

These minutes are subject to approval by the Parks and Recreation Commission

The Parks and Recreation Commission held an in-person meeting on Tuesday, October 10, 2023 with an opportunity for public participation, at the Newtown Teen Center, 53 Church Hill Road, Newtown, CT 06470.

The meeting was called to order by Chairman Clinton DePaolo at 6:03pm.

Present: Clinton DePaolo, Warren Spencer, Aaron Britton, Vincent Yanni, Rance Thompson

Staff Present: Amy Mangold

Absent: Jim Parker, David Payne, Rose Ann Reggiano, Carl Samuelson

Public: Jan Brown, Bruce Goulart, Jeff Rubino, Rob Merrifield

Public Participation:

Jan Brown of 15 Lori Lynn Circle, Newtown, asked for an update on stenciling the Pickleball courts. Ms. Mangold will follow up with Carl Samuelson. Ms. Brown stated that Pickleball is growing by leaps and bounds. She also relayed that she and Mr. Bruce Goulart, 15 Lori Lynn Circle, Newtown, were leaving to attend the ARPA meeting. Ms. Mangold thanked them for attending the NPR meeting as well as the ARPA meeting.

Mr. Jeff Rubino of 77 Head of Meadow Road, Newtown, stated that he is here tonight to represent Newtown Soccer Club. Mr. Rubino is the VP for Travel Soccer and a new board member with Newtown Soccer Club. Mr. Rubino wished to raise concerns about field usage and closures due to rain. He has made headway in his discussions with Mr. Carl Samuelson with regard to the handling of field closures during the excessive rain we have experienced of late. Mr. Rubino requested that some adjustments be made as other towns have more play time on their fields despite the heavy rain. He expressed that parents are concerned about the lack of play time this season in Newtown as they believe other towns to be less restrictive during periods of heavy rain.

Mr. Rob Merrifield of 14 Stonewall Ridge, Newtown, stated that he is a parent with 4 children playing with Newtown Soccer Club. He played with the club as a child and is a former board member of Newtown Soccer Club. He too expressed concern about play time on fields during this excessive rainy period. He suggested having someone assigned as a liaison to communicate between Newtown Soccer Club and Newtown Parks and Recreation. This would be helpful for next year to keep communication ongoing regarding field usage during periods with heavy rain. He also discussed having more fields lined for soccer at some point in the future.

Commissioner Thompson suggested that one or two fields without cosmetic needs could be set aside for play during excessive rainy periods.

Ms. Mangold discussed the effect this heavy rain has had on all outdoor programming. Our tennis programs, for example, have used up all scheduled make-up days and we are experiencing challenges when it comes to accommodating additional make-ups.

Acceptance of Minutes:

August 8, 2023 Minutes were accepted.

Acceptance of September 12, 2023 Minutes is moved to the next meeting.

Old Business:

Discussion and Possible Action

- **Capital Improvement Plan Update**
Chairman Clinton DePaolo reviewed modifications and the timeline of the CIP.
- **Feasibility Update for Pickleball on P&R Campus Masterplan**

Ms. Mangold shared with the commission that she and Mr. Samuelson met with Stantec to walk through the Fairfield Hills Campus as well as discuss the scope of work and updates to the Master Plan. In the feasibility study, they plan to include 3-4 potential locations for 8 Pickleball courts (with the option of increasing to 10 courts). The cost for the study was quoted as \$8,350. The Commission had budgeted \$5,000 for this study. The study, however, includes changes to the Master Plan which is an important tool for future planning. Ms. Mangold will speak with Stantec about lowering the fee and possibly exclude some of the proposed components of the study. The commission approved raising the funding to up to \$7,500.

New Business

Discussion and Possible Action

- **AED – Defibrillators at parks and fields**

Ms. Mangold received a suggestion from Youth Lacrosse that defibrillators be placed on or parks and fields. She has undertaken preliminary research and presented an option which would fit in with our needs, including safe-keeping, temperature regulation and easy to use instructions. The unit mentioned would tie in with 911 if a call were made, whereby a dispatcher would provide the code to open the lock-box. With discussion, it was clear that all were in favor of further researching this undertaking. Chairman DePaolo stated that we would need to know how many units would be needed to cover all athletic fields and other locations. Commissioner Yanni commented that in New York, the sports teams are responsible for bringing these units with them.

