

March 9, 2021

The meeting of the Board of Park Commissioners was held on Tuesday, March 9, 2021, 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:

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Meeting ID: 920 3903 2747

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 March 9, 2021, 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. Absent was Craig A. Nadrizny, Acting Public Facilities Director, Also, in attendance were: Luann Conine, Recreation Superintendent, Stephen Hladun, Special Project Coordinator, 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 FEBRUARY 9, 2021, 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**

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Please submit written testimony to Ellen.Gerrity@bridgeportct.gov by 4:30p.m.on Monday, March 8, 2021.***

OLD BUSINESS

1. Charles Dowd, Deputy Director of Athletics, External Operations and Bobby Valentine, Executive Director of Athletics, Sacred Heart University, requesting to update the Board regarding putting a scoreboard at Veteran's Memorial Park baseball field.

Mr. Dowd said that he had spoken to Associate City Attorney Eroll Skyers who informed them that the City Attorney had agreed that they only needed a short addendum to the their existing lease and that was moved forward in large part of overcoming the challenge and concern of the electricity usage.

He said that under the current plan, the NEVCO Board will be powered by generator and that will enable them to not have to tap into any existing electrical nor establish any new electrical other than from the Board to the generators which will be mounted out by the scoreboard.

He said that there will be multiple generators, two that Sacred Heart University will use and one designated for the City to use which will have nominal sound issues.

Mr. Dowd said that they have contracted with NEVCO, the scoreboard manufacturer and ABC Sign will do the installation and their engineers will be doing studies on the foundations and they will be pulling permits from the City of Bridgeport in order to facilitate the project.

He said that they are hoping to move forward so they can enhance the ballpark at Veteran's Park.

He said that the scoreboard will be located in the right center section of the fence and will not impede the batters as they get a hit and will enhance the experience for any player utilizing the field, from the Division 1 players coming to play Sacred Heart to local Bridgeport players on their way up.

Mr. Labrador said that the wording "Veterans Memorial Park City of Bridgeport" on the scoreboard looks great.

Mr. Labrador stated that Mr. Dowd has answered the question on the electricity, and they have been in touch with the City Attorney's Office regarding the scoreboard.

Mr. Dowd said that they have been in contact with Associate City Attorney Skyers on a regular basis and Attorney Skyers reached out to them today with the welcome news that City Attorney's Office said that they only have to submit the addendum to the existing relationship.

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Mr. Labrador asked the Commissioners if they had any questions?

Mr. Hosier thanked Mr. Dowd for working so close with the Commissioners and doing what the Board needed to be done.

Mr. Cotto asked what the generators run on, gas or are they electric.

Mr. Valentine said that the generators are hand carried portable generators that run on gas.

He said that the scoreboard could be on all day and the generator would run on one fill of gas.

He said that they are as big as a large brief case that has the generator and gas in it, and it connects to the scoreboard and disconnect at the end of the day.

He said that as Mr. Dowd mentioned there are three generators, where one that the City keeps, one that Sacred Heart keeps and the third would be kept in the locked shed to be used as a backup if needed.

Mr. Cotto inquired about the noise capacity of the generator.

Mr. Valentine said that there is very little noise, it is more like a hum of a vacuum cleaner.

On a motion made by Mr. Brideau, seconded by Mr. Cotto, it was unanimously voted to allow Sacred Heart University to put up a scoreboard at Veteran's Memorial Park Baseball Field.

Mr. Labrador congratulated Mr. Dowd and Mr. Valentine and said that he looks forward to working with them and any other matter that may arise as far as the field and equipment around the field.

Mr. Dowd and Mr. Valentine thanked the Board for their approval of the scoreboard.

NEW BUSINESS

1. Maria Pereira, 138th District City Councilwoman, requesting to speak to the Board of Park Commissioners at the Tuesday, March 9, 2021, meeting, regarding public parks used for private events/uses, and the Christopher Columbus statue.

Ms. Pereira said that she would like to speak on two things this evening, the first being Manila Park on Pearl Harbor Street.

She said that at one time the park was run down with only a single jungle gym that was about 25 years old, with no trash barrel.

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She said that there were no trees, no lights and didn't even have a park bench to sit on.

She said that mothers could not even bring their children to that little jungle gym because there was no place to sit.

She said that when she was elected, she asked Craig Nadrizny to join her to look at the park.

She told Mr. Nadrizny that this is a neighborhood park in an impoverished community with many people in the community who are single mothers with children who are quite frankly, living in poverty.

She said that they do not even have a decent park to take their children.

Mr. Nadrizny told her that he grew up across the street from the park and had a full plan on its future renovation.

Ms. Pereira said that the Parks Department did an amazing job on renovation the park with swings, a modernized jungle gym, benches, trash barrels and all types of trees were planted.

