City of Ellsworth
1 City Hall Plaza, Ellsworth, ME 04605
RECREATION COMMISSION
Regular Meeting
Tuesday, January 16, 2024 at 8:30 a.m.

1. Call to Order

Chair Marichal called the meeting to order at 8:30AM.

Members Present: Chair Eric Marichal, Vice-Chair Kathy Young, Member Kim Fitch, Member Melinda Workman (via Zoom), and Member Jon Stein.
Members Absent: Members Josh Frost & Ellerie Ezekiel
Staff Present: Matthew Williams, City Planner and Elizabeth Ouellette, Assistant City Planner.

2. Adoption of January 4, 2024 Special Meeting Minutes

Vice-Chair Young moved to adopt the January 4, 2024 Special Meeting Minutes. Member Fitch seconded the motion. **The vote to adopt the January 4, 2024 Special Meeting Minutes was UNANIMOUS.**

3. Update Regarding Asset Spreadsheet

Chair Marichal began by explaining the background of this project. He explained that the Commission is now working on compiling a spreadsheet which they plan to present to the City Council with suggestions for needed improvements. He said that the end goal would be some sheets of information about each of the recreational assets that would be accessible to the public. He said that he had a rough draft of the compiled information, but he was waiting to hear from some of the other members with their input. He said that he would like to highlight the location, ownership, positive qualities, and needed improvements for each of the assets. Marichal then said that this would also be needed to inform the budget process. He said that he would share the compiled information with the rest of the Commission and asked that the members review it and give their input. Member Stein asked if the budget would be broken out by asset this year. Marichal said that it would not, but this document would help the Commission determine which of the needed improvements should be their priority. He said that it would show a list of all the improvements needed and then the Commission can choose their top few to include in the budget process. Stein then made the comment that there is also the capital improvement budget for the City each year and they can have the bigger projects funded through that budget process. Vice-Chair Young asked who she should send the information to. Marichal said that he will be compiling all of the information and create a rough draft.

Member Workman made a comment that the several rain events over the last few weeks have done a lot of damage to Knowlton Park. She said that there was a lot of runoff which was piling up and the walking trails had some significant holes in them now. She said that there was a lot of landscaping that would be needed to fix all of it. Marichal asked City Planner Williams what the process would be to fixing that. Williams said that it would be a job for the Public Works Department and he would have to see if they have any room in their schedule to fit it in. He explained that there was a lot of storm damage that the Public Works Department is working to repair.

Marichal said that he would present a more final product of all the compiled information at the next meeting. Young said that they need to include more specifics about the location of all of these assets. She said that some people may want coordinate information. She also said that the Commission should make sure that all of the hiking trails are included in that information. Member Stein suggested making an interactive map of all of the assets where members of the public can click on the asset and be brought to the information page. Williams said that this was something that they could work on with the Communications Specialist. Marichal made the comment that there should be more information on the assets that are owned partly by the City and partly by some other partner organization. He said that there should be more information about who the partner is for each of those assets. Zachary Ames from The Y asked if the public could contribute to the asset information or give input about which projects should be the priority of the Commission. Williams said that he could send a copy of the draft to Ames and said that if there is a project that they would like considered for priority then to bring that to the full Commission in a meeting. Marichal made the comment that they may need to rely on some outside organizations to get all of the information that they need for each asset.

4. Discussion and Possible Action on Moving the Regular February Meeting Date

Chair Marichal said that there was a request to move the February meeting date since the regular meeting is scheduled to take place during February vacation. He said that there are several members who would not be available to attend the meeting since they have children who would be off from school. Vice-Chair Young suggested moving the meeting date to February 27th which would be one week after the regularly scheduled meeting. The Commission agreed with this suggestion.

