

**CITY OF NORWALK
COMMISSION ON STATUS OF WOMEN
REGULAR MEETING
VIA ZOOM TELECONFERENCE
NOVEMBER 13, 2023**

ATTENDANCE: Claudia Werman Connor, Chair; Ashley Gulyas, Shannon O'Toole
Giandurco (7:56); Kristina Testa-Buzzee; Ivonne Zucco; Jasmine
Prezzie;

STAFF: Michelle Woods Matthews, City of Norwalk Director of Communications

OTHER: Robert Stowers; Director of Recreation and Parks (7:15)

CALL TO ORDER

Ms. Werman Conner called the meeting to order at 7:04

APPROVAL OF MINUTES

Ms. Werman Conner called for the approval of the minutes from their last meeting on September 11, 2023.

- ** MS. TESTA-BUZZEE MOVED TO APPROVE THE MINUTES.**
- ** MS.GULYAS SECONDED THE MOTION.**
- ** THE MOTION PASSED WITH TWO ABSTENTIONS (MS. ZUCCO AND MS. PREZZIE)**

Ms. Werman Conner had a question about the note-takers. Ms. Woods Matthews explained the meeting was recorded and was typed up later.

PUBLIC COMMENTS

There were no members of the public that wished to participate.

NEW BUSINESS

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ROBERT STOWERS; DIRECTOR OF RECREATION AND PARKS, PRESENTS THE RECREATION AND PARKS MASTER PLAN.

Robert Stowers; Director of Recreation and Parks, was thanked for sharing his memo on how gender was incorporated into the master plan. He stated that they did a study that was as scientific as possible and tried to produce a valid random sample of all the various segments of society. He stated the study was backed up by multiple surveys both online, intercepted in local parks, and 9 focus groups. Mr. Stowers indicated the focus groups provided input and asked how things could be made more equitable in terms of female access and participation.

Mr. Stowers indicated the master plan had been completed and adopted by the council of the Rec and Parks Committee. He stated they have also had several public meetings. Mr. Stowers then pointed out the Master plan is just a plan that lays out projects, facilities, activities, and sports programs that they want to improve on. He went on to say they wanted to generate more interest and participation in those programs. He then stated the public was instrumental in the process

Mr. Stowers laid out items they would be working on over the next ten years including a 32,000 sq. ft. Recreation center with community rooms, sports and music facilities, plus places for STEM classes and arts and crafts.

Mr. Stowers talked about putting together an advisory council to advise the staff on programs, activities, timing, marketing, and promotions. He said he hoped to include participation from the females in the sports leagues. He stated another advisory board will be put together and he asked Jody Sandler, a resident, Diane Campbell; Recreation Advisor, Kim Gerardi who has experience in league involvement, and various people to help recruit from the right sources. He then mentioned the creation of another advisory council to address women's sports and was looking for suggestions for participants and some suggestions for names.

Mr. Stowers wanted to meet and talk to put together a charter to be followed and was hoping for a lot of participation and input on things like designing programs that girls want. He said they should be the ones designing the programs and as we go we start implementing pieces of the master plan, particularly with our facilities. He indicated he was in the process of forming a Park Foundation to create capital campaigns to help with the costs.

Mr. Stowers said they were also covering 4 tennis courts at Springwood to create an indoor facility and were looking into women's tennis. He indicated there were also tennis courts available through Oakhills Golf Authority and golf was another avenue for more participation by women, girls, and multi-gendered participation. He felt these groups were key in the planning of facilities and

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programs, and the way to do that is through advisory committees, and building charters that are formalized Recs and Park and accepted for resolution by the common council.

Mr. Stowers then brought up a completed joint use agreement with the BOE. He stated they were adding appendices and exhibits and then it would be brought back to the BOE and public school districts and hopefully be an avenue for more access to school facilities.

Ms. Kristina Testa-Buzzee needed clarification about the study, survey, and finalization process. Mr. Stowers stated the surveys and focus groups were used to formulate. Ms. Kristina Testa-Buzzee asked Mr. Stowers if gender equity issues came up. He stated yes.