She said that she would like to hold a ribbon cutting in early May on a Saturday.

She said that she would like to fund the cost with fundraising and have a kid's face painting, a DJ, snacks, and provide important information about how to get rental assistance, and things of that nature and she would like to do this in conjunction with the Board of Park Commissioners.

She said that when the Commission does good for the neighborhood, they should be recognized it.

She also said that Mr. Nadrizny also deserves a lot of the credit, because before she started griping about the park, he literally already had it on his radar.

She said that the name of the Park is Manila Park and does not know if it was named after an individual or not, but she would like the Parks Board to consider naming the park "Senator Gomes Park", in honor of a senator Ed Gomes of the 23rd District, which does encompass the JFK present.

She said that she would like to get a permanent signage installed also.

She would like to hold the ribbon cutting ceremony in early May with the Park Commissioners, and invite Senator Blumenthal, the Connecticut Post, and Fran Recchia the reporter for News 12, and she will work with Ellen Gerrity to take out a permit.

Mr. Labrador said that it's a great idea and an effort well taken by her as far as getting it going with Mr. Nadrizny.

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He said that it is the small things in life like this that mean a lot to people and it isn't always about money or riches, it's about the simple things in life, and a small community park like Manila Park means a lot to parents that do not have means of transportation to go anywhere else.

He said that the importance of something like that for the neighborhood and community is a long time coming and he would like to see this happen and as soon as we know the COVID 19 Guidelines for events.

Ms. Pereira said that the Governor announced that some restrictions will be lifted on March 19th and you can now have up to 200 people at outdoor events.

Ms. Gerrity said that the City will be having a meeting on events this week and we will know better how events will be handled.

Ms. Pereira said that she and volunteers will be dropping off invitations' door to door for the ribbon cutting event to the entire neighborhood.

She said that Manila Park is significantly better than it was before, and she would like to address that to the media.

She said that the Park Commissioners need resignation the good things they do.

Ms. Pereira said that Success Park has come a long way also, with a putting a gate around the parking lot so kids would not get hit by cars driving through there, putting in lighting, a splash pad, benches, picnic tables, removing the dilapidated tennis court and adding a pine tree for Christmas tree lightings.

Ms. Pereira said that she would like to talk about the issue with the Columbus statue.

She said that she wants to say that the Park Commissioners that they have demonstrated and encouraged.

She said that as somebody who's been in Bridgeport politics for 12 years and not very friendly with what she likes to call the democratic machine.

She said that she thinks that the Parks Board stood up and did the right thing with respect to the statue, but, she finds it deeply disturbing that the Board voted in their August 2020 Parks Board meeting to return the statue which is under the Park Board's sole authority and purview under the City Charter and tried to have it installed but was then shut down which is just so outrageous to her.

She said that it is six months later, and the statue is not back, and we are about to turn our clocks forward on Sunday for spring.

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She said that she understands that somehow this has been referred to the City Attorney's Office, which does not understand, because the matter has already been decided.

She said that the Parks Board has sole authority over the parks and she is not sure why the City Attorney's Office is involved; it's a matter of simply returning the statute that quite frankly the Mayor has no authority to dispute.

She said that she has learned over her 12 years in Bridgeport politics that if you let someone disrespect you, what you show them is that they can disrespect you repeatedly and she really does consider this a complete lack of disrespect to the Board of Park Commissioners.

Ms. Pereira said that a decision was made, and no one has the purview or authority to make that decision, but the Parks Board and she does not understand how the statue has not been returned.

She said that if this issue is in the City Attorney's Office, she would just like to say that there is no public agency of the city that is more reprehensible than the City's Attorney's Office.

She always tells people that we have a lawless law department, and when you sent something there, she does not know why the Board would expect any assistance because the City Attorney's do whatever the Mayor needs them to do.

She said that she would ask the Parks Board to put their foot down and move forward with putting the Christopher Columbus Statue by up.

She said that if they need to raise funds privately, that she will help raise the money and that she know plenty of Italian companies that would love to volunteer their services to help put the statue back up.

Mr. Labrador said that the Parks Board did what they thought was the proper thing to do within their guidelines as far as putting the statue back up.

He said that Public Facilities was preparing to put the statue back up when they were told to stop because there was no money to put it back up, even though the person who was putting it back up said that he would wait a year to be paid.

Mr. Labrador said that when the Park Board is told not to put the statue back up, he does not know what other resources we have and where the Board stands legally.

He said that so far, no one has gotten back to the Board of Park Commissions on the statue.

Mr. Labrador said that he has asked for three quotes from companies to put the statue back up and has not received an answer.

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He has also asked if the Italian Society was willing to pay for the statues return, who would open the door to get the statue; he was told that it would be the Mayor's decision and therefore he is waiting on the advice of the City Attorney's Office.

