



REGULAR MEETING – RECREATION, PARKS & CULTURAL AFFAIRS AGENDA

**FEBRUARY 12, 2025, 7:00 PM
BY ZOOM VIRTUAL MEETING**

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Members of the public may call in to participate. Callers will not be able to see the meeting participants. All participants will be muted upon entering the meeting. To speak, dial *9 on the phone and you will be called on by the host of the meeting during the public comment section. All speakers must state their name and address. Comments must be on a topic on the agenda, and are limited to three minutes. Anyone disrupting the orderly conduct of the meeting, including by using threatening, hateful, or sexually-explicit language, will be removed. Please find the information using the link above.



Members of the public who wish to provide "live comments" may also use the Zoom meeting platform. All participants will be muted upon entering the meeting. To speak, click the "raise your hand indicator" and you will be called by the host of the meeting during the public comment section. All speakers must state their name and address. Comments must be on a topic on the agenda, and are limited to three minutes. Anyone disrupting the orderly conduct of the meeting, including by using threatening, hateful, or sexually-explicit language, will be removed. Please find the information using the link above.



Members of the public who wish to provide public comment are encouraged to submit those via email in advance of the meeting. For these comments to be included into the record, they must be submitted by 12:00 p.m. the day of the meeting. Please email Dilene Byrd at dbyrd@norwalkct.gov with the subject line "Public Comment" to provide written public comment prior to the meeting.

ATTENDANCE: Darlene Young, Chair; Douglas Sutton; Nicole' Eaddy; Heather Dunn; Lisa Shanahan; Johan Lopez

ABSENT: Nicol Ayers

STAFF: Robert Stowers, Director, Recreation and Parks, Ken Hughes, Superintendent, Recreation and Parks; Sarah Cruz, Arborist/Horticulturist, Recreation and Parks

OTHERS: Christopher Peiffer said he is the Director of Urban Forestry Strategy at Planet Geo

I. CALL TO ORDER

Ms. Young called the meeting to order at 7:00 PM.

II. ROLL CALL

At the roll call, there were four (4) committee members present. A quorum was present.

III. ACCEPTANCE OF MINUTES

A. Regular Meeting: January 8, 2025

**** MS. SHANAHAN MOVED TO APPROVE THE MINUTES AS SUBMITTED.**

**** THE MOTION PASSED UNANIMOUSLY.**

IV. PUBLIC PARTICIPATION

There was no public participation this evening.

Mr. Lopez joined the meeting at 7:02PM.

V. OLD BUSINESS

There was no old business discussed this evening.

VI. NEW BUSINESS

- A. AUTHORIZE THE MAYOR, HARRY W. RILLING, TO ENTER INTO AN AGREEMENT FOR THE USE OF VETERAN'S PARK AND IMMEDIATE SURROUNDING GROUNDS BY NORWALK POLICE EMERALD SOCIETY FOR THEIR ST. PATRICK'S DAY PARADE TO BE HELD ON SATURDAY, MARCH 8TH, 2025, FROM 11:00 A.M. TO 12:00 P.M. SET-UP TIME BY 10:00 A.M. SATURDAY WITH TEAR-DOWN BY 1:00 P.M. APPROXIMATELY 200 PEOPLE.**

Mr. Grady provided an overview of the event and said this will be the 9th annual St. Patrick's Day parade and it will begin at Veterans Park and will exit the park at approximately 11:00 AM.

****MS. DUNN MOVED TO APPROVE AND AUTHORIZE THE ITEM.
** THE MOTION PASSED UNANIMOUSLY.**

Mr. Sutton joined the meeting at 7:05PM.

B. AUTHORIZE THE MAYOR, HARRY W. RILLING, TO ENTER INTO AN AGREEMENT FOR THE USE OF CALF PASTURE BEACH PARKING LOT AND IMMEDIATE SURROUNDING GROUNDS BY NORWALK KARTING ASSOCIATION FOR THEIR GO KART RACING TO BE HELD ON SATURDAY, MARCH 15TH, 22ND, 29TH, APRIL 5TH, 12TH, 19TH, 26TH AND MAY 3RD, SEPTEMBER 13TH, 27TH, OCTOBER 4TH, 11TH, 18TH, 25TH, AND NOVEMBER 1ST, 8TH, 15TH AND 22ND, 2025 FROM 7:00 A.M. TO 6:00 P.M. APPROXIMATELY 40 PEOPLE.

Mr. Bairaktaris provided an overview of the races and said the go-cart club was established in 1972 so this will be the 53rd season the races will be held and is very good for the kids.

