

City of Ellsworth
1 City Hall Plaza, Ellsworth, ME 04605
RECREATION COMMISSION
Regular Meeting
Tuesday, March 19, 2024 at 8:30 a.m.

1. Call to Order

Chair Marichal called the meeting to order at 8:31AM.

Members Present: Chair Eric Marichal, Vice-Chair Kathy Young, Member Kim Fitch, Member Josh Frost, Member Ellerie Ezekiel, and Member Jon Stein.

Members Absent: Member Melinda Workman

Staff Present: Elizabeth Ouellette, Assistant City Planner; Matthew Williams, City Planner.

2. Adoption of February 27, 2024 Regular Meeting Minutes

Vice-Chair Young moved to adopt the February 27, 2024 Regular Meeting Minutes. Member Fitch seconded the motion. **The vote to adopt the February 27, 2024 Regular Meeting Minutes was UNANIMOUS.**

3. Discussion Regarding FY2025 Budget

Chair Marichal said that in previous years, the outside organizations made a presentation before the Commission. Assistant Planner Ouellette said that this year, the outside organizations all turned in their funding requests to the Finance Office as opposed to sending it to the Commission directly. Vice-Chair Young said that the organizations need to include some sort of explanation about how they used their funds from last year if the Commission is going to consider them for funding this year. Member Ezekiel asked what maintenance has changed for Demeyer Field that has caused their budget allocation to go down. Member Frost explained that the fields are no longer lit at night which has led to a significant reduction in costs. Young asked why Demeyer Field was a part of the Commission's budget but Knowlton Park is not. Ouellette said that she was not sure, but the Knowlton Park funds are held in the Facilities budget. Frost pointed out that there is a budget line for maintenance of Knowlton Park, but it does not seem that any funds have been allocated to it in previous years. Young said that she thought the ice rink and the funds for that should be put under the YMCA's budget line since they are the ones who maintain it. Member Stein said that the YMCA did turn in a budget request, but he did not have his materials on him. Marichal asked the group if there are any outside organizations that were funded in previous years that they would be uncomfortable funding again. Young said again that the Commission should put the ice rink maintenance under the YMCA's budget since they maintain it. She asked if the ice rink was ever set up this year. Marichal said that it was not, and that the weather has been so mild that there would not have been much opportunity for ice skating this year. He said that they have been discussing artificial ice rink options and will be working with the YMCA on this potential project. Frost asked about the Challenger Program, noting that he did not believe they even requested funding last year. Member Fitch said that they did not turn in a budget request, but there was \$1,000 budgeted for a potential sponsorship opportunity that never happened. Frost then pointed out that the Ellsworth Little League is not on the list of organizations funded. He said that the Commission could potentially invite them to request funding. He said that they do a lot of work at Demeyer field in terms of laying down the stripes and dragging the dirt on the fields.

Marichal then asked Fitch about The Grand's activities from last year and if they all were accomplished. Fitch said that all of the events that were funded through the Commission did take place. She said that the outdoor movies went well and they hope to increase the number of movies from 4 to 5 this year. Young asked if the

movies that were shown were family movies. Fitch said that they were all rated G or PG so families can come and enjoy them. Frost said that the name of that event should change to reflect that The Grand now runs it. Fitch said that the outdoor concert series went well. She said that they will be building in a rate date of the following Sunday for each performance since there were some performances that had to be cancelled due to rain. Marichal asked what the funds from the Commission go towards. Fitch said that it was mostly to pay the players and pay for the marketing. Fitch then said that she was fairly certain that they requested the same amount of funding for this event as they did last year. Fitch then continued by saying that the Shakespeare at the Harbor will now be held at Knowlton Park in the amphitheater. She said that it would run from August 8th to August 11th and she will be filling out the paperwork with the Clerk's office today. Fitch then said that the budget request for the Vacation Movies has been increased due to the rising costs of obtaining the rights to the films. She said that they wanted to add a second showing on Fridays, but that will be dependent on budget. Frost asked what the movie would be for April vacation. Fitch said that it would be the new Ninja Turtles movie. Fitch then moved onto the educational programs offered by The Grand where they bring school children into see shows and conduct workshops. Young asked what the duration of that program was. Fitch said that it was only active during the school year.