Ms. Kristina Testa-Buzzee inquired about the advisory councils asking if there will be more than one, or one geared particularly towards gender. Mr. Stowers indicated there would be multiple councils and they were putting together a council with the YMCA. He explained there'd be ten or eleven member councils with one dedicated to gender equity, which will be the charter.

Ms. Kristina Testa-Buzzee expressed her hope that children as young as middle school could be engaged and take part in those committees. She then brought up an item she would send to Mr. Stowers about parity between boys and girls teams and hoped the master plan would reconcile that. She also wanted to advocate for people coming back to youth sports in town as opposed to clubs.

Mr. Stowers addressing whether youth should be on the Park Board advisory council stated it was a plan and that each project and activity has to be planned out in a way that provides equity. He explained he was working with Ms. Fernandez both in hiring and acquiring more accessible programs,

Ms. Zucco stated she wanted to emphasize the importance of having youth, the differently abled, and those from the LGBTQ community represented to inform about the accessibility that is needed. Mr. Stowers stated that the charters would spell out the various people they want as representatives on all of the advisory councils

Ms. Werman Conner asked if there could be a couple of youth seats on the charter for the rec center and the Council for Sports.

Ms. Werman Conner asked if there was anything in the master plan to anticipate policies about transgender youth participating in sports based on how they identify. She wanted to know if it was in a charter or had come up in focus groups or surveys.

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Mr. Stowers stated they were looking to acquire accreditation and that will require policies on that and it's one of the policies we'll have to draft.

Ms. Gulyas stated it would be best to have a proactive transgender policy in place. She also recommended reaching out to the Triangle Community Center for help creating that policy.

Ms. Prezzie asked how they intended to recruit for the various advisory positions. Mr. Stowers indicated he had various sources like the committee to help with the process. They would get a group of people together and build a charter with everybody participating in the purpose, mission, and membership.

Ms. Testa-Buzzie talked about a necessary collaborative approach on the advisory councils and urged against self-selection by people with their agenda. Mr. Stowers stated that without volunteers they couldn't accomplish much.

DIVERSIFICATION OF BOARDS OF COMMISSIONS COMMITTEE

- **NEXT STEPS FOR POTENTIAL CHANGES THE COMMISSION'S NAME**

Ms. Werman Conner stated they were waiting for Mr. Stowers so they would move on with new business, item B. the Diversification of Boards and Commissions Committee regarding the name. Ms. Woods Matthews proceeded to discuss the process and further explained that if they voted on a name it would be a recommendation that had to go to the Ordinance Committee for further research to see what's possible for a potential vote so it's not guaranteed.

Ms. Werman Conner talked of a discussion at the previous meeting about writing up a recommendation. Ms. Woods Matthews indicated they could do that and said if a name was voted on she would facilitate the next steps.

Ms. Werman Conner stated that the name that was put forward was the Commission on Gender Equity. She then there had been some discussion at the previous meeting, but not everyone was there. She opened the topic up for discussion and to vote.

Ms. Prezzie if that was the only name you guys decided on. Ms. Woods Matthews indicated she had shared a few names and that Ms. Baanante also asked for further recommendations.

Ms. Gulyas noted that most of the names that came up for discussion were as wordy or wordier than the current committee name. She expressed the fact that they were looking for something more

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concise and inclusive. She also stated several commissions around the country were moving from the status of women to gender equity.

Ms. Testa-Buzzee asked how many commission members were missing from the meeting. She felt a possible need for a more robust conversation. Ms. Woods Matthews indicated they had five and they were missing four and mentioned several positions were also open.

Ms. Werman Conner suggested they could vote to table the discussion till the full commission is present. Ms. Gulyas asked if the members who weren't at this meeting were at the meeting in December. She asked if the two meetings covered most of the members in the discussion. Ms. Werman Conner checked the minutes to see who was at the September meeting. Ms. Testa-Buzzee indicated that she felt enough members had weighed in to move forward and not table it. Ms. Woods Matthews added that others are welcome to share other ideas or further research with the commission. Ms. Zucco indicated she liked the name and agreed with the recommendation.