Ms. Pereira said that the City Attorney's Office is under the city charter and represents every board and commission including the Parks Board to legally represent your interests.

She said that every bench, tree flower and statue is under the Park Board's control, and no one else's, they do not have a right to deny the Board access to the statue.

Mr. Brideau reminded the Park Commissioners that the Mayor washed his hands completely about putting the statue back up and said that if the Board wants it put back, they should pay for it.

He said that it his contention that the Mayor took the statue down and he should pay to put it back up and the Parks Board should not pay a dime.

Ms. Pereira said that she wanted to put on the record, that the Italians are livid over the statue situation and are major political donors and the Mayor will never get re-elected.

Ms. Pereira said that the Parks Board has a budget because under the city charter whenever you sell parkland every dollar should go to the parks board in your budget that they can only spend.

She asked where the money was from the sale of the parkland to Sacred Heart.

Mr. Brideau said that the Parks Board relinquished the money in an agreement made with the City to go into the General Fund.

Ms. Pereira that the City Charter does not give the Park Commission that power and that every dollar should go into the parks budget for parks.

Mr. Labrador said that he cannot speak for all City Attorney's, but the one he has worked with has been honest and open with him and he cannot say that he hasn't returned his phone call, because he has and he is hoping that he has not been put in a bad situation because of the guidance he has given us on the Parks Board.

Mr. Labrador wanted Ms. Pereira to know that the Parks Board has not dropped the ball on the returning of the statue to Seaside Park and we have made it clear that the Mayor's Office took the statue down and they should be putting it back up.

He said he will wait for the City Attorney to get back to him but if he doesn't, he may have to go in a new direction.

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Ms. Pereira said that it has been six months and this esteemed City Attorney should have figured it out after six months.

She said that the Park Commissioners do a really good job and volunteer their time, and they should never allow themselves to be disrespected.

Mr. Labrador said he is ready to take the next step towards the statue situation and hopes that this can be done nice manner.

Mr. Labrador asked if any of the other Park Commissioners have anything to add tonight?

Ms. Wade said that she thought that since the Board voted to put the statue back up, she thought that it was already back up.

She said that she understands how the City works, and people are going to do what they are told to do.

She said that the Board has already voted on putting the statue back and they do not need to make the motion again.

Mr. Hosier said that the Board must keep working on it.

Mr. Labrador said that he is hoping that under the City Attorney that he has been speaking with will guide him in a faster and more reasonable to get this done.

He said that he knows that Ms. Pereira and the Italian community have been patiently waiting and he and the other Park Commissioners have also been waiting along with her, but his father always said that you could only put so much air in a balloon before it busts.

Ms. Pereira said that she agrees that you want to always go to the channels that are respectful, that are about following policy procedure and the law, you want to address the item formally in a committee or commission; she is all for that.

She said that she also knows that with this administration, and with these people who are the helm, they do not play nice.

She said that she is willing to do all that and then as everybody here knows I have no problem escalating.

If the next Mayor wants her support, the condition will be that every City Attorney is terminated, that will be her condition to get her support for Mayor three years from now. Every one of them has to be removed.

Ms. Pereira said that if the Commissioners haven't driven by Manila Park on Pearl Harbor Street, she would like them to take a look at it.

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She said that the Board did not see the before pictures of Manila Park, but it is so much better than it was a year and a half ago, and that's why she really wants to do something nice for the neighborhood, and she'd love to have all of the Park Commissioners to join her to be recognized for all of their good work.

Ms. Pereira thanked the Parks Board for their time.

COMMISSIONER'S REPORT

Mr. Hosier asked if could read the following statement to the Park Board Commissioners:

To provide a safe and secure environment for individuals engaging in recreational activities in all city parks. To provide and enforce all levels of law enforcement. To enforce quality of life issues. To conduct public safety assessments. To engage in recreational advisements and to enhance community services and community relations. Thus, is the mission statement of the Bridgeport Park Police. The Commission is looking for support from the City Council to fulfill the mission statement. Therefore, the Parks and Recreation Commission requests of the City Council the funding of 9 Park Police Officers in order to meet that mission.

Furthermore, the position of Park's Director has remained dormant for a prolonged period of time. In accordance with the City Charter, we are asking the City Council to provide necessary funding to hire a Parks Director. In light of the fact that Bridgeport is referred to as the Park City, it is imperative that the numerous parks and beaches be managed by a director who possesses qualifications and experiences for the successful management of parks and beaches.

He said he would like to put into the form of a motion that we as a Park Commission ask the City Council for funding to cover the (9) Park Police and to put in funding for a Director of Parks.

Mr. Labrador said he does not know that a vote is necessary.

Mr. Hosier said that he would then like to have this put on the record.

Mr. Labrador said that he will speak to Ms. Gerrity before the weekends out.

He said that he will be talking with the people he needs to talk to and will try to get on the Common Council.

