

**Minutes of the Waukegan Park District  
Special Meeting of the Board of Commissioners  
Recreation Program Advisory Committee  
March 13, 2023**

The Board of Commissioners of the Waukegan Park District met in a Special Meeting of the Recreation Program Advisory Committee on September 12, 2022, at the Field House Sports, Fitness, & Aquatics Center.

**I. Call to Order**

The meeting was called to order at 6:05pm by Errick Beverly who directed a call of the roll, introductions were made, and welcomed all to the new format to include all committee members from Cultural Arts, Recreation, and Special Recreation into one combined meeting.

**II. Roll Call**

Present: Errick Beverly, Director of Recreation; Kaitlin Fischer, Superintendent of Sports, Fitness & Aquatics; Jennifer Dumas, Manager of General & Special Recreation; Javi Martinez, Manager of Fitness & Aquatics; Ty Rohrer, Manager of Cultural Arts; Elizabeth Fallon, Department Coordinator; Patricia Hogan; Lori Nerheim; Martha Padilla-Ramos; Mercedes Rivera; Christian Torres

Absent: George Bridges, Commissioner; Jacqueline Herrera Giron, Commissioner; Jay Lerner, Executive Director; Yolanda Brown; Maria Calderon; Brian Cowart; Jo Dooley; Jack Dudley; Mark Harms; Sam Johnson; Melissa Juarez; David Motley; Mary Olson; Dulce Ortiz; Odie Pahl; Rich Ribando; Roxanne Swanson; MaryFran Troha; Jane Waller; Tina Yurik

**III. Review, Discuss, Divide**

**A. Programming Updates**

1. In Aquatics, the 2<sup>nd</sup> Grade Field Trip swim lessons have begun again with 11 schools visiting the Field House so far this year. School visits are every other Thursday. The students have a water safety lesson and a fun day at the Field House. General Swim Lessons are going well with 120 participants in group swimming lessons and 50 participants in private swim lessons.
  - o Committee member comments:
    - Do the 2<sup>nd</sup> Grade field trips include private schools?
      - Javi Martinez responded that all schools in Waukegan are included, including private, charter, and home-schooled students.
    - Are students given any coupons for a discount on lessons?
      - Javi Martinez responded that students are given a goodie bag to take home which includes a free pass to the pool for their family.
    - How do the numbers compare in swim lessons to previous years?
      - Javi Martinez responded that there are more participants during the summer swim lesson sessions but our numbers for this session are good and comparable to previous years prior to the pandemic.

2. The Field House has hit an all-time high in membership numbers at 8425. We have won Lake County's Best of the Best award for Fitness Centers for 4 years in a row. Membership decreased during the pandemic but now exceeds pre-pandemic levels.
  - Committee member comments:
    - What is the strategy for getting new members?
      - Kaitlin Fischer responded that there is very good word of mouth, a few marketing campaigns during the year, member retention programs and continued low pricing.
    - Is the pricing designed to cover costs for maintenance?
      - Errick Beverly responded that all facilities are designed with a break-even budget to cover costs but at the Field House the revenue from memberships and activities consistently exceeds costs.
    - How is the parking?
      - Errick Beverly responded that during the week there are no problems. There was expanded parking to the north a few years ago which has eased the weekend parking and we provide set aside member parking during busy weekends.
    - As a regular walker at the Field House, it doesn't seem as clean.
      - Errick Beverly responded that we appreciate this kind of feedback and are taking note of the issues expressed.
3. Free and low-cost fitness programs have increased in participation throughout this year with the free monthly Family Zumba having up to 40 participants and increasing in participation each month, the monthly Family Swim Night provide families a low-cost fun event with swimming, snacks, and crafts. Each month there has been an increase in participants at the Family Swim Night. Parent's Night Out is a monthly program for children that is provided free for members, and low cost for non-members, to participate in activities at the Field House. We have exceeded our original goal to provide more free and low-cost programs to the community which also include programs in Cultural Arts like Arts Park and other family programs.
  - Committee member comments:
    - What about having movies in the park like here at Hinkston Park or at the lakefront?
      - Errick Beverly responded that we offer movies in the park which are designed to get programs out to some of the smaller neighborhood parks. This summer there will be a movie at Hinkston Park. Each summer we have a movie at the Stiner Pavilion at the Waukegan Municipal Beach in collaboration with the City of Waukegan.
4. Summer Camp this year we are offering weekly camps at two locations for ages 6-12 starting June 5 through August 4. The camps are at Rose Park and the Belvidere Recreation Center and at Bowen Park and the Jane Addams Center. We