**** COMMISSIONER LOPEZ MOVED TO AUTHORIZE THE ITEM.
** THE MOTION PASSED UNANIMOUSLY.**

C. AUTHORIZE THE MAYOR, HARRY W. RILLING, TO ENTER INTO AN AGREEMENT FOR THE USE OF TAYLOR FARM AND IMMEDIATE SURROUNDING GROUNDS BY FRIENDS OF NORWALK DOGS FOR THEIR MARDI PAWS, TO BE HELD ON SATURDAY, MARCH 22ND 2025 FROM 11:00 A.M. TO 1:00 P.M. WITH A RAIN DATE OF SUNDAY, MARCH 23RD AND PAWS AND PRIDE, TO BE HELD ON SATURDAY, JUNE 14TH 2025 FROM 11:00 A.M. TO 1:00 P.M. WITH A RAIN DATE OF SUNDAY, JUNE 15TH. APPROXIMATELY 70 PEOPLE.

Ms. Bruger provided an overview of the event and said they are a non-profit organization for Friends of Norwalk Dogs and all of the proceeds will be going to purchase a water station at Taylor Farm Park.

Mr. Stowers said they are working on a formal agreement with Friends of Norwalk Dogs as they are an advocate of Norwalk dogs and have already been helping them out a great deal with supplies and have been a big advocate of Oyster Shell Park.

Ms. Young thanked Friends of Norwalk Dogs for partnering with the city.

**** COMMISSIONER SUTTON MOVED TO APPROVE THE ITEM.
** THE MOTION PASSED UNANIMOUSLY.**

D. AUTHORIZE THE MAYOR, HARRY W. RILLING, TO ENTER INTO AN AGREEMENT FOR THE USE OF VETERAN'S PARK AND IMMEDIATE SURROUNDING GROUNDS BY NORWALK JUNIOR LACROSSE FOR THEIR POUND ON THE SOUND TO BE HELD ON SATURDAY, MAY 31ST AND SUNDAY, JUNE 1ST, 2025 FROM 8:15 A.M. TO 7:15 P.M. SET-UP TIME BY 6:15 A.M. SATURDAY WITH TEAR-DOWN BY SUNDAY AT 9:15 P.M. APPROXIMATELY 300 PEOPLE

Ms. Rebbechi provided a brief overview of the event and said it is a jamboree for little kids and has been held for over a decade. She said they are a non-profit organization, and this is their biggest fundraiser, which lets them provide free or discounted fees to Norwalk residents to participate in their lacrosse program.

**** MR. LOPEZ MOVED TO AUTHORIZE THE ITEM.**
**** THE MOTION PASSED UNANIMOUSLY.**

E. AUTHORIZE THE MAYOR, HARRY W. RILLING, TO ENTER INTO AN AGREEMENT FOR THE USE OF CALF PASTURE BEACH PARKING LOT AND IMMEDIATE SURROUNDING GROUNDS BY THE COACHMEN FOR THEIR CALF PASTURE BEACH CRUISE TO BE HELD ON TUESDAY, MAY 13TH, JUNE 10TH, JULY 8TH AND AUGUST 12TH, 2025 FROM 4:30 P.M. TO 9:00 P.M WITH RAIN DATES OF WEDNESDAY, MAY 14TH AND JUNE 11TH AND TUESDAY, JULY 15TH AND FRIDAY, AUGUST 15TH. APPROXIMATELY 150 PEOPLE.

The representative provided a brief overview of the event and said that Coachmen have been around for over 65 years and bring car clubs from other towns and enjoy the beach and is a good time.

Ms. Dunn asked if it was a non-profit organization. The representative said “no”, but they do not charge a fee, receive donations, and put together a sponsor book but do not make any money on the events.

**** MS. SHANAHAN MOVED TO AUTHORIZE THE ITEM.**
**** THE MOTION PASSED UNANIMOUSLY.**

F. AUTHORIZE THE MAYOR, HARRY W. RILLING, TO ENTER INTO AN AGREEMENT FOR THE USE OF VETERAN’S PARK AND IMMEDIATE SURROUNDING GROUNDS BY VOX CHURCH FOR THEIR EASTER EGG HUNT TO BE HELD ON APRIL 12TH, 2025 FROM 7:30 A.M. TO 1:30 P.M WITH A RAIN DATE OF SATURDAY, APRIL 19TH. APPROXIMATELY 480 PEOPLE.

Mr. Kromidas provided a brief overview of the event and said this is the third annual event and is open to the entire community and has 35-40 volunteers to help with the activities and will have police to help with traffic control.