Mr. Brideau said that he is also in favor of the request.

Mr. Labrador said that he supports the idea and that it is long overdue.

Mr. Hosier said that this is what we want as a Parks Commission and they need to respond to this.

REPORTS – CRAIG A. NADRIZNY, ACTING PUBLIC FACILITIES DIRECTOR

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Mr. Hladun read the Director's report:

Park Projects:

- Comfort Station Renovations: Newfield Park Restroom renovations request for pricing to hire an architect to create renderings and a bid set is due March 9. Went Field restroom fixture replacements are in the process of being installed with Public Facilities Building Maintenance.
- Court Reconstruction / Resurfacing: Courts identified for crack repair and resurfacing include Puglio, Central/Kennedy Stadium, Glenwood and for reconstruction Washington Park. Pickleball striping of certain courts will also be considered for seniors.
- D. Fairchild Wheeler Memorial Golf Course:
 - FWB057213—Red Course Holes #10-18 Sand Bunker Project @ Fairchild Wheeler has been opened on Tuesday, March 2, 2021 at 2PM. One bidder responded. Recommendation to Award being prepared.
- Newfield Park “Juneteenth” Memorial: Approved at the May 2020 meeting held by the Board of Park Commissioners, the memorial plaque is in the process of the final proofing. A stone and beautification area shall be reviewed for the project to work towards completion by June 2021.
- Parks Maintenance Division:
 - New Dugout Benches Field improvements are being planned at Newfield Park to support a new little league being planned as well as Seaside Diamond 11 and Beardsley Diamond 5.
 - Playground Assessment and repairs are in progress. Repair parts are on order where needed. Playground Wood Safety Fibers are scheduled for replenishing surfacing where applicable.
 - Picnic Areas at Beardsley, Newfield, Seaside and Went Field are being prepared for new grills, benches, and picnic tables.
 - In-House Tree stump grinding in city districts is expected to resume week ending March 19.
- Perry Memorial Arch at Seaside Park: Assessment report and preliminary opinion of cost has been completed by the Consultant. Funding including grant opportunities are being sought for the construction bid process. Additional probes and prep work being planned in the coming months to finalize bid set.
- Pleasure Beach: Planning to prepare for the possible re-opening of Pleasure Beach is under way.

Recreation Dept.

- The Seaside Lifeguard Station Renovations are under way.

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- Sports Permits: We are preparing for the Spring Sports Season when state guidelines are released and contacting our sports leagues to come up with a safe plan for play this year.
- Seasonal Hiring: We are taking applications for seasonal positions - lifeguards, checkpoint attendants, splashpad attendants, and hopefully if it can be held, summer camp.

Mr. Hladun had no further business.

Mr. Labrador asked Mr. Hladun about the Seasonal Maintainer application and how one would apply for a job.

Mr. Hladun said that they are trying to get as many applicants as possible and he knows that Luis Burgos has reached out to Civil Service and Human Resources.

Mr. Hladun said that there is a link to the application packet on the Parks website.

He said that he had just shared the application recently and we are going to start trying to promote the application on a wider scale and we have already requested that it be posted through social media and to have some notification through the Mayor's Office to try to get more applicants.

Mr. Labrador said that people have come to him asking how to apply for a Seasonal Parks Maintainer position.

He said that some of the people that would like to apply are not really computer savvy, so, if they are being made to jump from site to site to get a basic application put in a lot of them are being discouraged.

He said that we really need manpower and the people that we use to have think that it's easier to stay at home and collect unemployment than it is to come to work.

He said that we need to make the application more accessible for those that are willing to work, and don't want to sit at home anymore.

Mr. Nastu said that we still offer the application through the Parks and Recreation Office if they want to stop by.

Ms. Gerrity said that the application can also be e-mailed to them if they want.

Mr. Labrador asked if Ms. Conine had any suggestions or anything she thinks that we can do better to get the word out about Seasonal Maintainer positions?

Ms. Conine said that we are advertising on Facebook, the City website and other outlets and it is very difficult for us to get applicants this year.

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She said that they have called all the lifeguards from last year and that they are anxious to come back and hopefully we'll have more news about our camp and how many kids we will be able to have and where it will located.

She said it is a tough time and if the commissioners know of any applicants, to please guide them to either the Park Office or the City website.

Mr. Labrador said that he really enjoys hearing Steve Hladun's voice again and he appreciates him and everything he does.

He said that he appreciates the work everyone does and he knows that it is definitely beyond what their job description states, and even though some other people may never understand, please know that he does, and he knows that the rest of the Board of Commissioners appreciates them too.

ADJOURNMENT

On a motion made by Ms. Wade, seconded by Mr. Cotto, it was unanimously voted to adjourn the meeting at 6:00 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Ellen M. Gerrity

Ellen M. Gerrity
Clerk