Vice-Chair Young moved to change the February Meeting to February 27th at 8:30AM in the Council Chamber. Member Fitch seconded the motion. **The vote to change the February meeting to February 27th at 8:30AM in the Council Chamber was UNANIMOUS.**

5. Update Regarding Winter Carnival

Chair Marichal began by giving a background on the idea for a Winter Carnival. He said that this event was held in years past and there was a desire to bring it back. He said that the Commission wanted to give the public something to do during the winter months that is recreation based. Member Fitch said that they would have less than one month to pull this event off, and that is not much time. Fitch suggested that the Commission begin advertising for 2025 this year and build up excitement for an event next year. She said that they could begin planning it now so they would have enough time to make it a big event. She said that the Christmas in Ellsworth group (which will be renamed) will reconvene and discuss the planning of this event. She said that they would see who would be willing to participate in the planning and execution of the event. Amy Reisman asked if the event would be at the same time as the BANFF Film Festival. Fitch said that was currently the plan, but it did not have to be. Fitch then went on to say that they have missed the window for getting Fire Marshall approval for a fireworks show. She said that there may be a possibility to get approval expedited but they would need some information about the location and would need to get it to the Marshall's office that day. She said that there would also need to be a waiver signed by the owner of the property and asked whether that would be the City Manager or the School Superintendent. City Planner Williams said that it would likely be the City Manager, but he would have to check. Fitch then said that there were some concerns regarding existing buildings near the launch site, and they would need to tell the Fire Marshall what is inside those buildings to get approval. She said that a 12-15 minute show would cost $3,800 and that the contract includes a rain date of the following week. Vice-Chair Young asked what time the show would be at. Fitch said around five o'clock so that people can go to dinner and then go to the Film Festival in the evening. Young asked where people would go to have a good view of the fireworks. Fitch said that they could stand in the school parking lots and at the Mill Mall.

Young made a comment that there are not many skating or sledding opportunities and she did not anticipate that the conditions would improve by the time of this event. Marichal said that there was not a lot of time to plan an event and it is so weather dependent that there likely wouldn't be any outdoor events possible. He suggested that the Commission just start planning for next year and use the time to make that event a City-wide event. Young said that she is looking into outdoor winter activities that do not require snow. She said that there is a possibility that she could organize sled dog rides where the sleds are on wheels. She said that she will be looking into it. Member Workman suggested a corn-hole tournament that could be held indoors. Young said that they could possibly hold that at Woodlawn in the barn next year, but she would have to look into it. Marichal then talked about how the Commission needs to get the public involved in the planning and marketing of the event. He suggested that they begin marketing now and build up excitement for the event next year. Member Stein said that they should look into private sponsors for the event to help offset the costs and to better include the public. Fitch said that they have done events with private sponsorship before and that was something that they could look into. Marichal then circled back to the fireworks discussion, wondering if it would be too rushed. Fitch said that there was a possibility that the Fire Marshall would not sign off in time and she thought they should just promote next year's event. Stein asked if there was money budgeted for this. Marichal said that it was wrapped up into the Holiday Events budget. Williams said that they could make purchases for next year's event out of this budget as well. Young asked if Fitch thought there would be Fire Marshall approval in time. Fitch said that if she was able to get all of the necessary information then there would be a chance that they could be approved, but it would not be a guarantee. Williams said that this would be a lot of work in a short amount of time. He said that he would check on the budget and make sure that expending those funds is something that could be done at this point. Young said that she thought the Commission should try to do fireworks this year as a teaser for next year. Williams said they could try, but the Commission would be primarily responsible for promotion of the event. Marichal said that there was no need to vote on expending those funds since they are already in the budget. Fitch said she would try and compile the needed information and see if she could get an approval. Stein said that if they can do this event, then they should look into including the students and booster club at the schools, suggesting that they could sell refreshments as a fundraiser.

