

**Meeting of the
Parks, Recreation and Conservation Board
450 Saw Mill River Road, Ardsley NY, 10502
WebEx
October 19, 2023
4:00 PM**

PRC BOARD MEMBERS

Pamela Tillinghast Dubitsky, Chairwoman
Charlene Indelicato, Vice Chairwoman
Hon. Legislator Nancy Barr
Debra Clay (absent)
Sobeida Cruz (absent)
Martin Kamarck
J. Henry Neale Jr. (remote)
Vishnu Patel
Martin Rogowsky (absent)
Joel Seligman

PRC STAFF

Kathleen O'Connor, Commissioner
Peter Tartaglia, First Deputy Commissioner
Neil Squillante, Deputy Commissioner (absent)
Judith J. Allen, Executive Assistant, Board Meeting Secretary
William Bland, Asst. Director of Division – PRC (absent)

EX-OFFICIO MEMBERS

Hugh Greechan, Commissioner, DPW&T (absent)
Blanca Lopez, Deputy Commissioner Planning (remote)

GUESTS

Robert DelTorto – President of the Bronx River
Parkway Reservation Conservancy
Gayle Katzman - First Deputy Commissioner DPW&T
Aviva Meyer - Westchester County Liaison

ITEM NO. 1 – APPROVAL OF MINUTES

Chairwoman Dubitsky called the meeting to order. She reminded Board members about County policies for WebEx meetings, noting that Board meetings start promptly at 4:00 p.m., and requesting that members arrive and be ready to start by 3:55, with caution about conversation once the microphone is turned on. She noted that meetings will end promptly at 5:30 p.m. and need to run efficiently. She asked Board members to inform her or Secretary Allen at the end of each meeting whether they can attend the next meeting, and in any event, to inform her or Secretary Allen at the very latest on the Friday before the Thursday monthly meeting so they could confirm quorum.

She thanked those Board members in attendance and stated that, if quorum is not achieved for a future meeting, she will cancel that meeting since she does not want to waste the time of Board members and staff, but emphasized that the Board is often required to approve Department decisions and if a meeting is cancelled, staff members may not be able to do their jobs properly.

Upon motion by Mr. Kamarck and seconded by Vice Chair Indelicato, the Board unanimously approved the Minutes of the September 14, 2023.

ITEM NO. 2 – CHAIR’S REPORT

Chair Dubitsky reported the following:

- She noted that the Parks Board hadn’t met in five weeks due to the Westchester Parks Foundation Gala. She asked Mr. Kamarck, who is also a board member of the Foundation, to report on the Gala, and he stated it was very successful in terms of the number of people attending, gross receipts and seats sold, and was the most well-run, fun and elegant of recent WPF galas.
- She thanked the Westchester Parks Foundation for doing such a fantastic job raising money for County parks. She noted the Gala has become a Westchester County “must-attend” event, and that it was really great, with tasty food and excellent speakers, and it was very impressive that Hillary Clinton was the honoree.
- Aviva Meyer reminded Board members to visit the Foundation website to view the many photos taken at the Gala.
- Chairwoman Dubitsky stated that Deputy Commissioner Squillante will discuss fees at the November meeting.

ITEM NO. 3 – COMMISSIONER’S REPORT

Commissioner O’Connor reported the following:

- She thanked everyone who supported the Westchester Parks Foundation Gala.
- Construction of Winter Wonderland 2023 has begun, paid for by the Westchester Parks Foundation, opening on November 24 and closing on December 31.
- The County Center has reopened, and the Westchester Knicks are back, with the first game Sunday, November 12.
- Golf is thriving and year to date, has hosted more rounds than last year.
- Beaches and pools are closed.
- During off-season, work is done on park infrastructure which cannot be worked on in season.
- The Department continues to work on re-accreditation, with staff meeting weekly. The process of re-accreditation has become more complex, and the Department is working with a consultant. Documentation should be completed by Thanksgiving, with a committee visit in May, and a final announcement made in October 2024 at the 2024 National Recreation Parks Association Conference.
- The Parks Department annual conference will be held at the County Center on February 6, 2024, with a snow date of February 7.
- REXPO has been scheduled for the first week of April at the County Center.
- The 2023 staff picnic on September 29 was cancelled due to stormy weather.

Chairwoman Dubitsky asked for an update on vacuuming of the invasive lantern flies. Deputy Squillante stated that 20 vacuums are on loan to different municipalities, and 20 vacuums were given to Conservation to distribute.

ITEM NO. 4 – ACTION ITEMS

A. Tree Removal Request B-03-2023 (Kensico Dam Plaza)

Chairwoman Dubitsky stated that during the previous month she visited Kensico Dam Plaza, and it was clear to her that the trees in question should be removed, allowing for construction of the new maintenance building, maintenance yard, and parking lot area, and she also noted that the lovely coniferous trees around the construction area will be protected. She noted that Park Superintendent Domenic Gangemi, with whom she was very impressed, gave her a tour of the Plaza and the 9/11 Memorial. Mr. Patel stated that he also had visited the site and agreed with Chairwoman Dubitsky that the removal of trees would be beneficial.

Upon motion by Mr. Seligman and seconded by Mr. Patel, the Board unanimously approved Tree Removal Request B-03-2023 (Kensico Dam Plaza).

B. Golf E-Z Reserve & Nonresident Weekday and Weekend Rate Fee Increases

Deputy Commissioner Squillante stated that the Department is requesting the Board approve an increase in the Golf E-Z Reserve annual rate for residents from \$350 to \$400, clarifying that E-Z Reserve is a 35-week program that guarantees a tee time reservation for golfers on Saturday or Sunday, and that the program began in 2003 and the rate has not been increased in twenty years. In addition, he requested an increase by \$5 of the Weekday and Weekend non-park pass nonresident rate, which was last raised in 2019. After some discussion, and upon motion by Vice Chair Indelicato and seconded by Mr. Kamarck, the Board unanimously approved the Golf E-Z Reserve and Nonresident Weekday and Weekend rate fee increases.