Marichal then asked if the Music Institute is located at the Moore Center. Fitch said that it was. Young asked if they only perform in the winter. Fitch said that program was year round. Young asked if concert band only performed during one time of the year. Fitch said that their performances were outdoors in the summertime. Young asked if the situation with the storage shed had been resolved. City Planner Williams said that the shed is still there and not currently an issue. Marichal then moved onto the Winter Events section and said that this should be kept because of the Winter Carnival. Fitch said that she wanted to address the lights next year, noting that they were in need of an upgrade. Stein asked if there were unused funds from this year's budget. Williams said that there is a lot in the Winter Events, but some of that may be used for the deposit on the fireworks show for the Winter Carnival in 2025. Fitch asked if the funds that were set aside for the ice rink got used or not. Williams said that they were not used. Young said that Woodlawn is owed a reimbursement for their ice skating pond and she would get that request to Williams soon. She asked that Woodlawn get their own budget line instead of coming out of the "miscellaneous" section. Frost asked about the budget line for Knowlton Park that did not seem to be funded. Williams explained that this was taken out of the budget a few years ago. He said that the Commission can put Knowlton Park back under their budget, but it would also be accepting the responsibility for the Park. He said that the Commission should coordinate with the Public Works Department to determine which responsibilities the Commission can realistically take on. Marichal then asked Williams how the Commission would go about budgeting for a Staff person. Williams said that the Commission would first need to come up with a job description and do some preliminary planning before the position is posted. Stein said that they could plan on a Staff person for only half of the fiscal year, starting on January 1. This way, Stein said, they could plan for the Staff person and get ready for them to begin in January. Young asked who this person would report to. Williams said that it would be the City Manager and that this would be a management position. Stein said that the Commission would need to show the City Council the need for this position and all of the potential benefits of having this position. Young confirmed that if they budgeted for a half year's salary that the person hired would begin in January. Williams confirmed. Stein said that they need to put it into the budget now to get the funds secured. Williams said that if they are not prepared to have someone begin in January, then they would just not use those funds which would not be a problem. He said that they may need to coordinate with Public Works to determine what responsibilities this person would take over.

Williams then said that he added a budget line for the Outdoor Recreation events and moved \$1,000 from the “miscellaneous” section to cover it. Fitch asked if there was a date for the first event. Ezekiel said that it would be on June 8th. Marichal said that the Recreation Commission’s budget workshop would be on April 29th and asked if the Commission could have the outside organization’s requests to review before then. Williams said that he would get it to them. Marichal then asked Williams if they could put a Staff person in the budget. Williams said that was up to the Commission and it was not for him to decide. Stein said that he thought they should put in for a Staff person for half of the year. Stein said they can determine the salary based on comparable communities. Williams said that the job description would need to be drafted first. Frost asked if the Staff person would take over the Holiday events. Fitch said that she would be glad of some help on those events, although she does not mind doing them. Young said that the Commission would need to take funds from the YMCA’s request since they are currently doing some things that this Staff person would do. Marichal said that the YMCA does a lot more other activities that a Staff person could not have the capacity to handle. Stein said that they would need to determine the responsibilities of this Staff person and then see if any other changes are necessary at that time. Stein said that he could get some job descriptions from other municipalities. Marichal then asked the Commission to one-by-one give their opinion about budgeting for a Staff person for half of the year. Frost said that he is supportive of the idea of having a Staff person and it has been discussed for many years. He said that he was unsure if this was the right year for it given all of the other issues with the budget. He said that the School is likely going to have to lay off teachers, and he would rather see those funds go to the School this year. Ezekiel said that she thought this position would be very beneficial. She said that she would want to know what their responsibilities would be. She said that there is a lot of potential to make the improvements that the Commission has been talking about, but the logistics would need to be figured out. She said that the job description would be the first step. Fitch said that this was something that has been discussed for a while and there is a real need for it. She said that jumping into the request without doing the groundwork may be a risk. She said that it would be great if they could find a grant to fund the Staff person’s salary. Young said that she was in full support of budgeting for a Staff person. She said that there is never a right time to make these kinds of moves. She said that there is time to do the necessary planning before January and that it would be great if there was a grant that could fund the salary. She said again that timing is always a challenge, but this was necessary. Marichal said that it is a great opportunity for cost savings and he was in favor of trying to persuade the Council to agree. Stein said that he could get a job description and provide it before the next meeting. Young asked if the Maine Community Foundation could possibly help with some sort of grant. Williams said that he would like to see the Commission take the initiative and find and write the grant for this.