6. Discussion Regarding the Ice Rink

Zachary Ames said that The Y is all set to help out with setting up the rink and maintenance, they just need to know the right time to go and set up. He said that the liner would have to be cut to accommodate the loss of some of the boards which make up the walls of the rink. Chair Marichal said that he would also make himself available to help with the setup. Ames said that sometime in the morning would be preferable and that they would need access to the shed where the boards and supports are located. He also said that they would need to wait for good weather to set up the rink. Marichal made a comment that there wouldn't have been much opportunity for skating anyway given the weather, so not much has been missed. Member Fitch said that they used artificial ice for The Grand's production of Elf and it worked very well. Marichal said that was something that City Planner Williams has already been looking into. Vice-Chair Young asked how it was set up. Fitch said that it didn't take much time and the pieces snapped together. Young said that this material could be used in multiple locations throughout the year, which would be a big benefit. Williams said that he thought using the artificial ice would be the best option for future years. Marichal said it could also be used for roller skating and blading. Williams said that it would, however they would likely need to construct some sort of walls if they were going to use it for that. Marichal asked Fitch if the Commission could visit The Grand and see the artificial ice. Fitch said that she could arrange a visit.

Marichal said that they would still likely need a sponsor for the rink. Williams said that the cost for a full-size rink would be somewhere around 13-15K. Fitch said that the company The Grand used was called PolyGlide Ice and said that it may not be as expensive as the company Williams was looking at. Marichal said that the rink would need to be put on a flat area, so it would not be able to be at Knowlton Park. Williams said that they are unable to build or fill any of the land at Knowlton Park so they would need to find a different alternative. Ames said that the basketball courts or the pickleball courts would also be good locations for the ice rink since they are not used in the winter months. Ames said that using this material would open up the possibility of having a lot more activities like roller skating and things like that. Marichal said that it would make sense to move to this material since it would allow for skating in more weather conditions. He said that sponsors would also prefer that since more people will be using the rink. Ames said that the sponsors could put their logos on the walls as a benefit of donating funds. Marichal told Ames that they would coordinate a time where they can go set up. Williams said that Tuesday of next week looks like it would be good weather to set up. Young asked about the maintenance of the rink. Ames said that it would be a joint effort with The Y and community volunteers. Marichal said that he has two volunteers who are willing to help keep the rink clear of snow. Young said the Commission should hang shovels and just have the parents of the children who use the rink shovel. Williams said that would likely lead to theft and they would come up with a system so volunteers can access equipment without it being out in the open. Williams asked Ames to let them know what The Y is able to do in terms of maintenance and the Commission and community volunteers will fill in the gaps. Fitch suggested that Marichal share the Facebook post asking for volunteers again in hopes of getting more people. Ames said that he could also assist in the volunteer coordination since they have experience with volunteers.

7. Member Comments

Chair Marichal asked City Planner Williams what the timeline would be regarding the Commission's budget. Williams said that funding requests from outside organizations are due mid-February and that the Commission will be working on the budget at their next regular meeting, which is after that due date. Marichal asked if the same groups will be requesting funds from this Commission or if they would be moved to other Commissions. Williams said that most of the organizations who will be requesting funds are the same, but there were some that were moved to Social Services. Williams said that the Finance Director has created a new funding request form that asks for more information from the organization about what specifically they will do with the funding that they receive from the Commission. Williams said that there may be some new organizations who request funding, but they will have to wait and see what requests they get. Marichal then brought up the idea of drafting a contract with The Y to better explain what they do for the City. Williams said that would be a decision left to the City Council, since they are the only ones who can authorize that. He said that it would not be feasible to get a contract approved before this budget cycle, but that is something that he can bring up with the City Manager. He said for this budget cycle, The Y should turn in a detailed description of where all their City funds go towards and what programs they are offering the community. Member Stein said that the City Council wanted more explanation from The Y, and they would be interested in seeing that document as well. Marichal said that he has spoken with the Director of The Y and they are both in agreement that there will be more details provided this budget cycle and that their relationship with the City should be better defined. Member Workman made a comment that she was impressed with how much The Y does for the community and all of their activities should be more widely known. Ames said that The Y is working on a better reporting system where they will provide more detail.

