

THE REGULAR MEETING OF THE EMERSON RECREATION COMMISSION WAS HELD ON DECEMBER 6, 2018, AT 7:30 P.M. IN THE CONFERENCE ROOM OF THE RECREATION CENTER.

Presiding Officer Afrim Hoxha called the Regular Meeting of the Recreation Commission to order at 7:30 p.m.

Roll Call: Presiding Officer Afrim Hoxha, David Cannici, Mike Graham, Paul Coombes Anthony Gismondi, Eilish Viggiani, Richard Solimando and Council liaison Brian Downing

Apologies: Bob Quinones, Willie Ortiz

Presiding Officer Afrim Hoxha welcomed the Recreation secretary Liz Morris who introduced herself.

I Christmas Tree Lighting Event

Organization of the event is mostly complete. Nicole del Grasso will be taking photographs of the children with Santa. She went to the Firehouse on Tuesday to make sure everything was OK for the night. Joe (Santa) will be at the firehouse at 6:30 p. m. and the tree lighting will be at 7:00 p.m. When the children arrive they will come in through the main entrance, have refreshments and can go to the cordoned off area for a picture with Santa.

Tom Carlos will open up the firehouse which has been cleared out the tree decorated. The photo's will be taken in one of the bays which has a white background and no fire trucks. There will be a chair for Santa and the tree which will have presents around it. Nicole will take 5 pictures, print and leave on the table. She has been asked to limit this to one picture per family. Paul will submit a PO for her to be paid.

Fire Department has cups and napkins Rich will check to see if they have plates. If not he will get some. Paul, Brian, Rich and Anthony will help set up. Rich will be there around 6 p.m. Brian will get the donuts from Demarest Farm. Afrim asked that any Rec Commission member who attend the event take pictures which can be posted on social media. Rich asked those helping to text him when they are available.

The event has been well advertised with over 700 flyers put into kids back packs through the schools. Good social media coverage so there should be a good turnout. The flyer has a map of Santa's route which went over well. Jim McDermott one of the firemen is also going to put his route on GPS so kids can track his arrival. This will be done again when Santa does his tours of Emerson on December 18th, 19th and 20th. Rich suggested that the Rec commission should send a letter of thanks for all the people in town who have helped out, particularly Joe who has acted as Santa for the last two years. He doesn't want to be paid and asks for donation to Special Homes instead.

II Open Public Comment

John Gray, 96 Eagle Drive

John attended the meeting because he was wanted to know why all sports offered in town are not part of the Recreation Commission. Rec supports Baseball, Softball, Football, Wrestling and Soccer, the Middle school are now offering basketball, track and volleyball, Boys and Girls clubs offer bowling, volleyball and basketball and Track is run by Munson's and the Assumption.

Afrim clarified that the Rec board is the main board and all the other sub-committees report into this board. If an interested group wanted to set up a new sport they can do that, but there are certain rules and conditions that have to be followed. Any new sport would require a president, vice-president, a board, by-laws and volunteers to get it going. So as long as any group of individuals is aware that there are these requirements, and that they are responsible for running it, then they are welcome to set up a new sport or activity. There is also an expectation that once it has been set up they will keep running it and not end their involvement when their kids leave the sport.

This is not limited to sports, if a group of people I want to set up other activities, for example fishing they can do that too. The Rec Commission is open to any suggestions.

III 2019 Meeting dates

Motion to approve an amendment to Resolution 4-18 was made. The amendment approves the start time of the meeting from 7:30 p.m. to 8:00 p.m.

Motion made Dave Cannici Seconded by Rich Solimando
Roll Call: AH-yes AG-yes MG-yes PC-yes EV-yes

IV New Ordinances

Commissioner Downing confirmed that Ordinance No. 1570-18 was adopted and Ordinance No.'s 1573-18 and 1579-18 were introduced at the Mayor & Council meeting December 4, 2018. Copies of the ordinances are attached to the minutes. Brian commented that a lot of research was done for all three of the ordinances discussed.

He also discussed the new background check system that will be introduced in the New Year which the Recreation Secretary will have responsibility for maintaining. The new system will mean that all coaches will have to be finger printed again but once that has been done it will not need to be done again. The system should be better because the background checks are deeper and they keep the records longer. This means that when an updated background check is requested there will be no need to redo the fingerprints. The updating of the database will be done by the vendor.