Correspondence:

Copies of written correspondence are attached.

Correspondence includes a detailed explanation from Mr. Carl Samuelson about how fields are studied and the steps taken before field closures.

Chairman's Report:

Chairman DePaolo relayed that he has received many calls from parents concerned about field closures. He also discussed that there is some concern on the part of parents that sports groups are not following the field use manual. He stated that we would reach out to ensure that groups are following the bylaws. Lastly, he was asked about expanding the Skate Park. He discussed the fact that the Skate Park has recently been expanded but due to continuous and fruitful use of the park, further expansion might be a positive move and a potential undertaking.

Director's Report:

Ms. Mangold advised that yesterday was the deadline for boat slip renters to remove their boats. A few remain due to a variety of circumstances but the boat owners have been contacted and they will be removed by the end of the week. The maintainers are eager to remove the docks before the water is lowered.

Ms. Mangold relayed that we have received a wonderful gift from the Catherine Violet Hubbard Sanctuary – a Kindness Garden. It was planted at Dickinson Park by CVHS volunteers and they did an extraordinary job.

Ms. Mangold discussed a number of upcoming events. The young man who coordinated a band night at the Teen Center recently is holding another on October 20. This evening will include costumes and it is hoped that attendance will increase. Another new event is a SkateJam Fundraiser on Sunday, October 29. Richard Beck, our skateboard instructor and Skate Park proponent, has coordinated this event with the assistance of another avid skateboard enthusiast. All proceeds will go towards new additions for the Skate Park. The event will feature skate contests and a costume contest. Also coming up is our Halloween Happening on October 27 – this event is being co-sponsored by the Newtown Community Center. There will be a new Grades 5 & 6 event at the Teen Center entitled "Grinchmas" on December 8.

In addition to the above-mentioned special events, we have a new Tuesday Co-Ed Volleyball League for ages 18 & over. Commission Britton suggested consideration be given to High School girls volleyball players as the demand has been greater than the high school team can handle. Ms. Mangold will follow up with the high school girls volleyball coach.

Commissioners Out & About:

No items were mentioned.

Motions:

- Commissioner Yanni made a motion to accept the August 8, 2023 Minutes. Commissioner Warren Spencer seconded the motion. All were in favor.
- Commissioner Warren Spencer made a motion to increase the budget for the Pickleball Feasibility Study to up to \$7,500. Commissioner Rance Thompson seconded the motion. All voted in favor, the motion passed.

Adjournment of Meeting:

Commissioner Thompson made a motion to adjourn the meeting.

Commissioner Yanni seconded the motion.

Chairman DePaolo declared the meeting was adjourned at 7:40pm.

The next regular meeting is scheduled is Tuesday, November 14, 2023

Respectfully submitted by,
Jennifer Balbes, Clerk



Amy Mangold <amy.mangold@newtown-ct.gov>

Fwd: [Newtown CT] Field closures (Sent by Audra Dickson, Audradickson29@gmail.com)

1 message

Correspondence

Amy Mangold <amy.mangold@newtown-ct.gov>

To: Carl Samuelson <carl.samuelson@newtown-ct.gov>

Fri, Sep 29, 2023 at 9:40 AM

Not sure that this requires another response but wanted you to be aware.

Thanks, Carl

Amy

----- Forwarded message -----

From: Audra Dickson <audradickson29@gmail.com>

Date: Fri, Sep 29, 2023 at 9:39 AM

Subject: Re: [Newtown CT] Field closures (Sent by Audra Dickson, Audradickson29@gmail.com)

To: Amy Mangold <amy.mangold@newtown-ct.gov>

Hey Amy,

Thanks for the quick response and I definitely understand the challenge and the need of business rules to help guide our teams to make consistent decisions.

