

**COMMISSION ON THE STATUS OF WOMEN
REGULAR MEETING
OCTOBER 21, 2024**

ATTENDANCE: Kristina Testa-Buzzee; Chair, Shannon O'Toole-Giandurco, Co-Vice Chair, Ivonne Zucco; Co-Vice Chair, Emma Dignoti, Sharon Baanante, Joy DeJaegar, Jasmine Prezzie (7:05 p.m.)

STAFF: Michelle Woods Matthews

OTHER: William Schwartzstien, Athletic Supervisor for Department of Recreation and Parks.

I. CALL TO ORDER

**** MS. DEJAEGER MOVED TO OPEN THE MEETING.
** MS. DIGNOTI SECONDED THE MOTION.
** THE MOTION PASSED UNANIMOUSLY.**

The meeting was called to order at 7:03 p.m.

II. APPROVAL OF MINUTES OF PREVIOUS MEETINGS

a. September 9, 2024

**** MS. ZUCCO MOVED TO AAPPROVE THE MINUTES.
** MS. DIGNOTI SECONDED THE MOTION.**

Ms. Testa-Buzzee requested that the spelling of her name be corrected.

**** MS. ZUCCO MOVED TO APPROVE THE MINUTES AS AMENDED
** MS. DEJAEGER SECONDED THE MOTION.
** THE MOTION PASSED FIVES EYES AND ONE ABSTENTION (MS. BAANANTE).**

Ms. Prezzie joined the meeting at 7:05 p.m.

III. PUBLIC COMMENT

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There was no one present for public comment.

IV. NEW BUSINESS

- a. Welcome Will Schwartzstein, the Athletic Supervisor, Department of Recreation and Parks to present on increasing female participation in Norwalk sports programs and answer questions.

Mr. Schwartzstein introduced himself and presented his strategies to increase female participation rates in rec sports offerings. He described his planned changes to rebuild the programs and increase female participation. He followed with statistics that discussed overall team sports participation.

Mr. Schwartzstein answered a question about equity in the distribution of resources. He described his efforts to provide equal resources for girls and marginalized identities. He stated he has been resetting standards, expectations, rules, and procedures while also monitoring participation rates in various programs.

Mr. Schwartzstein then answered questions about the type of programs they have to encourage girls to participate in sports. He described several programs like Girl's Youth Volleyball to encourage participation. He said he wanted to meet with the committee to explore options and ideas for generating more interest among girls to participate in sports. Mr. Schwartzstein said he was considering a girl's sports day to help generate interest.

Mr. Schwartzstein discussed the girl's travel clubs that use the facilities for their various sports. He noted their control over the sports and indicated they have not attempted to compete with them but rather offer instructional-based clinics and programs during their off-seasons. He noted a lack of interest in some of these programs by Norwalk residents.

Mr. Schwartzstein stated the non-club organizations using their facilities were seeing a rise in female participation especially in sports like soccer, softball, lacrosse, and field hockey. He then listed a series of clubs and the breakdown of female and male participants.

Mr. Schwartzstein stated that compared with the posted information from neighboring cities, female participation in high school sports tends to be on the decline. He noted a lack of numbers for youth sports. He stated many schools lacked freshman and JV teams for women's sports. Ms. Testa-Buzzee asked if it was due to a lack of funding for female sports. Mr. Schwartzstein stated that information was not readily available. He felt there was a need to create a program that would keep girls interested longer so they continue with sports after middle school.

Mr. Schwartzstein then discussed how the new field at Cranbury School would be used and the plans for the fields impacted by the Norwalk construction. He addressed the field allocations and said they have a good start on sorting it all out. He stated they were working on a plan to rest a field each season to do necessary work and repairs. In response to a question posed by someone from Norwalk House League Softball, Mr. Schwartzstein said he was unsure about the prospect

of turfing all the fields and where the funding would be coming from. He stated he would check on the information and get back to them.

Mr. Schwartzstein gave an overview of the programs for girls, women, and coed sports.

Mr. Schwartzstein then went through the list of various programs by gender. He discussed the various programs and his plans to update them to move forward.

Mr. Schwartzstein discussed the allocation of field time by gender. He stated the number of hours was relative to the number of participants.

Mr. Schwartzstein answered questions about transgender students joining programs for the gender they identify with. He noted there were no issues on the topic at this time. He stated the city of Norwalk Values its LBGTQ+ residents and youth and encourages them to participate in the programs as long as safety is not an issue.

