020

He said that you can cherish these words because they are worth more than money can buy or any plaque that you could put on a wall, and he is proud to say that he agrees with the positive words that have been spoken.

Mr. Labrador said that we, the Parks Board will not let anyone in this City get us to do things other than what the right way is; we stand for ourselves and believe in what we believe and up to now we have done things and no one has come back to the Parks Board saying that we voted on something ugly or that really hurt them or how they feed their family or how they enjoy the parks.

Mr. Labrador ended by asking the Board to please keep this in mind and never let anyone influence them on saying something you do not want to say.

He said that he will do the same and if it costs him his position of President of the Board of Parks Commissioners than so be it, he will not do anything that he is pushed into doing without his will or without him feeling he does not want to do it.

Mr. Nadrizny had no further business.

ADJOURNMENT

On a motion made by Mr. Brideau, seconded by Mr. Cotto, it was unanimously voted to adjourn the meeting at 7:50 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Ellen M. Gerrity

Ellen M. Gerrity
Clerk