4. Public Comments

Teresa Davis from the Arbor Commission was present and said that their Commission is in the same boat in regards to the budget process. She said that it was interesting seeing this Commission’s process. She said that if there was a Parks & Recreation Director, there would be an opportunity to bring in income as well, which would be a benefit to the whole community. Tabitha White, the Chair of the Arbor Commission, agreed and said that they have also recommended that a Parks & Recreation Director be hired. She also said that the Arbor Commission would like to see a Director and a maintenance person in the department. She said that these positions could bring in a lot of income for the City. White added that the Arbor Commission was willing to advocate to the City Council with the Recreation Commission regarding the merits of this Department. She said that an actual conversation with the City Council is what is needed so they all will understand the need for this. She said that the new City Manager seems open to the idea of a Parks &

Recreation Department and that this Department would be able to help the rest of Staff as well. Chair Marichal said that it would be great if the Recreation and Arbor Commissions could present to the Council together on this topic. He said that it will at least bring this issue to the attention of the full Council. He then said that he will do some of the groundwork discussed before the next meeting. Vice-Chair Young asked what type of Department other comparable communities had. Member Stein said that he could send the information that the Human Resources Director sent him. Young commented that there needs to be more coordination between Commissions regarding topics like these. Marichal asked what comparable cities the Arbor Commission was looking at. White said that they are looking at Skowhegan and Castine and will send some information via email regarding those municipalities' Parks & Recreation Departments. Zabet NeuCollins from Heart of Ellsworth said that the Business Attraction Plan also has some comparable municipalities that the Commission could take a look at. She asked if it would be possible to partner with an outside organization to match funds for this position. City Planner Williams said that would not be advisable since it could create a conflict. Stein said that the communities mentioned in the plan were Saco, Biddeford, and Skowhegan. Williams said that there will also be other communities discussed in the Comprehensive Plan. White then said that there is so much tourism in Ellsworth that it makes it a very unique community in Maine and it adds population during the busy season. Member Fitch said that a lot of other municipalities use Ellsworth's facilities as well, causing more of a strain.

Young then asked Williams if there was a requirement for any organization requesting funds to give an explanation of how they used the funds last year. Williams said that was a requirement this year. Stein asked if the topic of a Staff person could be added to the agenda for next month. Williams said that it could.

5. Member Comments

Member Frost said that he was unable to come to the next Regular meeting since it is during April vacation. City Planner Williams recommended that the Commission hold a special meeting before the next regularly scheduled meeting to discuss the budget. The group agreed that April 9th at 8:30AM would work. Member Fitch asked if there still would be a regular meeting when scheduled. Chair Marichal said that he would like to also have the regularly scheduled meeting next month.

Member Stein said that the Downeast Rock and Roots music festival will be happening again this year. He said that it will be July 6th and 7th and there will be a dozen vendors this time. He noted that the event got expanded due to the success last year. Vice-Chair Young said that parking will be an issue.

Marichal asked Williams about the slide at Knowlton Park. Williams said that the original plan was to replace the slide, but the replacement part that came did not fit. The Facilities Director could attach it to the playground, but would have to manufacture something to make it fit securely. Williams said that this is an issue for Maine Municipal Association (MMA) who is the insurance facilitator for the City. He said that they are trying to get approval from the slide company that the part made by the Facilities Director would work and then they will return to MMA to get approval under the insurance. Fitch asked if the company that provided the slide also provided the other playground equipment. Williams said that they did and noted that this company is very unresponsive and they have had a difficult time contacting them. Marichal said that he would be willing to contact the slide company for Williams if he would like that.

6. Staff Comments

Assistant Planner Ouellette announced that it would be her last meeting as she was starting a new job in Bangor in April. She said that she had enjoyed getting to know everyone and would miss them. The Commission wished Ouellette luck in her new position.

Tabitha White, Chair of the Arbor Commission, then got up to use the remaining time to discuss the background and goals of the Arbor Commission. She said that the Commission was originally established in 1991 after Dutch Elm disease killed most of the elm trees on Main Street. She said that some planting took place around that time, but no one was ever appointed to the Commission. She said that they had their first meeting last August and are working on updating their ordinance as well as putting a tree management plan together. She said that Green Ellsworth has around 300 trees in the tree nursery and some are almost ready to be planted. She said that the second grade class from the local school comes every year to plant more saplings in the tree nursery. She said that this is a huge cost saving measure since buying adult trees is very expensive and it costs less to raise them from saplings. She said that Frenchman Bay Conservancy (FBC) purchases the trees, Green Ellsworth raises them, and then the Arbor Commission plants the trees. Young asked what land they would be planting these trees on. White said that they will be looking to plant on both public and private land. Young asked about High Street. White said that was one of their priorities, but they needed to look into where they could plant and which types of trees have the most chance of success on that street. She said that they do not want to plant a tree if it will just die within a short amount of time. White said that the Commission is working on a survey to figure out the city-owned right-of-way and what properties they can plant their trees on. White then said that they are also working on a new job description for the Tree Warden and are looking to have someone fill that position that has background experience with trees. She said that may fit into the Parks & Recreation Department. Marichal encouraged White to come back to another meeting in May or June to discuss further collaboration between the two Commissions.

7. Adjournment

Member Frost moved to adjourn. Vice-Chair Young seconded the motion. **The vote to adjourn was UNANIMOUS at 10:05AM.**