Mr. Schwartzstein discussed his methods of identifying programs that are needed in the community. He stated his focus is not on new programs but on improving the quality of what is already in place.

Mr. Schwartzstein then discussed various plans to expand adult offerings.

Lastly, Mr. Schwartzstein outlined his plans for continued cooperation with public schools and the Norwalk BOE. He stated he was working on methods to directly market their programs to parents.

Ms. Baanante wanted the spending by gender numbers. She also suggested a round table discussion with the BOE or MPS. Ms. Baanante proposed a BOE Survey for female students to ask them why they are not participating in sports.

Ms. Baanante wanted clarification about the gender makeup of the adult programs.

Mr. Schwartzstein explained his plan of running an open gym for adult females where he could talk to them to get a better idea of what they might be looking for.

Ms. Baanante wanted to know if the community would be surveyed.

Ms. Zucco had suggestions for what she would like to see as part of the program. She noted the city's cultural diversity. She stated that people from these diverse backgrounds would like to see sports that reflect them culturally. She also pointed out that talking to the parents is a key element and offered suggestions for interactions. Ms. Zucco also noted difficulties faced by many children and families that could hinder their involvement in sports. Mr. Schwartzstein said that per resident, Norwalk was the least expensive of the surrounding towns and cities. He also stated they were working on ways to make things more affordable.

Ms. DeJaegar extolled the virtues of just participating in a sport for fun. She stated it builds confidence and self-esteem and keeps you in a little better shape. She also noted Mr. Schwartzstein's feeder program because it would help increase participation in girls' volleyball programs on the high school level. She pointed out the need for children to see athletes that look like them. Mr. Schwartzstein cited an old Hometown Heroes program he would like to bring back that allowed for kids to interact with, and get to know the players.

Ms. Dignoti listed various areas she felt were important to entice children to participate. She stated those elements would dovetail with academics and could make students more motivated in the classroom and make for success outside the classroom. She noted a necessity for a diversity of offerings for people of all skill levels.

Ms. Testa-Buzzee possible things that could be done on multiple levels to partner and support this work. She asked how the Commission could get involved in outreach, promotion, and helping with advocacy, equity, and policy issues.

- b. Talk about next steps after identifying 2024-2025 priorities at September meeting: childcare, women's sports equity, focusing on women and other marginalized gender identities to pursue positions in sports and on commissions, voting awareness.

Ms. Testa-Buzzee went through the notes of the previous meeting to make sure the recollections were accurate. She stated that the goal was to confirm the priorities. Ms. Zocco put up a slide showing the standing committees the Commission should have and activities the Commission should engage in. Ms. Testa-Buzzee asked for thoughts as to how to proceed. She gave an example she felt would fit as part of civil engagement. Ms. Zucco suggested a good thing to do was find out who wants to be involved and what community they wish to be part of. Ms. Testa-Buzzee offered to put together a survey for the Commission so people could pick their committees and identify their preferences.

Ms. Baanante and Ms. Dignoti asked if civil engagement and community outreach should be combined to prevent things from becoming disjointed. Ms. Zucco provided the definitions used when developing the committees. She felt civic outreach should be done all the time while civic engagement was more seasonal. Ms. Testa-Buzzee offered her take on how policy advocacy would require the services of both community outreach and civil engagement. She pointed out that community outreach is the thread that runs through everything. She stated the two committees would be Policy Advocacy and Civic Engagement. She noted from there they could identify who's interested in what committee. She suggested they meet before the next meeting to come back with a definition and motivation for the committee. There was an agreement that two committees would make for a better model.

Ms. Baanante asked about age limits on the commissions feeling it would be helpful to have a high school student on the commission.

V. OLD BUSINESS

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Ms. Testa-Buzzee inquired about updates from the Ordinance Committee about the Commission's name change. Ms. Woods Matthews stated she would have to check with legal.

Ms. Testa-Buzzee discussed the awards program. She stated it would either be a part of the civic engagement committee or an ad hoc committee. She noted she would include that in her survey and save it for discussion at their next meeting.

VI. MOTION TO ADJOURN

**** MS. DIGNOTI MOVED TO ADJOURN THE MEETING.
** MS. ZUCCO SECONDED THE MOTION.
** THE MOTION PASSED UNANIMOUSLY.**

The meeting was adjourned at 8:17 p.m.

Respectfully submitted
China Mayhew
Telesco Secretarial Services