

MINUTES OF THE WORKSHOP MEETING BOARD OF PARK COMMISSIONERS April 4, 2024

The Workshop Meeting of the Board of Park Commissioners was called to order by President Cohen at 6:42 p.m. in the Patty Turner Center. Executive Director Harvey called the roll, and the following were:

PRESENT: Brown, Caron, Cohen, Patinkin and Serota (5)

ABSENT: None (0)

Staff: Executive Director Jeff Harvey, Deputy Executive Director and Director of Recreation Laura McCarty, and PTC Evening and Weekend Program Manager Kathleen Muellner

I. MATTERS OF THE PUBLIC, VISITORS AND GUESTS

A. Comments from the Public, Visitors and Guests

None

II. DISCUSSION

After school Enrichment

Mr. Harvey reported an email was sent out indicating that the Park District was pausing any changes to after school enrichment for the 2024/2025 school year. The e-mail was very well received and he received about 100 responses thanking the Park District. He also received some calls asking when a final decision would be made and believes it would be beneficial if the Board agreed on the plan so a follow-up email could be sent.

Commissioner Patinkin provided background information when the Patty Turner center was developed. Prior to meeting with the Village, Park District staff surveyed every District on the north shore to get information on the proportionate contributions of Villages and Park Districts toward senior centers. Commissioner Patinkin suggested staff should survey every district to see the breakdown between the Park Districts and School Districts for after school programs. President Cohen suggested including transportation in the survey.

Commissioner Patinkin explained the survey would find out where the after school programs are held; if they are held at the Park District, and who pays to transport the kids from the schools to the park district. He noted the schools have a much greater tax base than the Park District and the schools should take care of the transportation. Commissioner Patinkin explained if the survey shows other school districts are handling transportation, the Park District should point that out to the school district.

Commissioner Serota does not believe things will change unless there is a meeting with all the stakeholders. Commissioner Serota believes that the decision made by the Park District assumed it was in the best interest of the families, but the parents were not consulted. Ms. McCarty suggested those families would want it to stay at the schools unless transportation could be provided. The Park District needs to get insight on why the school district can't provide transportation. Commissioner Serota questioned how to make the programs work onsite at the schools. Ms. McCarty noted there are logistical challenges in running all the programs in the schools, with only popular ones being feasible due to limited resources and staff. Currently, more than 40 percent of programs are cancelled due to lack of enrollment.

III. ADJOURNMENT TO CLOSED SESSION

Commissioner Patinkin moved to adjourn the open session meeting to closed session for personnel matters involving specific employees pursuant to 5 ILCS 120/2(c)(1). Commissioner Serota seconded the motion. The motion passed by the following roll call vote:

AYES: Brown, Caron, Cohen, Patinkin and Serota (5)

NAYS: None (0)

The meeting was adjourned to closed session at 6:52 pm

IV. RECONVENE TO OPEN SESSION

President Cohen reconvened in open session at 7:26 pm.

PRESENT: Brown, Caron, Cohen, Patinkin and Serota (5)

ABSENT: None (0)

Staff: Executive Director Jeff Harvey, Deputy Executive Director, Director of Recreation Laura McCarty and PTC Evening and Weekend Program Manager Kathleen Muellner (arrived at 7:52 pm)

In continuing discussions regarding after school enrichment programs, Kathleen Muellner believes that unless there is a solution with transportation, the program either needs to be kept as is or just let people figure out the transportation on their own. President Cohen noted the issue is not going away and believes doing a survey makes a lot of sense. Commissioner Caron expressed concern because the Park District agreed to make sure everyone who needed after school care would be accommodated.

The Board members believe they need cooperation from the school and possibly the PTO, in order to come up with a solution that would serve most families. Commissioner Brown believes if the parents are asked, they would want the enrichment at the schools so they can leave their kids there for after-care and would not have to worry about bussing. From the Park District's perspective, however, it is a logistical issue and makes sense to consolidate enrichment at a central location. Ms. Muellner believes the Park District needs to have more conversations with the schools.

Commissioner Serota believes the Park District should have collaborative conversations with parents and they eventually will understand the thought process. Involving parents in the discussions about the various issues and constraints faced by the park district will foster understanding and alignment. This involvement will help parents grasp the rationale behind decisions, even if they may not always agree with them. Ultimately, this collaborative approach would mitigate potential blame for the decisions that are made, as parents will have been part of the dialogue and will understand the considerations involved.

Ms. Muellner explained the biggest issues include the logistics and quality. Bringing in vendors with non-qualified instructors and holding a program for grades kindergarten through fifth grade is not ideal. Many of the instructors do not know about classroom management and do not know what to do when children do not listen. In addition, the vendors try to get as many kids as possible into their programs, so they are not providing good quality programs. If the program was consolidated at Jewett, the Park District would be in charge at their facility, would have better control over instructors and ensure attendance and maximized learning.

Ms. Muellner explained the other hurdle is working with the contractual custodial staff at District 109. Staff are going into rooms not set up when vendors come in. Staff has to wait because they are not allowed to set up because in the IGAs. Custodians are contracted and believe the Park District should be charged to have the custodial staff set up the designated rooms.

The Board members discussed the possibility of just offering the classes that have a good following. Ms. Muellner noted the lower level of Jewett, with the newly renovated rooms, will be empty because the staff are at the schools. Commissioner Serota explained that without bussing, parents will not sign up and Jewett will still be empty. The Park District does not offer classes at Jewett because they would be competing with themselves; but they could offer scaled down classes at the school as well as some classes at Jewett. They would have the enrichment coordinators at the schools and the full-time staff at Jewett. President Cohen does not believe offering classes at Jewett without transportation is a good option. Commissioner Serota added they are not going to Sachs Center and she does not believe they would go to Jewett without transportation.

Commissioner Serota believes there are some solvable things, like updating the IGA to include more support, collaboration and cooperation with the custodial staff, lowering the minimum number of enrichments offered, extending the amount of time for the program to allow kids to get a snack first and the custodians to set up the rooms, and working with the PTO to find more staffing and different vendors.

Ms. Muellner noted some enrichment programs start at 4:30 or 5:00 so parents that work can take their kids to enrichment offsite. She suggested next year could be a transition year where a few, popular enrichment classes could be offered at the schools and other classes offered at Jewett. She suggested next year the Park District should offer two classes per day, rather than four, at each school. Commissioner Serota questioned if there is any harm listing other programs, even if they get cancelled for low enrollment.

The Board members discussed enrollment. Residents would enroll first and non-residents would enroll two days later. Commissioner Caron asked if registration is in the order people sign up, or if there is a lottery. She suggested offering a lottery with a two- or three-hour window, so the computers do not get gridlocked. Ms. Muellner explained they stopped having a lottery for camps, because they were able to accommodate most of the waitlist. Commissioner Serota received complaints about people no longer having priority registration, but did not know there had been priority registration for people currently signed up. Ms. Muellner explained this was implemented during COVID because people needed to be in pods.

V. ADJOURNMENT

There being no further business or discussion, Commissioner Patinkin moved to adjourn the meeting. Commissioner Serota seconded the motion. The motion passed unanimously on a voice vote.

The meeting was adjourned at 8:45 pm.

Respectfully submitted,

Jeff Harvey, Secretary

Transcribed by: Jeri Cotton