

RED BANK PARKS & RECREATION COMMITTEE

Minutes from March 26, 2024, 7 PM – Borough Hall Courtroom

The meeting was called to order at 7:00 with a motion by Nicole Taetsch and seconded by Maureen Dolan.

Attending: John LeFevre, Maureen Dolan, Sarah Corrado, Pat Richter, Nicole Taetsch, Julie Flores-Castillo, Oscar Salinas, Ben Forest, Melissa Moore, Katie O'Brien, and guest Lee Sanderson, a community member.

The minutes from the February 27, 2024, meeting were approved unanimously.

Guest attendee: Lee Sanderson is a Red Bank resident and professional musician. He shared with the Committee his concerns about heat exposure for musicians and other presenters at Riverside Gardens Park, especially given the trend of increasingly hot summers. Not only is the heat oppressive for performers, but any change in weather, such as rain and lightning, presented hazards that could be serious. Prepared with examples of shelters from other parts of the country, Lee noted that with world class jazz musicians performing through the Jazz Arts Project and increasing interest in surrounding communities to travel to Red Bank for quality concerts, the venue is worthy of more investment. A permanent structure that did not block the view of the river would be preferable. The shelter in front of 2 River Theatre was put forward as an example of a possible design and the Committee was open to looking at some cost estimates and maybe run those by the town engineers. However, it might make more sense to integrate a riverside shelter at Marine Park as there is a commitment to major renovations there and the budget might be able to accommodate such an addition.

New Member: As of Thursday, the Committee will officially welcome Katie O'Brien, a Red Bank resident currently Recreation Director in Manalapan. With extensive parks experience (Manalapan and Monmouth County Park System) Katie will be a terrific addition to the Committee. Her position in Manalapan is comparable to Oscar's in Red Bank, but she has a larger staff with five full time employees and 'a lot' of part time employees.

Jeff Davis, another Red Bank resident interested in joining the Committee (current soccer coach), may join when there is a new vacancy. The Mayor appoints new members, and the Committee votes to accept/reject them.

Item 1: Update of current Parks and Recreation activities and events

Projects and grants update

The Green Acres grant for Count Basie hit a bit of a snag with the State requesting that the lease with the Board of Education be extended for 25 years. It currently runs until 2034. The Board of Education owns the stadium, field 1, part of the basketball courts, the playground, and most of the parking lots. They lease it to the town for \$1. There will be discussion with the School Superintendent about this challenge. If it cannot be resolved, the proposal will be rejected.

Upgrading the basketball courts cannot be done because of landfill contamination below the surface. Worn areas can be patched, being careful not to dig too far down below the courts.

There may be new drawings of Marine Park redevelopment available soon. The current plans on the website are pretty old.

Egg Hunt Incident

As reported in Red Bank Green, and to the frustration of staff, volunteers, and participants, a whistle was blown to try and control kids who were surging ahead before the official start of the egg hunt, and this whistle was interpreted as the 'go' signal. There was a mad dash for eggs, and families arriving on time were frustrated that it was over before they got a chance to participate. Oscar was able to help some of these disappointed kids get treat-filled plastic eggs. This incident impacted the 6 years old and older age group, so the younger kids were fine. The turnout was huge (about 500 people), and there were two Easter Bunnies in costume.

There was considerable discussion on how to better control for accidents like this and how other towns manage similar events. Ideas included using yellow caution tape to control the waiting kids and dividing the egg hunt into periods with smaller groups of kids and replanting eggs.

The volunteers at the event were great. In the future the town could add on some things to the event – face painting, a library event, or music.

This event is always two weeks before Easter.

Item 2: Upcoming activities and events

Spring sports kick off.

The Two River Little League will start April 8th until the end of May.

Track and field is off to a good start with 67 youth registered and two coaches.

The various sports teams got all of their equipment.

T-Ball for the younger kids has a coach and will be on Saturdays in Eastside Park.

Summer camp still needs four or five counselors and a supervisor. Counselors must be between 16 and 24 years old and the State's workforce development program will reimburse their costs (\$16 per hour, minimum of 200 hours), but the counselors must be paid as consultants rather than employees. Additional outreach for counselors will be done at Brookdale. Oscar will discuss this requirement with the Human Resources person for the town. Camp is filling up, but the challenge of getting buses continues. Bus transportation absorbs \$10,000 of the budget.

PRIDE

The date for PRIDE is June 8 with a rain date of June 9 at Riverside Gardens Park. Volunteers should report at 11:00 to help set up. RiverCenter is sponsoring Drag Bingo, and a Beacon of Light Award will be given to an advocate of LGBTQ+ issues and rights. There is a Committee working on this event.

Juneteenth

Juneteenth celebration will be June 16 at 12 or 1 at Johnny Jazz Park preceded by a March from Pilgrim Baptist Church to the Park. Oscar is hoping to have the street closed for 20 minutes to allow the march to happen safely. There is a Committee working on this event.

Summer Series – Tentative dates, all at Riverside Gardens Park

Movies will be July 8, 15, 22, 29, and August 13.

National Night Out will be August 6

Jazz in the Park will be July 11, 18, 25, August 1, 8, and 15th in the evening.

Fitness in the Park will be weekly from mid-June through August in cooperation with the Red Bank YMCA.

Westside Jazz Concerts

Westside Jazz Concerts will be at 3:00 on August 4, 11, and 18, and adjusted to 1:00 on August 25 for Count Basie's birthday, all at Johnny Jazz Park.

Item 3: New Business

The complicated ownership of Count Basie Fields may present permanent challenges to government and other types of grant seeking. The Board of Education may not entertain a change in ownership structure to keep their options for the future flexible, especially new construction.

Sponsorship for the summer series at Riverside Gardens Park is lagging with four sponsors confirmed. The Committee voted to be a sponsor at the lowest level (\$500) with participation being voluntary.

There was some discussion about creating a Friends of the Parks nonprofit to raise funds for improvements that are not likely to be funded by government or grants or sponsors. Monmouth County Parks has several spin off nonprofits that raise money, including Friends of the Parks, SPUR, and the Conservation Foundation. Committee members were aware of the challenges of identifying people with the right skills and access to resources to make this a reality. At the next meeting Katie will share how Monmouth County Parks went about starting a Friends organization and the benefits and challenges of having one.

Open Discussion

There will be Zumba offered at the Senior Center from May 7 to June 25 for a fee of \$25 for all classes. Registration is through the Parks and Recs Department.

Eastside Park's renovated pickleball courts may offer an 'open play' option. Kim Smith, pickleball Ambassador, would like to help this effort. The Committee discussed keeping the courts open for tennis as well as pickleball and limiting open play to the less busy time of year, perhaps one day a week from 9 to 12. There has been damage observed at the courts, possibly from dogs, and the water pooling challenge will be addressed by the contractor. Some of the lines are coming up, but the contractor will not take responsibility for that. Online sign up for court time is doing well, but there is not an option to cancel via phone. It was recommended that the courts be numbered.

The meeting ended at 9 pm with a motion from Nicole seconded by Maureen.

NEXT MEETING IS April 23, 2024, 7:00 PM AT 90 MONMOUTH STREET