Vice-Chair Young then brought up the idea of an outdoor recreation event. She said that she is in favor of the equipment repair service which Williams discussed at the last meeting and she thought it would be a good event. Williams said that they are looking into finding sponsors for the outdoor recreation fair. He said that he would like businesses like Cadillac Mountain Sports and L.L. Bean to come and provide demonstrations of the types of gear they have to offer. He also said that they are looking into getting food trucks and different nonprofit and for-profit organizations to table. The first event will be at the Harbor in the spring. The second event will take place in the fall and be held at Woodlawn in combination with their recreation gear swap program where individuals can donate old gear for reuse. Williams said that the idea was that people could come and get used gear and then have any needed repairs done right on site. Williams said that the possible dates for the spring event would be May 31st or June 7th at the Harbor. Fitch suggested scheduling the fall event around Autumn Gold since that brings more people to Ellsworth. Williams said that he would look into it. Marichal said that the Commission will get to work on promoting the spring event once the date was finalized.

Stein then discussed the City's capital improvement plan. He said that some of the major projects could also be funded through this area of the budget, so it would not all have to come out of Recreation. He also said that the Commission should think about a recommendation for a Staff person who would be dedicated to Recreation. Marichal said that he would include that in his report to the City Council. He also said that the asset project they are working on will help illustrate how many different places in the City there are that need to be maintained. Stein suggested they frame it in a way that shows how much money could be saved by hiring one staff person to help coordinate that maintenance. Williams explained how maintenance of these assets are handled now, saying that any needed repairs are put on the Public Works work schedule which can mean that it takes a few weeks before they can get to the repair. Marichal said that was the reason that they needed at least one person to be dedicated to the recreational assets specifically. Young asked how they would put their proposal together, wondering if there was a job description or pay scale already in place. Williams said that there is no set pay scale and the City Council decides the pay ranges for employees. Stein said that they could get some information from surrounding municipalities to see how much they pay their staff who is dedicated to recreation. Williams said that is usually how they determine what ranges they should be paying their employees and that he would look into it. Marichal said that the Commission should make getting a staff person a priority since the current system is not ideal.

8. Staff Comments

Amy Reisman asked if there was a formal request process to get large rocks installed in Merrill Park so the plow does not hit anything in the park, as has happened in the past. City Planner Williams said that would be a discussion with Public Works to make sure that nothing would be installed in the right-of-way. Reisman said that where the owner was planning on putting them would not be in the right-of-way. Williams said that he would send her the funding request form so she can begin that process. Vice-Chair Young asked why they couldn't just remove the bench in the wintertime so it would not be hit by the plow. Reisman said that people still use that bench in the wintertime and that it is very heavy to move. She also said that they have spoken to the individual who does the plowing several times and they keep making the same error, so she thought the rocks would be the ideal solution. She said that one time someone drove completely into the park to access the electric chargers from the wrong side, and these rocks would also stop that from happening again. Zabet NewCollins from Heart of Ellsworth introduced herself as the new Program Coordinator. Chair Marichal asked NewCollins what she thought of the new ice material. NewCollins said that it was very interesting. Reisman said that they would love to see a covered space where the new rink could be placed.

Marichal then wrapped up by reminding Members to fill out the asset evaluations and send them to him so he can compile all of the information. He said that he is working on the report to the City Council which will also be given to the Comprehensive Plan consultants. He said that Fitch would reach out about the potential of fireworks and organize a time where the Commission can visit The Grand to see the new ice material. He said that for the rink this year, they will coordinate a time to get it set up and work with Zachary Ames to get the volunteers coordinated. Member Stein said that he would talk to the Communications Specialist about creating an interactive map on the website about all of the recreational assets. Young asked Fitch if she could include some promotional material in the BANFF festival. Fitch said that she could include material in the slide show before the films begin. Young then asked Williams if he could get some rough estimates on how much a part-time recreation staff person would cost. Williams said he could get that information.

9. Adjournment

Member Fitch moved to adjourn. Vice-Chair Young seconded the motion. **The vote to adjourn was UNANIMOUS at 9:43AM.**