**** MS. ZUCCO MADE A MOTION TO RECOMMEND THE NEW NAME, THE
COMMISSION ON GENDER EQUITY TO THE ORDINANCE COMMITTEE.
** MS. GULYAS SECONDED THE MOTION.
** MOTION PASSED UNANIMOUSLY**

Ms. Werman Conner stated there was an update on the status of the onboarding for appointing commission members, document. Ms. Testa Buzzee indicated there was a draft and Ms. Werman Conner and Ms. Matthews had seen it. Ms. Werman Conner said she had no comment and it was what they prepared in the intro PowerPoint. Ms. Test-Buzzee stated they would follow up with Ms. Baanante as to what the next steps would be.

Ms. Woods Matthews said that she had reached out to Latoya Fernandez, DEI Officer, about coming to the December meeting to which Ms. Fernandez agreed. She also explained that Ms. Werman Conner suggested the Diversification of Boards and Commissions Committee should meet with her before the December meeting date.

UPDATE ON THE IMPLEMENTATION OF THE MENSTRUAL EQUITY LAW

Ms. Werman Conner mentioned she reached out to Sandra Foyes who is the person who ensures the implementation for all the Norwalk public schools and several committee members met with her to see how to move forward. Ms. Foyes responded by saying feminine hygiene products were available in all bathrooms for ages 6 to 12 and in the nurses and administration offices for ages 3 – 5. She then stated that she wrote back with specific questions as the law states that these products be available in all bathrooms and not in nurses' offices. She also had questions about posters indicating

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there is a coordinator in each school. Ms. Werman Conner said she wanted to sit down with Ms. Foyes to talk through fully what the law requires.

Ms. Werman Conner stated the rules were very specific requiring products in all the girls' restrooms, one boy's restroom, and all of the non-binary' restrooms.

OLD BUSINESS

COMMUNITY OUTREACH AND CIVIC ENGAGEMENT COMMITTEE

Ms. Werman Conner talked about the previous meeting where only two were present. She stated the major consensus was the day and time were not good and they needed to find another day and time.

- **REPORTING ON FARMERS MARKET TABLING**

Ms. Werman Conner indicated they had talked about the lead-up to the Farmers Market but that was canceled in October.

- **UPCOMING TABLE SURVEYS**

There was no discussion about upcoming table surveys.

- **NORWALK PUBLIC LIBRARY PARTNERSHIP –TWO GEN READINGS –
MULTIGENERATIONAL BOOK CLUB UPDATE**

Ms. Gylas reported that the date had been changed from the 1st to the 8th so as not to conflict with the Right to Read movie. She also said no one came to the book club and there was discussion to find ways to get people to sign up. She felt it just wasn't a good time for families and left it to the members to decide if they should move on with it. Ms. Werman Conner said she could perhaps reconnect with the people involved and see.

Ms. Werman Conner brought up an awards event discussed at the September meeting where various ideas were floated. Ms. Testa-Buzzee contacted some at NCC to secure a date on Friday, March 8th. She stated there was no conclusion during the previous meeting for issues like what, where, when we charge, whether is it awareness raising, and whether is fundraising part of the goal. They talked about creating a committee or working as a group to make it happen.

Ms. Testa-Buzzee said the NCC would be willing to host the event but in space only and would charge a rental fee. She stated she might try with people who work there and pitch the idea

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differently. She indicated she would reach out for confirmation that NCC could act as co-host and not charge rent but felt it would need more clarity as to what they want for them to co-host.

Ms. Werman Conner stated that some of the ideas were to raise awareness about the commission and its overarching goal. She said they discussed having two awards, one for a young person, and one for an adult, who had an impact on women and girls in the community.

Ms. Werman Conner then indicated that they never discussed whether or not there would be a charge, and what type of charge for the event.

Ms. Werman Conner then stated she wouldn't be in town on the planned date. She said they could still go with that date and she would help with the planning. She expressed concerns that they wouldn't have a plan by their target date of December but believed it was doable if they scaled back based on timing and human resources. She then stated that soon there would be three vacancies and doing something low-key like a celebration of women in Norwalk, not trying to raise a lot of money, and giving out awards could be an option

Ms. Guylas suggested for 2024 something could be put out and people could nominate individuals and instead of an event honorees could be recognized at the March meeting. She continued by saying if enough people got involved it could be a jumping-off point for an event the following year.

