



**CHICOPEE CITY COUNCIL
RECREATION COMMITTEE**

MEMBERS

Frank Laflamme, Chairman
Stan Walczak, Vice Chairman
Shane Brooks
Fred Krampits
Gerard Roy

APPROVED 12-4-19

**MINUTES
May 22, 2019**

Members Present: Laflamme, Walczak, Krampits, Brooks, Roy

Also Present: Councilor Courchesne, Benjamin Strepka (Superintendent Parks Department) Gary Lonczak (Golf Commissioner), Mike O'Neill (Director of Golf), Rick Nadeau (Golf Commissioner), Gary Ziemba (Golf Commissioner), Gary Ziemba (Recreation Commissioner), Maureen Buxton (Recreation Commissioner), Liz Montemagni (Recreation Commissioner)

In compliance with the open meeting laws the Chairman asked if anyone in the audience was recording the meeting. Hearing none the meeting continued.

The following are the minutes of a public hearing held Wednesday, May 22, 2019 at 6:30 PM in the RiverMills Senior Center, Card Rm #9, 5 W Main Street, Chicopee, MA 01013.

Item #1

BE IT ORDERED THAT the Recreation Committee meet with the Parks and Recreation Department and Golf Department for an update on the department's budget, capital and outlook for 2019.

Mike O'Neill stated that we are two months into the season and our biggest battle has been the weather. He stated that the Golf Course is in great shape. The company that's running it does a great job. He stated that we have a good slate of outings, tournaments and leagues booked for the year. He stated that our revenue has been headed in the right direction but the one battle is the weather. When we are open on a day like today we had two hundred and fifty rounds out there. He stated that we have a national junior golf tournament that's playing in Chicopee July 22nd through the 28th.

Councilor Roy added that the Commissioners are doing a great job.

Councilor Walczak stated on the present budget; do you have any anticipated short comings in salaries or expenses.

Mike O'Neill stated not in salaries or expenses but for the upcoming budget year the big change is in the water line item. He stated that in years past it has always been part of the contract with IGM who takes care of the course but we are going to pay that directly this year. He stated that it's the irrigation part of the cost which we had to estimate this year because they measure in cubic feet now. He stated that our Water Department has increased substantially so we are budgeting for about one hundred and fifty five thousand for that. He stated to try to combat that we have raised our rates in the last couple of years; we have a couple of events this year.

Councilor Walczak stated what increases are you anticipating in 2020.

Mike O'Neill answered water and minimum wage.

Councilor Walczak asked on capital equipment what's happening short term and long term.

Mike O'Neill answered spray rig, air raider and seed box from last year are great and helping out with the conditions, they were needed. He stated that in the upcoming year they are looking at a couple of utility vehicles, and a rough mower; the ones we have are fifteen years old and the mower is from the nineties. They are on our capital improvement for 2020.

Councilor Walczak asked how many more years on the golf cart lease.

Mike O'Neill stated we are just about to start year four in June on a four year lease. He stated that these carts are in such good condition right now, we take good care of them. He stated that we could just get new batteries for them. He stated that these carts bring in two hundred and fifty to three hundred thousand dollars a year for the City.

Mike O'Neill guessed the batteries would cost over forty to fifty thousand.

Councilor Walczak stated is there any plans to upgrade the driving range.

Mike O'Neill stated that it's the wettest part of the course right now and it's been a struggle to keep the balls from the netting. He stated that we are looking at a new Teeing area. Right now we are looking at making one whole synthetic row where you can put your tee right into the ground. It's like artificial grass. He stated that the overhead down there is very little and it's a money maker.

Councilor Walczak recommended put up a board indicating golf lessons. He asked if there was a woman's golf tournament at the course.

Mike O'Neill stated we just had one and it was a very rainy day and a low turnout. He stated he would like to have the kids from camp Opie over to learn the basics of golf.

Councilor Walczak stated that Chicopee is recognized as the ninth best course in Massachusetts. He stated that you need to make that more visible in the way you advertise or market.

Mike O'Neill stated its all courses that are reviewed through golf in the state.

Councilor Laflamme asked how the concession building is doing.

Mike O'Neill stated that the club house is old and we try to keep it patched up. He stated that we had some siding put up this year and it looks fantastic on the outside. He stated on the inside it's always a battle, we have battles with our air-conditioning unit each and every summer. He stated that the equipment could be upgraded in there. It's a fifty five year old building and we are open to any suggestions.

Gary Lonczak stated that the last time we met the Council may have proposed seeing if some money could be appropriated to have some review or analysis of the building done given its age and condition. He also added that going forward over the next few years is to start to replace that equipment with Chicopee Country Club owned equipment so that we could get other bidders on an equal playing field.

Benjamin Strepka stated that there are coming into their busy season with the Parks and Recreation but our biggest problem has been the weather. He stated that it has affected our schedule a little bit and we are doing the best we can to keep games up and fields dry. He stated that we are in the process of hiring seasonal employees; Lifeguards, Park Attendants, Rangers and all of our DPW positions that are open. He's hoping to have the Recreational positions finalized within the next couple of weeks. He stated that softball leagues are up and running right now. Rentals are filling up fast. We have bids in for the fireworks and we are scheduling concessions. He stated that our summer concert series are all booked. He stated that Purchasing Department is putting together a contract for online software for us Myrep.com and we are hoping to go live with it in the fall. He stated that we just finished putting together the baseball diamond at Szot Park and Nash Park is coming along nicely. He stated that he is working with Chris Chaban to put together a plan to have Fairview Tennis Court replaced; it will be attached to a road resurfacing bid that will go out in the fall. He stated that on the other courts they will have a specialty company come in and do slight repairs but nothing major.