keep the cost as low as possible and work with families who utilize subsidized funding. The Special Recreation camps will begin June 12 and will be at the new facility. There are two camps, TNT camp for ages 13-17 and Campapalooza for ages 6-12. We will also be offering a Swim Camp for one week in July for the second year. In 2022, we had a grant that covered the expense of hosting the iCan Shine swim camp and from the training our staff received, we can offer this camp again on our own.

5. Special Events coming up are the Eggstravaganza Trail on April 8 at Rose Park with a Bunny Trail for children to meet various costumed characters and collect plastic filled eggs. There are 14,000 eggs stuffed and ready to go. New this year will be pony rides with a handler for each pony instead of a pony wheel, a new petting zoo, a bubble entertainer with bubble stations, and walking entertainment. The American Independence Parade is on July 2 and new this year we have set up a parade application on our website so units can apply online. We have set up a separate parade email to streamline communication for units. We have responded to patron feedback and added more entertainment and handing out more eggs and candy at the Eggstravaganza Trail and the same for the Halloween Trail.
6. New and growing arts initiatives include Private Music Lessons, which had 35 students in 2022 and so far, this year, we are up to 72 students. We are in need of bringing on another voice instructor because our current instructor is fully booked. We brought back an adult theatre program over the holidays with the Holiday Radio Play It's a Wonderful Life. The Youth Theatre program continues to grow with now 20 young actors who are in rehearsals for Lion King Kids. Performances are March 18 and 19, and tickets are \$5. It's all the great parts of the actual Broadway production condensed into a 35-minute performance for young actors. The award-winning Arts Park program will be returning to a neighborhood park near you and expanding into two new programs this summer. The Arts Park Academy will be offered to two age groups in one-week camps which will explore various art mediums and have an artist reception at the end to showcase the artists' work. And we are offering Arts Park Parent and Child Workshops, where children and their parents will learn various art techniques like origami and pinata making.
7. The Waukegan Concert Chorus (WCC) concert, Handel Celebration, went very well. The Waukegan Symphony Orchestra (WSO) concert last weekend received excellent feedback and had a larger audience. The next WSO concert is the Young People's Concert on April 30 at the Trapp Auditorium, featuring music from DC and Marvel comics movies. In the handouts for this meeting there are 6 adult tickets for you to use or give to your family and neighbors. All children's tickets are free. The Arts Park staff will be creating a live animation demo during the concert which will be projected on a screen. The final concert of the season will be June 10 and with the Trapp Auditorium unavailable, we will be using the St. Martin de Porres Cristo Rey school facility. Thanks goes to Patricia Hogan for helping us make that connection.

- Committee member comments:
  - How does the high school accommodate you for a handicap accessible entrance?
    - Ty Rohrer responded that the high school works with us to open the circle drive entrance for handicap accessibility, and we provide outside signage.
  - It is impressive to see all the activity that has been going on at the Jack Benny Center.
    - Errick Beverly responded that the increase in programming will allow for a renovation of the theatre space, and it has been awesome to see so many people taking part in the new events and programs like the Women’s International and the Black History Month Celebrations.