Not sure I fully understand the nexus with safety and wet fields. As a mom, sliding and falling are part of the kids business rules. I understand if the town is concerned about getting sued if someone gets hurt, but that is what waivers are for.

Again, I get it and appreciate all the hard work. I know making the unpopular decision is challenging.

Thanks,

Audra

On Fri, Sep 29, 2023 at 9:32 AM Amy Mangold <amy.mangold@newtown-ct.gov> wrote:

Hi Audra,

We had one other person reach out with the same concerns. I am going to send you the thorough explanation that our Assistant Director of Parks sent to help understand the decision making process behind the field closures and this unusual amount of rain we have been having. I hope this helps,

Thank you,

Amy Mangold

This past weekend was certainly a tough one. It was frustrating for us, and many other Towns, who cancelled big events based on the forecast. The Cultural Arts Festival was cancelled in Newtown which is a devastating loss for that organization.

While we certainly did not receive the forecast amount of rain, it did rain off and on throughout the day. Our field use rules dictate that no events shall be started if it is raining. Some may argue that drizzle is not rain, however with previously saturated fields, it does not take much to make fields unsafe for play.

We had a bit of everything this weekend between downpours, drizzle and rain. When inspecting fields our team uses four metrics to dictate field closures. The first is the forecast, second is visual inspection and the third and fourth are actual measurements of soil moisture and the field surface shear strength. Our guys come in at 6:30 to check fields, which at that time on Saturday it was raining, and the hourly forecast showed an 88% chance of heavy rain from 7:00 AM through at least 5PM. Our guys visually check fields and use an infiltrometer and shear tool. The infiltrometer showed 96% field saturation (over 75% is considered unplayable) and the more important test is the shear indicator. This tool indicates footing strength, which needs to be between 4-7 NM to be considered safe. Our tests on Saturday were only 2 in the high wear areas on the natural fields. What I can't say for certain, is what those tests would have been at noon, or 3 PM. Perhaps we need to do a better job of closing fields for the first half of the day, and rechecking for the second half. I do not know that the tests would have been any different as the amount of rain we have had overall has kept things incredibly saturated. One other comment/suggestion I heard recently was to have at least one 7 V 7 and one 9 V 9 field on the artificials, so that if one of those events were a priority there would be at least one field to use. We had also been trying to reschedule games during the week as early as Tuesday, based on the forecast. We had plenty of field space and playable conditions on Thursday and Friday yet none of these games were moved. Our intent is never to unduly restrict access to our fields however, we always will make what is deemed to be the safest decision. I realize the decision this weekend was not a popular one, yet our priority is the safety of the kids using the fields, and secondly not causing undue damage to the fields. I hope the weather cooperates a bit more for the balance of the season and that everyone can appreciate the better field conditions as a result of us closing when poor conditions exist.

Regards,

Carl Samuelson
Assistant Director, Parks
Office: 203-270-4378 Cell: 203-948-2523

→ NCA
→ Standards

On Fri, Sep 29, 2023 at 7:14 AM Contact form at Newtown CT <cmmailer@civicplus.com> wrote:

Hello amangold,

Audra Dickson (Audradickson29@gmail.com) has sent you a message via your contact form (<https://www.newtown-ct.gov/user/473/contact>) at Newtown CT.

If you don't want to receive such e-mails, you can change your settings at <https://www.newtown-ct.gov/user/473/edit>.

Message:

Good morning,

I would like to thank you and your team for developing and maintaining such a robust and diverse park system here in Newtown. I don't know if you oversee the sports fields in town or if that is another department, but my family plays soccer and we have enjoyed using the fields. I know it's been a wet year and there is a decision tree on when to close the fields, but it would be great if the fields could remain open even if the ground is wet. The kids will be fine and the grass will grow back. I know there are potential drainage issues to consider and maybe enhance, but it seems that Newtown closes its fields more often than the surrounding towns. Our teams have been able to use other town fields as a substitute when ours are closed. The kids are disappointed they are missing practices and games. I understand more than most the weather patterns are changing and we need to do our best to plan and adapt best we can.