Benjamin Strepka stated that he is working with the Planning Department to put together an application for a park grant fiscal year 2020. He stated for work on Rivers Park and some ADA pathways, upgrades to the bath house, replace filters in the pool as well as replacing the baseball diamond. He stated that they have selected a designer for the dog park. On Bemis Pond we just selected our Engineer to start working on the lower dam removal to restore it to a stream.

Councilor Walczak asked if there are any unanticipated shortcomings in your salaries or repair expenses.

Benjamin Strepka answered we have four or five open positions so there's some money to work around with the budget. He stated that next year; contract, wages and with minimum wage going up we had to increase all of our recreation positions to stay competitive and keep them on a scale.

Councilor Walczak asked have you anticipated what percentage is going to be available to you.

Benjamin Strepka stated we started putting together those numbers and we're starting to get a rough estimate of what we're going to have available. He stated he would like to move some money into our overtime line item just to play catchup because of the weather.

Benjamin Strepka stated that we do have money to buy a new truck and we need a couple mowers replaced. He stated that he is looking into replacing all the bleachers throughout the parks.

Benjamin Strepka stated that he was interested in coming up with new rules for the dog park.

Councilor Walczak suggested that you put one of the Gang mowers at the Fairview Fire Station so you can mow; Preston, Fairview, Bowie, Nash, Rivers parks.

Benjamin Strepka agreed

Councilor Walczak asked about the status of the Assistant Superintends job.

An unidentified Parks & Rec Commissioner stated that they are waiting for the job description to be revised.

Benjamin Strepka stated that the parks and pools open July 1, 2019.

Councilor Walczak stated that Fairview Park is not physically attractive and there is very little there. He stated that he would like to see water spray features, a welcome to Opee sign, a basketball hoop, new playground equipment, and a ball diamond. He stated that it would be an incentive to send their kids to camp if we offered swimming lessons.

Councilor Krampits stated organizations using the park without paying the fees or getting permission, will that be covered with the overtime employees to go spot check and enforce that.

Benjamin Strepka stated that it is something we could look into. We just adjusted our Leader of Recreation job description so he has a little more responsibilities. He stated that it's something we can utilize with the Ranger as well.

Benjamin Strepka stated that some of these fields are all getting over used.

Councilor Walczak stated that we have a lot of outside playing in terms of people coming from other cities. He stated that when asked they could not produce a permit. He stated that they're good fields but they are constantly being used by outsiders.

Liz Montemangi stated that we have plans to go to each of the parks and do a walk through with the Commissioners and re-evaluating what is being used at each park.

Benjamin Strepka stated that we are utilizing almost every park that has fields. Rivers one has finally dried out and we can start using that again.

Councilor Walczak stated that having the lack of your positions filled greatly affects what you can get done. How does that impact the maintenance effort such as Memorial Day.

Benjamin Strepka stated that we have High school games all over the place and we are just getting able to start mowing. He stated that it has been taking a toll and we have guys all day draining diamonds because of the rain. He stated that we just started filling some of these positions.

Councilor Walczak stated you should think about privatizing the cemeteries.

Councilor Laflamme inquired about the new trash truck.

Benjamin Strepka stated that before they took over the route we were doing trash in our parks about twice per week. He stated that right now they are only able to do it once per week. He stated the bigger parks trash fills up very quickly. He stated that we need to change the DPW schedule to get them through there at least twice a week.

Benjamin Strepka stated that all our trucks have lift gates on them.

Councilor Laflamme stated that the truck was specifically for the parks and now he sees it doing side streets.

Councilor Laflamme stated that the music in the parks is extremely loud.

Benjamin Strepka stated that should be directed to the Director of Athletics.

Councilor Laflamme stated if you have a permit for the parks are you required to carry it with you.

Benjamin Strepka stated yes. He stated that the only ones who do not need a permit are the youth baseball teams, they have a blanket permit.

Councilor Laflamme asked how many open positions do you have right now for staffing.

Benjamin Strepka stated five positions. He stated that we are filling from within and starting to fill the summer positions.

Councilor Laflamme asked if Camp Opee has gone down in attendance.

Benjamin Strepka stated that it has still held course. He stated that there is one hundred sixty opening per session and typically they are always filled.

Maureen Buxton stated her biggest concern was filling the Assistant Superintendent position.

Liz Montemagni stated that Ben needs a good assistant that he can rely on.

Gary Ziemba stated that he sees a lot of people use the Parks Department as a feeder system to go to another department because it pays more money. He stated that Ben is going to bring a lot of stability to this department because; he grew up here, he started at the bottom as a laborer and he's smart.

Councilor Krampits motion to place on file – Councilor Walczak 2nd the motion – motion passed

Committee vote 5 – 0 favorable

Item #2

Councilor Krampits motion to approve the Minutes of June 24, 2018 – Councilor Walczak 2nd the motion – motion passed

Meeting adjourned at 7:50 PM