## **B. Facility Updates**

1. The Field House Fitness Center has 16 new pieces of Selectorized strength equipment. Patrons have been giving great feedback on the new machines.
2. The new facility for Special Recreation is nearing completion, and equipment and supplies are beginning to be delivered to fill the space. There will be a community open house when the building is open. There will be a Sensory Room, 2 youth/teen/adult rooms for multimedia use, arts and crafts, a kitchen for cooking skills programs, a larger multipurpose room, and administrative space for 3-4 staff. It is on a single floor making it so much more accessible than the current facility on two floors. This facility will provide opportunities for increased programming and partnerships.
  - Committee member comments:
    - What is the location?
      - Jen Dumas responded the facility is located at 540 S. McAlister.
    - What about partnering with the new facility for people with Autism near Lewis Produce? (*The Place for Children with Autism at 2749 Grand Ave*)
      - Committee member Mercedes Rivera responded that the organization is new and has indicated they are not quite ready for collaboration.
    - How many people are served in Special Recreation?
      - Jen Dumas responded that prior to the pandemic programs were full but the community that utilizes Special Recreation has been slower to return to in-person programs but overall, we serve about 200 individuals.
      - Errick Beverly responded that the previous facility also limited the growth of the program and the new facility will provide more opportunity to grow.
    - What is the purpose of the Sensory Room?

- Jen Dumas responded that it is designed so it can be used as a 1:1 or small group therapy program space or as a space for an individual to go when they need to be in a less stimulating environment if they are overwhelmed while participating in a group activity.
3. The Greenhouse at Bowen Park became damaged in a storm in 2021. Getting the replacement in place has been a long process but should be completed within the next month. Currently, the Greenhouse has been encased in a clear plastic tarp, so we were able to use the Greenhouse for a growing space last Spring. It will be nice to have the new Greenhouse installed so we can return to have more camp and family programs and expand on the Tuesday evening Garden Club. Each season, we give away approximately 500lbs of vegetables grown in the Greenhouse Heritage Garden.
  4. So much has been happening at the Carnegie building including: the foundation for the new part of the building going north has started, repairs to the limestone will begin, interior work has begun including dismantling the woodwork to take to another location to be restored, the windows are being restored, and new floors installed. The historic paint color study is completed to match the colors and textures from 1903 to go into the Ray Bradbury Library room. Along with a lot of work with the Historical Society, 50% of the schematic design is completed. And the latest news is the Ray Bradbury collection housed at the Waukegan Public Library has been officially acquired and will have its new home with at the Waukegan History Museum at the Carnegie where it will be exhibited and stored. Board President Janet Kilkelly, along with other folks such as Lori Nerheim, President of the Historical Society, have been providing monthly updates via video on the construction process on Facebook. Errick Beverly added that overall, with cooperative weather the construction has been progressing. Kudos to the Historical Society for securing the Ray Bradbury collection.
    - Committee member comments:
      - What is the parking situation?
        - Errick Beverly responded that there is an agreement with the City of Waukegan for Parking Lot F.
        - Committee member Lori Nerheim added that there will be a few accessible parking spaces adjacent to the building and complimented the work that Ty, Bryan, and Historical Society members have done on the design team, collection inventory, and the renovation plan.

### **C. Website/App**

A new website was launched two weeks ago which has an updated look, provides more integration to our registration software, and is mobile friendly. It has been a long time since our website has had an update, and it was needed to meet the new technology needs and the needs of the community. Overall, the website has been streamlined and is easier for patrons to find what they are looking for by listing all the facilities and fields

available including pricing as well as program information. A new App will be launched soon.

- Committee member comments:
  - Does it translate to Spanish or Polish?
    - Kaitlin Fischer responded that the website does translate to Spanish but not Polish. We can investigate the translation for other languages.
  - Can you access facility rental applications?
    - Kaitlin Fischer responded that the rental applications as well as other forms are on the website.

#### **D. What Can We Do Better?**

Committee member comments:

- What about putting a marquee for Rose Park on the corner of Belvidere Rd and Lewis Ave?
  - Errick Beverly responded during the renovation of the property an issue was identified that prevented putting a marquee on the corner.
- What is happening at Bevier Park?
  - Errick Beverly responded that Bevier Park is getting a renovation of the pond, playground, fields, and other things identified as needing improvements.
- What about a walking club here at Hinkston Park?
  - Errick Beverly responded that there is a walking program, GO Waukegan, that meets at Hinkston Park as well as at other parks.

Errick Beverly closed the meeting thanking the committee and the community for supporting all that we do.

#### **IV. Closed Session**

There was no closed session.

#### **V. Adjournment**

Meeting adjourned at 6:55pm.

Next meeting scheduled for Monday, September 25, 2023, at 6pm.

Respectfully submitted,

Errick Beverly  
Director of Recreation