

**COVENTRY PARKS & RECREATION COMMISSION
PUBLIC HEARING MINUTES
WEDNESDAY, MAY 4TH, 2016**

The Coventry Parks & Recreation Commission held a Public Hearing on Wednesday, May 4th, 2016 in Town Hall Annex to discuss the proposed changes to the summer 2016 beach operations, including fee increases and hours of operation. Todd Messier called the meeting to order at 6:30pm.

Members Present: Todd Messier, Sean Butler (arrived at 6:56pm), Jennifer Rodgers, Antonia Conti, Marie Gallo-Hall and Jillian Miner.

Members Absent: None.

Others Present: Wendy Rubin, Director of Parks & Recreation and Caterina Merriam, Recreation Supervisor.

Wendy Rubin, Parks & Recreation Director began the meeting with some background information, and a summary of the current proposal. Printed copies of the proposed changes were available for those in attendance (see attached).

Audience of Citizens:

1. Christine Pattee, 98 Brookline Road:
 - Ms. Pattee began by saying that Ms. Rubin's summary along with the handout answered most of her questions, and that she is very impressed with the careful way the Commission has worked this out. She said that she was initially concerned that this was a ploy to deter non-residents from coming to the beach. She said that the Commission has done a great job and that she supports the increases in fees as she finds them to be reasonable.
2. Ray Streeter, 211 North River Road:
 - While he appreciates the Department's efforts to make the beaches self-sustaining, he feels that there should be a line item in the Town's budget to subsidize these costs. He is willing to support the Commission's efforts, however he is concerned about discrimination of senior citizens, and that seniors should be given a free beach sticker. He noted that he is not a member of the Senior Center, and would not benefit from that pass.
3. Andy Broderson, 340 Cassidy Hill Road:
 - Mr. Broderson noted that he is opposed to the increase in parking fees. He said that if the revenue generated by parking fees is not covering the costs, then gatekeepers' hours should be lowered. He also suggested that the Police Department patrol the parking lots and give tickets to those without beach stickers. If the intention is for fees to be a revenue source, then perhaps other sources of revenue should be considered. He also noted that it is inappropriate to raise some fees and not others; he believes that other facilities do not have parking fees. He concluded by saying that if most folks are only going to the beaches once or twice a season, then we may sell less stickers this years as folks may not be willing to pay the increased price. (see attached)

4. Tom Pope, 683 Brigham Tavern Road:
 - Mr. Pope explained that he was speaking as an individual, not as a member of the Town Council. He reiterated his comments made at the May 2nd Town Council meeting, of which minutes and video are available. He noted his opposition to the proposal, explaining that seniors should not have to pay for a pass and that this proposal should have been discussed at the Department's budget presentation. He went on to say that the Council could have allocated additional funds, if asked. He also questioned why we staff the beaches with lifeguards, as the National Seashore does not. He asked if it was about safety.
5. Christine Pattee, 98 Brookline Road:
 - Ms. Pattee spoke for the second time, to express that she likes the fact that we provide lifeguards. She is a resident in Waterfront Heights, which does not provide lifeguards and a near drowning has happened there. She said that with so many kids in a small space, we should be protecting them. She also noted that this is the first time she has heard a Town Council member suggest more spending. She also noted that she has recently been by the Senior Center, and is planning on participating more; she asked about obtaining the senior center beach pass and noted that she does not believe that seniors should get everything for free. Ms. Rubin noted that a shift from government funding to "pay to play" in Parks & Recreation Departments nationwide happened back in the 1970's; in 2009, the Department was asked to subsidize formally funded programs with revenue, as a large fund balance existed. Since the economic downturn, that fund balance has depleted and revenues have been down.
6. Lois Frankland, 18 Prospect Street:
 - She asked about the senior center hangtag, and whether that was just for access to the Senior Center, or if it included beach access. She also noted that she does not believe that seniors should have to pay, especially if it's just for a few trips throughout the season. She mentioned that she was a lifeguard, and knows what they go through. She asked if there is still a free pass available for swim lessons.
7. Tom Pope, 683 Brigham Tavern Road:
 - Mr. Pope expressed noted the "contradiction" of the purpose of the Senior Center pass, noting that the Town Manager said that the pass is not a beach pass, but rather a pass just to gain access to the Senior Center – he asked that the policy be clarified. Ms. Rubin noted that when the pass was first instituted, that it was meant for access just to the Senior Center, however that has since changed and that the pass can be used for park/beach access as well, Monday-Friday. Mr. Pope said it should be called a free beach sticker then. He also noted that if you don't attend the Center regularly, you're unlikely to obtain that pass.
8. Lisa Thomas, 255 Geraldine Drive:
 - Ms. Thomas noted that she is speaking as a private citizen, not as a Town Council member. She noted that many beaches on Cape Cod have lifeguards and do charge resident and non-resident parking fees, so that is not uncommon. She asked about how swimming is managed at Patriots Park while Camp is in session. Ms. Rubin noted that the beach is split in half, with 1 half designated solely for Camp (with their own lifeguard) and the other half is for the public so there is limited, if any, interaction. Ms. Thomas also asked about charging fees at other parks, and if Patriots and Lisicke are the only places where fees are charged. Ms. Rubin responded that there are fees associated with the sports fields, and Creaser Park for rental space. Ms. Thomas then asked for clarification on the differing roles played by the gatekeepers at Patriots Park versus the

gatekeepers at Lisicke Beach. Ms. Rubin explained that the gatekeeper at Lisicke monitors resident beach stickers and swim lesson parking; the gatekeeper at Patriots Park monitors beach stickers and collects non-resident parking fees; they also address park rules and sell resident stickers on weekends. Ms. Thomas asked if there has been issues with alcohol-use at Patriots Park in the past; Ms. Rubin answered yes. Ms. Thomas also noted that she agrees with Mr. Streeter, in that the resident sticker should be free for seniors, as she does not believe it would be a large loss in revenue. She also noted that she finds the fee structure proposed to be reasonable, especially in comparison with surrounding facilities. She also noted that increase use by residents of our facilities has also increased the maintenance needed. She thanked the Commission for their efforts and service.

9. Lois Frankland, 18 Prospect Street:

- Ms. Frankland explained that she does not think it's right, that if you live in a lake association, that you should have to pay association fees, on top of swim lesson fees for your kids, and then also have to purchase a beach pass. She said a lot of families are hurting and cannot bear that burden. She also said that many of them are too proud to seek out assistance.

10. Ray Streeter, 211 North River Road:

- Mr. Streeter noted that he was not too proud; that Ryan's Fund purchased his beach sticker for him last year. He said that to pay \$4,000 in taxes each year, you get nothing.

11. Richard Williams, 508 Wrights Mill Road:

- Mr. Williams noted that he finds it appropriate that the resident beach stickers be free for seniors.

Todd Messier, Commission Chair, thanked those in attendance for their thoughts. He said that they would be taken under advisement during their regular meeting, beginning following this hearing.

Adjournment: Mr. Messier closed the public hearing at 7:24pm. The Commission's regular meeting will begin following a short break, at 7:30pm.

Respectfully Submitted,

Caterina Merriam,
Recreation Supervisor

Please note: These minutes are not official until approved by the Parks & Recreation Commission at the next Parks & Recreation Commission Meeting. Please see the next Parks & Recreation Commission Meeting Minutes for approval or changes to these minutes.