Ms. Guylas mentioned that Norwalk Actions for Reproductive Justice is doing their fundraiser this year in March and they could invite the honorees to that function.

Ms. Woods Matthews offered the use of the City Hall Community Room. Ms. Gulyas suggested In honor of Women's History Month using the community room for an in-person March Commission Meeting attended by the honorees, guests, and the public. it could also be sent out on Zoom.

Ms. Testa–Buzzee offered to pull together examples of nomination forms. Ms. Werman Conner said they were looking at the Calling the Awards, the Community Impact Award for Adults, and the Rising Star Award for Youth. She said she liked the Idea of using the March meeting to Celebrate these people and indicated that kind of event was doable.

Ms. Zucco asked Ms. Woods Matthews if she could find out the availability of the community room. Ms. Werman Conner asked if they should plan for March, 8th, or making part of the regular meeting. Ms. Gulyas pointed out that doing it at the regular meeting would help make people aware of the commission and draw some engagement

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Ms. Werman Conner thanked Ms. Testa-Buzzee for taking a pass at the nomination forms. She then discussed how and where those forms could be circulated. Ms. Gulyas suggested sending personal emails to the middle and high school principals. Ms. Werman Conner asked Ms. Zucco if she could add a tab to her Google sheet document creating a running tab of people and organizations that they could circulate this to. Ms. Zucco said the document was created by someone else but she would connect with her.

Ms. Prezzie asked about deadlines for the nominations and who would be choosing the winners. Ms. Testa-Buzzee stated she could put together a timeline and the nomination forms would identify some requirements. She said she would draft something that may or may not be used by the committee. She stated she would work up the nomination forms, and timeline, then suggested that someone else could work on whether the decision would be made by a committee or the commission. Ms. Gulyas commented that they couldn't discuss anything at the February meeting because it was public so any community couldn't go through the nominating process for members.

Ms. Werman Conner clarified the nomination process, and that nominations could be made by anybody and they were thinking of how they would whittle that all down for final decisions made by the commission. Ms. Zucco suggested a Google form people can fill out online. Ms. Gulyas offered suggestions about what could be on the form. Ms. Zucco asked if a link could be included on their web page. Ms. Woods Matthews indicated yes.

Ms. Werman Conner indicated they had three meetings before the March deadline and a lot would have to be done to move things along. He asked Ms. Prezzie her ideas about moving the process along from the draft nomination form to evaluating the nominations and who should be included in the process. Ms. Zucco stated that by December they should have decided what the form should be. She said that launching in December would give people time to be aware and begin to submit their nominations. Ms. Testa-Buzzee thought January 1st., would be a better launch date. Ms. Werman Conner countered with January 2nd with nominations being in by early February, She then stated everything needed to be ready Between December and February.

- T-SHIRTS - JASMINE AND IVONNE.

There was no discussion about T-Shirts

DIVERSIFICATION OF BOARDS OF COMMISSIONS COMMITTEE

- MONTHLY BOARD AND COMMISSION VACANCY ANNOUNCEMENT REMINDER

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Ms. Zucco then asked a question about commissioners and vacancies. Ms. Woods Matthews said she would inform those concerned that there were three vacancies. She went on to say that There are spaces for those who were an R, I, and, U. In case anybody had a recommendation. Ms. O'Tool-Giandurco mentioned recommending someone a year ago. Ms. Woods Matthews stated not every resume that comes forward is selected. Ms. Testa -Buzzee indicated it would help to have an understanding of why names being put forward are not being acted on or moved forward. She then stated that information may not be necessary. Ms. O'Tool-Giandurco stated that every name that is put forward deserves the respect to be told they aren't a good fit at this time. She also noted they should be improving the appointment process as much as they can.

ADJOURN

**** MS. ZUCCO MADE THE MOTION TO ADJOURN THE MEETING AT 8:21 P.M.**
**** MS. PREZZIE SECONDED THE MOTION.**
**** MOTION PASSED UNANIMOUSLY.**

Respectfully submitted

China Mayhew
Telesco Secretarial Service

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