The current system used in Emerson relies on an internally produced spreadsheet which needs constant updating and it has not been clear if this was being done. The new system will mean require less maintenance. An email will be sent to all coaches currently active requesting that they get the background checks done. Once cleared, coaches will receive a card like the Rutgers card and they will need to have them when they are coaching or training. This should stop parents from trying to train or coach players from the sidelines.

IV Baseball Issues

Afrim welcomed members of the baseball sub-committee and asked them to introduce themselves:

Ken Benkovic, 10 Ridge Terrace, Emerson, New Jersey
Scott Messic, 39 Highland Ave, Emerson, New Jersey
Kevin Walsh, 102 Longview Drive, Emerson, New Jersey

Mr. Benkovic opened his comments by stating he was responding to an email sent to him by Afrim requesting his attendance. He summarized his involvement with sports in Emerson over the last 21 years during which time he has never had an incident or problem. He served on the EJBL board as treasurer 2000-2005, also on the board from 2011-2018 as president from 2012-18. One of the founding members of Emerson Junior League baseball in 2003 and from 2005 to 2011 supported the league without having children taking part. They established scholarships in 2007 and over \$25,000 has been raised. They made over \$200,000 in field and facility improvements and equipment purchases. He then read out a prepared statement:

“It is my opinion that the Emerson Rec Commission (ERC) over the past 12 months has failed miserably at its most significant core responsibility which is the oversight of the EJBL. And has through its own actions or lack thereof promoted an environment that’s not supportive and functioning without regard to the established policies that had fostered many years of successful program operations and relations between the Emerson Rec Commission and Emerson baseball. These two experienced volunteers have witnessed the drastic changes over the past year and can vouch for the impact that it has had. My hope is to speak openly and honestly and clear the air at the Emerson Recreation Committee (ERC) and make it known that it is not about me personally but about our baseball program. And that I am not alone with the respect to the perceived indifference and poor performance that has been endured by our league over the past year. In your email you mentioned several attributes describing the ERC’s approach. The ERC has for the most part been anything but open and direct, transparent or collaborative with respect to the EJBL.”

Mr. Benkovic further commented that the relationship between ERC and EJBL that existed for many, many years involved Dave Rector as the Presiding Officer and Steve Carmacino as the liaison. To ERC some sense of the relationship that existed and the mutual respect Mr. Benkovic circulated an item to the meeting. He observed that for

many years he and the EJBL were noted as being a major contributor to the annual summer kick off. (Document passed around.) The one established policy that stood out above everything else was that the EJBL always had an ERC liaison at our meetings since 2000. The importance of that may not be obvious, or seem significant but it is. The knowledge that EJBL has some point of contact in real time with someone on the ERC and they are not working in a vacuum is key. The EJBL feel that by not sending a representative or making sure that there is an alternative available is unacceptable. One of Mr. Benkovic's assertions is that it is a failure of ERC to provide fair representation of EJBL on the ERC. Does the ERC agree that there is no baseball presence of any personnel on this board?

Afrim reflected that everyone on ERC is not voted in, they are mayoral appointments and they have no say in who appointed to or removed from the board. Any discussions about who gets appointed should be discussed with the Mayor. The board can make suggestions but the Mayor will reach out to people and appoint them. There was some discussion about the accuracy of the presence of baseball on the board and the point was made that the Commission represent every sport not simply baseball.

It was noted that from January 2019 it will be incumbent on all sports board to send a member to the ERC meetings at least once a month (though not necessarily to both meetings as there are two per month). Also that the ERC meetings are open public meetings and the dates and times are published in the local newspapers. Anyone may attend they are public meetings.

2018 was not a representation of every year that went before from the point of view of ERC representation at EJBL meetings. There has been less than optimal responses to emails and attendance at meetings was insufficient. It was noted that baseball is not a separate entity and are a subdivision of the rec commission. They should not be acting as a separate entity. If the EJBL had an issue with the liaison between them and the ERC they could have contacted any member of the ERC. The ERC will assume that unless they are contacted there are no issues.

