

ONEONTA, NEW YORK – DECEMBER 2, 2013 - 7:00 P.M.
REGULAR MEETING OF THE PARKS AND RECREATION COMMISSION PG. 1

PRESENT: Chair Tim Catella
Commissioner Cynthia McCarthy
Commissioner Stephen Pindar
Vacancy
Council Member David Rissberger

ABSENT: Commissioner Gary Dilello

City Manager Michael Long also attended the meeting.

Chair Catella noted that Commissioner Dilello had informed him that he could not make the meeting due to work commitments.

APPROVAL OF MINUTES

MOTION, made by Chair Catella and seconded by Commissioner Pindar, that the Commission approve the minutes of the meeting of November 4, 2013.

Voting Ayes: Chair Catella
Commissioner McCarthy
Commissioner Pindar

Noes: None

Absent: Commissioner Dilello

MOTION CARRIED

CORRESPONDENCE

There was no correspondence.

PETITIONERS

Frank R. Russo, III, 5 Parish Avenue, Director of the YMCA, spoke of the discussions that led to the YMCA's proposal to provide swimming and park program under contract with the City. He emphasized that the YMCA's proposal was in response to needs expressed by Mayor Miller and City Manager Long and that the Y had only proposed taking on programs that are already in their areas of expertise.

Irene Gallaer, 16 Cedar Street, inquired about the absence of Commissioner Dilello. She stated that her interest in making sure the City responds to the needs of children.

Michael Lynch, 51 Ford Avenue, 4th Ward Council Member, thanked Chair Catella for providing a forum for community concerns about the proposed agreement with the YMCA. He expressed concern that the Parks and Recreation Department's comparison of current programs with the proposed YMCA programs was not available for the Commission's review. Chair Catella clarified that the Commission had been asked to consider the content of the proposal and that the staff review would be considered by the Community Improvement Committee of Council, for whom it was compiled, at its next meeting. He asserted that the savings from the proposal do not add up: that savings are from reductions in service and that privatization is not necessary to reduce expenses. He emphasized that the proposal should be considered on its merits and its effect on children. He felt that the YMCA proposal, made in good faith, nevertheless creates barriers to registration, particularly economic barriers and that accepting the proposal represents a retreat from the City's commitment to public access. In addition, he stated that the City retain all maintenance expenses, while income from program fees would go to the YMCA. He emphasized that the City has no good estimate of what income might be raised from Non-Resident Fees for existing recreation programs.

Irene Gallaer, 16 Cedar Street, stated that December 2 is too late to plan for next spring. She asked the Commission to be more proactive in the discussions.

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Frank R. Russo, III, 5 Parish Avenue, clarified that the proposed hours of operation are different than the 2013 programs because the school year ends much later in 2014.

Chair Catella thanked the petitioners for their input; he emphasized that the Commission is an advisory group but that the Common Council will be making the decision

OLD BUSINESS

YMCA Proposal

Chair Catella asked Commission Members for their input on the proposal. Commissioner McCarthy stated that she would prefer that the City continue to operate the programs. She felt that the Y's proposal is good and that the YMCA would find a way to include all children, regardless of financial need. Beyond that, she felt she still doesn't have sufficient information to form an opinion.

Commissioner Pindar stated that an apples-to-apples comparison isn't possible because the financial comparison is not available. He would like to see whether the City could continue to operate these programs, but is sure that the YMCA would do a fine job.

Chair Catella noted that Commissioner Dilello had informed him that he would not be able to vote should that be necessary because his employer, the Boys and Girls Club, might be involved in providing some other recreation programs for the City.

Chair Catella felt that the YMCA proposal provides the opportunity to partner with an organization with professional expertise in recreation and may have more resources than the City. He supports exploring the proposal further and will draft a memorandum for review and approval of other Commissioners that will go to the Community Improvement Committee.

Commissioner McCarthy asked whether the YMCA can provide an all-day playground program as the City has in the past. At Chair Catella's request, Mr. Russo explained that providing a program longer than 3 hours would require the YMCA to obtain a more involved license through Y-USA. Council Member Lynch stated that he felt the pool and playground programs should be kept separate. Council Member Rissberger stated that although the Y is a fine organization, he is disappointed that the Commission has been given no comparative data on the proposal and current programs. He felt that Non-Resident Fees should be instituted.

City Manager Long noted that costs and potential fees have been discussed informally for a number of years but that the Parks and Recreation staff have only recently been compiling the comparative data. He did point out that many other upstate cities have greatly reduced recreation programs in recent years.

Mr. Russo emphasized that the YMCA does need a response from the City by January in order to plan quality programs, so there is a sense of urgency on their part.

David Coury, Parks and Recreation Department staff, expressed disappointment that the comparative information is not yet available. He noted that the City has run a very cost-effective 7-hour drop-in playground program for decades. He felt that program should be retained regardless of action taken on the swimming programs.

Commissioner Pindar observed that he would abstain from any vote on the proposal because his employer, the Oneonta Outlaws, has a close relationship with both the City and the YMCA.

Chair Catella concluded the discussion by reiterating that he would draft the memorandum for the Community Improvement Committee and requesting that City Manager Long provide the Commission with any new information in the coming weeks.

Wilber Park Pool Bathhouse Update

City Manager Long reported that contracts have come back from the state. Further work on plans will occur over the winter. Construction will likely begin in Fall 2014.

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Commissioner Pindar asked why the work cannot be done earlier. City Manager Long explained that plans need to be finalized; the State Historic Preservation Office has to approve those plans; to get the work done before the season, construction would need to begin by April 1 and that appears unlikely.

Donation for Wilber Park

Chair Catella noted that a letter had been received from Margery Merzig accompanied by a donation for two decorative fences near the large pavilion in the upper area of Wilber Park “in honor of Martha Merzig, Sarah, Phoebe and Timothy Fountain and all of the children who will come to love Wilber Park as I do.” Work will likely be accomplished in Spring 2014.

NEW BUSINESS

Recreation Director’s Report

Director Andrews summarized his report distributed to the Commission. The staff has been involved with snow removal, planting of new trees, installation of a new skateboard rail, new lighting at Neahwa Park and a new dugout roof at Christman Field. Registration for the winter volleyball program is underway. Work on the Annual Report continues. The Chi Phi walk in early November attracted 200 participants. The department intern, Justin Barnett, completed and submitted his report on best practices and cost containment in parks and recreation programs. The staff is working with participants in the Alternatives to Incarceration program who are required to do community service. Reservations may now be made for 2014 usage of park facilities. The owntown holiday decorations have been installed.

Chair Catella noted the resignation of Geoff Davis from the Commission and offered thanks for his years of service as Commissioner.

There being no further business to come before the commission, Chair Catella adjourned the regular meeting at approximately 7:38 p.m.

DOUGLAS KENDALL, City Clerk

/dk