Again, thank you for all you do. I know it's a daily challenge to keep things moving and the weather has likely exacerbated the daily challenges. From one public servant to another- thank you

Have a great rainy day!

Audra Dickson



Amy E. W. Mangold
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The benefits are Endless!!!



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Amy Mangold <amy.mangold@newtown-ct.gov>

Re: Grass Field Closures

1 message

Carl Samuelson <carl.samuelson@newtown-ct.gov>

To: Laura Rubino <laurarubino11@gmail.com>

Cc: "amy.mangold@newtown-ct.gov" <amy.mangold@newtown-ct.gov>

Mon, Oct 2, 2023 at 12:04 PM

Laura,

We truly feel your frustration. This fall has been the wettest I can remember in my 22 years here. We have been collaborating with all of our sports groups to come up with creative solutions however leaving fields open when conditions are not safe is certainly not something we can ethically do. You are correct that we have been discussing lining a 7 V 7 on grass with lights, and a 9 V 9 on Tilson artificial surface. Obviously you have to be careful on the artificials as too many fields becomes confusing for players and disrupts the game. Sourcing the proper paint and getting it here in a timely manner is the next challenge.

We opened many fields later in the day this past Sunday. FFH soccer is one of the fields we opened later on Sunday, as conditions in the morning were borderline. We obviously want the kids to play and closing fields is not something we take lightly. Our guys visually check fields and use an infiltrometer and shear tool. The infiltrometer showed 85% field saturation (over 75% is considered unplayable) and the more important test is the shear indicator. This tool indicates footing strength, which needs to be between 4-7 NIM to be considered safe. Our tests on Sunday morning were a 3. Knowing the sun was supposed to come out, we opened this field later in the day. Due to damage from use on Sunday, that field would not pass the same tests today, and the damage to this field from Sunday afternoon play will take months to recover from.

Our intent is never to unduly restrict access to our fields however, we always will make what is deemed to be the safest decision. I realize the decision to close fields is rarely a popular one, yet our priority is the safety of the kids using the fields, and secondly not causing undue damage to the fields. I hope the weather cooperates a bit more for the balance of the season and that everyone can appreciate the better field conditions as a result of us closing when poor conditions exist.

I have attached a couple of pictures of the damage to the FFH soccer field from Sunday.

Regards,

Carl Samuelson

Assistant Director, Parks

Office: 203-270-4378 Cell: 203-948-2523



On Sun, Oct 1, 2023 at 9:53 AM Laura Rubino <laurarubino11@gmail.com> wrote:

Hello,

I am writing to you on behalf of Newtown Soccer Club – I am the U10 girls team manager. While I recognize that the weather lately has been unprecedented and difficult to prepare for, I am hoping that as two organizations that represent our town that we can work together to develop solutions that preserve our public spaces and allow our children the opportunity to play the sport they love.

These past two weeks, we have had to move two home games to play at our opponent locations in neighboring towns with the same field conditions - as they've decided to keep their fields open while ours are closed. I understand there are guardrails in place to determine when fields can and cannot be played on, but it places a lot of stress on our Newtown families when games are canceled or needing to be shifted at the last minute – not to mention the disappointment for our players who look forward to playing at home in front of larger and more supportive crowds, or potentially are shorted games in their season schedules when we are unable to get every makeup game in.

I have heard that there are plans in place to line an additional 7v7 grass field in the outfield at Treadwell which would allow for evening games to be played for this age group. While everyone is appreciative of any efforts to create more playing opportunities, this alternative does not solve the root of the issue, which is that grass fields are typically not playable during or after inclement weather. Additionally, it is asking the youngest players in not only our club but throughout the district to play at late hours. CSA guidelines do not mandate teams to hold games after sundown, meaning that we may be going through the efforts to set this field up for use only to have opposing teams refuse the makeup times. The most effective use of incremental resources at this point would be to line a turf field for 7v7 and 9v9 play as we will get significantly more use out of that field.

Thank you in advance for your consideration to this matter.

Laura Rubino



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