One issue came about as a result of a request made to the Board of Ed which was routed back to Rich. This process was followed at the request of the Administration who want only one point of contact for the booking of fields and does not want to deal with anyone other than ERC as far as the fields and facilities are concerned. As Rich has been the single point of contact that means he has carried a big workload to manage all the fields. Despite this he did talk to members of the EJBL on an ongoing basis if not specifically at the meetings.

There was also a discussion about the fact that an altercation between two baseball coaches was not reported in the ERC minutes. This was attributed to the fact that the issue was handled at the Baseball board level and so it was felt that the ERC did not need to be involved. There was also an observation that baseball activities were only mentioned once in the ERC minutes between January and June 2018 and that was related to the Summer Kick off. The ERC commented that this was because the EJBL are so

well run that there were no issues that needed to be commented on. That is a good thing. The ERC takes the view that if a board is capable of handling issues without it getting escalated to the Rec Commission then that is the best way of resolving conflicts. The point was made that there had been comments in one set of minutes about a basketball issue. This was detailed in the minutes because parents and coaches involved in basketball came to a Rec Commission meeting.

There was some discussion about a meeting in March where sub-committees with responsibilities for particular aspects of the sports program were agreed. Minutes for this meeting do not appear to have been posted and there was some discussion about whether or not any further action had been taken.

The EJBL reinforced the point that they felt in 2018 there hadn't been enough attendance by the Rec liaison. There was an acceptance by the Rec Commission that this could have been better. EJBL agreed that the new procedure that is that a member from each of the sport's boards will attend Recreation meetings was good and would ensure better communication in 2019 for all sports.

The EJBL reported that they have a lot of newer younger volunteers joining EJBL. Several of them have shown a strong interest in fundraising and have the potential to do big things. Baseball recently held a successful fundraiser which was not included in any minutes. They have also shown great proactivity in doing a survey of all the fields highlighting in detail what improvements are needed. There is a concern that the apparent lack of acknowledgement from the Rec Commission may demotivate them. A further example given was that no mention was made in any minutes that the 12U baseball team went to Cooperstown, which is the first time an Emerson team has achieved this.

There was a further discussion regarding the minutes which highlighted the fact that these are minutes and not a transcript, which has the potential to leave important items out. There will be an attempt to improve this in the interest of better communication.

V Field Scheduling

A new program field scheduling program (Team up) will be purchased in January. The high school also uses the program which has a web page and app. When a team wishes to use a field they would book it using the app or website. Users will be given a portal through which they can request fields for an entire year. This will be sent to three or four people for approval. One question that was asked was whether or not teams/coaches that have been able to block book time slots for several afternoons/evenings for a whole season would still be able to do that. The answer was yes, however there should be one point of contact for each sport who liaises with Rich. There was a request that if a team was not going to be using a field then they should notify Rich. This may be challenging. It was pointed out that Emerson Rec teams will have priority over Emerson travel teams which will have priority over club or other teams.

When the program has been purchased and is ready to go a training session for all coaches in all sports should how to use it and what the process is will be given. It was suggested that this should be done at the high school media center.

In addition to making scheduling more efficient, this should also address an issue that has come up this year where teams have booked a field and then their insurance has not been thoroughly checked. This will be rectified through a new ordinance.

VI Sport by Sport Review

Baseball

Will hold clinics Jan Feb & March

Softball

On-line registration has been going on and clinics are starting on January 9. Fundraiser will be March 23 at the Westwood community center.

Wrestling

Fundraiser will be held on Saturday at Knights of Columbus in Westwood.

Football

Pre-K had around twenty kids, first grade was unbeaten, second grade improved overall. Fifteen kids are showing interest in tackle. Trophy ceremony just held. Third and fourth grade Park Ridge/Emerson team won the super bowl and were undefeated the entire season. A successful fan cloth fundraiser was done and made more money than previous ones.

Soccer

Bob was not at the meeting so there was no report

The Recreation Commission wanted to thank both Councilman Brian Dowling and his wife for their tremendous support over the years he has been involved and that they will be sad to see him go. Everyone agreed and said how much he will be missed. Brian said the rec was the committee that he always wanted to be liaison for. Brian is committed to getting the TV and console for the summer rec and wi-fi for the recreation building before he leaves.

Motion to close the meeting made by Dave Canicci and seconded by Rich Solimando
Meeting closed at 9:05 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Liz Morris
Recreation Secretary