ITEM NO. 5 – INFORMATION ITEMS

A. Update on Active Capital Projects

First Deputy Commissioner Tartaglia noted the following:

- County Executive George Latimer held a press conference on October 17th to discuss his proposed 2024 Capital Budget for Westchester County.
- No changes have been made to the Parks capital budget as approved by the PRC Board.
- The 2024 County Capital Budget is now being reviewed by the Board of Legislators.
- The Croton Bathhouse, which was an active capital project, was completed in May. The bathhouse has been winterized, and a fence will be added to show the delineation of the public beach area.

Chairwoman Dubitsky asked what percentage of the overall county capital budget is Parks Department capital projects. First Deputy Commissioner Tartaglia answered he would provide that information at the next Board meeting.

Mr. Seligman pointed out the County Center was one of the major capital projects. First Deputy Commissioner Tartaglia stated that once the pandemic ended, New York State vacated the premises, and the County Center has been rebuilt, with future funds directed towards enveloping

and saving the building, fixing the roof and flood mitigation, after which funds will be used for boilers and HVAC, and then bathrooms and meeting rooms.

Chairwoman Dubitsky noted she has been asked several times whether the County Center should be torn down and replaced with a more modern structure. First Deputy Commissioner Tartaglia replied that it is an historical building and is on the national register, and is the County Civic Center, and many programs are utilized by the public, departments, and other agencies throughout the County. He noted the Center is parkland and part of the Bronx River Reservation, and is also the home of many sporting events for many localities, such as Section One Basketball. Commissioner O'Connor added that the County Center is centrally located, easy to get to by transportation, and the events are affordable. Chairwoman Dubitsky stated that she believes the building has important historical value for the County.

B. Review of Organizational Chart of Parks Staff, including Discussion of Classification of Parks and Staffing

Chairwoman Dubitsky noted that she had requested a presentation to the Board on this topic and that the Board packet for this month's meeting included an organizational chart.

Commissioner O'Connor noted the following:

- Prior to 2010, the Parks Department had 365 employees. When employees left, the positions were not refilled by the previous administration. The Department now has 244 employees.
- In 2023, the Department added two facilities (Hilltop Hanover and Scout Field).
- Peter Tartaglia is the First Deputy Commissioner, Neil Squillante is the Deputy Commissioner, and William Bland is the Assistant Director of Division-PRC.
- Mr. Bland heads up the Parks and Recreation Divisions. There are thirteen divisions managed by Directors.
- The County Executive and the Board of Legislators seek to make salaries commensurate with the importance of the job.
- The Parks Department manages fifty facilities with a budget of \$63 million.
- Staff currently meets once a month to discuss any issues at their facilities. During the meeting, a Pride in Parks Program (PIP) is shown to senior staff along with the manager of the facility, ensuring that the facility is being run efficiently., and if there are any issues, they are addressed and changes are made. This exercise is a way for senior staff to speak and share their points of view.
- She would like to bring back the PRC Academy program, which was held at Mountain Lakes and highlighted 25 sparks (young people) whom the Department thought had the right to shine.
- She thanked the Westchester Parks Foundation for paying for staff professional development.

Mr. Kamarck, referring to the organizational chart, asked how the designations were made. Commissioner O'Connor stated that designations were made during the Commission in the 1930s and 1940s, and are broken down into passive, inactive, nature centers, golf, County Center and facilities. First Deputy Commissioner Tartaglia added that some of the properties were designated according to their property management, environmental aspects, and when the property was purchased. He also noted that the Bronx River Parkway Reservation was the first County park, the first linear park in the United States, and the first parkway in the United States,

and is celebrating its 100-year anniversary. He noted that the staff who run the conservation facilities are “curators” and the staff who run the parks are “superintendents.” Mr. Kamarck noted that he became a member of the Parks Board because he was so impressed by Sara Cavanaugh, who was a curator at Lenoir and is now a park superintendent at Croton Point Park.

Chairwoman Dubitsky stated that Jason Klein, Director of Conservation, will speak to the Board at the December meeting.

ITEM NO. 6 – MEMBERS REPORTS & COMMENTS

A. Schedule Parks Board Tour

Chairwoman Dubitsky announced that a Board tour has been scheduled for Wednesday, November 8, at Sprain Lake Golf Course at 1:00 p.m., and that in December, a tour of the Jay Heritage Center has been tentatively scheduled for December 12 or 14.

B. Board of Legislators Liaison Report

Legislator Barr provided an update of a recent Board of Legislators meeting with Standard Amusement in connection with its contract to run Playland, noting there were 424,000 patrons who attended in 2023, and 4,500 season tickets were sold for 2023 and 1,200 season tickets were pre-sold for 2024, and during the meeting, Standard Amusement addressed safety issues and concerns that arose during the season.

ITEM NO. 7 – OTHER BUSINESS & COMMENTS BY GUESTS

Chairwoman Dubitsky noted that the last meeting of the year is scheduled for December 21 and asked members to inform Secretary Allen if they cannot attend due to the holidays, in which case the meeting may be re-scheduled for the previous Thursday, December 14.

ITEM NO. 8 – DATE OF NEXT MEETING

The next Board meeting will be held on Thursday, November 16, 2023 at 4:00pm.

Upon motion by Martin Kamarck and seconded by Vishnu Patel, the Board unanimously voted to adjourn the meeting.

Submitted by,
Judith Allen