**** MS. SHANAHAN MOVED TO AUTHORIZE THE ITEM.**
**** THE MOTION PASSED UNANIMOUSLY.**

G. AUTHORIZE THE MAYOR, HARRY W. RILLING, TO ENTER INTO AN AGREEMENT FOR THE USE OF ROWAYTON SCHOOL FIELD AND IMMEDIATE SURROUNDING GROUNDS BY ROWAYTON PTA FOR THEIR ROWAYTON ELEMENTARY SCHOOL CARNIVAL TO BE HELD ON FRIDAY, MAY 2ND, 2025 FROM 4:00 P.M. TO 10:00 P.M AND SATURDAY, MAY 3RD, 2025 FROM 10:00 A.M. TO 5:00 P.M WITH A RAIN DATE OF SUNDAY, MAY 4TH. SET-UP TIME BY 10:00 A.M. WEDNESDAY, APRIL 30TH WITH TEAR-DOWN BY SUNDAY, MAY 4TH. APPROXIMATELY 3,000 PEOPLE.

Ms. Slutzky provided a brief overview of the event and said the event has been held for at least the past 25 years, and has been using the same amusement park vendor, and is one of their largest fundraising events.

**** MS. SHANAHAN MOVED TO AUTHORIZE THE ITEM.**
**** THE MOTION PASSED UNANIMOUSLY.**

H. AUTHORIZE THE MAYOR, HARRY W. RILLING, TO SIGN ANY AND ALL DOCUMENTS REQUIRED FOR THE PARTNERSHIP AGREEMENT WITH KEEP AMERICA BEAUTIFUL AS IT RELATES TO THE GREEN WORKFORCE TRAINING PROJECT "NATIONAL URBAN FORESTRY EXPERTISE COMES TO NORWALK: A GREEN WORKFORCE PROGRAM", AWARDED THROUGH KEEP AMERICA BEAUTIFUL BY THE CONNECTICUT DEPARTMENT OF ENERGY AND ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION.

Mr. Hughes introduced Sarah Cruz and said she is a relatively new arborist and horticulturist and the partnership with Keep

America Beautiful is an exciting project.

Ms. Cruz said this grant was awarded to Keep America Beautiful as the primary awardee, but the City of Norwalk is partnering with them to execute the grant funds. This will support the Green Workforce initiative in Norwalk which is an apprenticeship program for individuals in the community who may face barriers to employment and to gain meaningful and technical skills in the field of forestry, landscaping, and tree care. It will allow for up to 10 people this fall and spring and will go through an eight-week course led by individuals from the Recreation and Parks Department and DPW as well as people from local tree care companies. It will also allow them to plant upwards of 150 trees within the South Norwalk area. She said they will need to enter into an agreement with Keep America Beautiful to move forward with the grant.

Mr. Lopez asked if there is room for placement for those who are participating in the program. Ms. Cruz said at the moment they are in the planning phases of both organizations to formally partner with us for the grant to ensure they are bridging existing community resources with this program and is a stepping stone towards future employment and hopes to have a career fair towards the end of each training session to get those folks in touch with employers in the area and possible hold some resume workshops.

Ms. Shanahan congratulated Ms. Cruz on receiving the grant as it was a very competitive grant to get, and she was very excited that they were awarded the grant.

Mr. Stowers said he is excited about this program because it does give the chance to get some people trained and working and a lot of cities around the country are doing this kind of thing particularly for green infrastructure.

Ms. Young echoed Ms. Shanahan's comment and thanked Ms. Cruz for all the work that she has done so far with the city and that it has been amazing, and this sounds like an amazing opportunity for the people in Norwalk and for the city.

**** MS. EADDY MOVED TO AUTHORIZE THE ITEM.**

**** THE MOTION PASSED UNANIMOUSLY.**

I. AUTHORIZE THE MAYOR, HARRY W. RILLING, TO ENTER INTO AN AGREEMENT FOR THE USE OF VETERAN'S PARK AND IMMEDIATE SURROUNDING GROUNDS BY NORWALK SEAPORT ASSOCIATION FOR THEIR OYSTER FESTIVAL TO BE HELD ON FRIDAY, SEPTEMBER 5TH FROM 6:00 P.M. TO 11:00 P.M., SATURDAY, SEPTEMBER 6TH FROM 11:00 A.M. TO 11:00 P.M., AND SUNDAY SEPTEMBER 7TH FROM 11:00 A.M. TO 8:00 P.M. SET-UP TIME BY 8:00 A.M. SATURDAY, AUGUST 16TH WITH TEAR-DOWN BY 10:00 P.M. TUESDAY, SEPTEMBER 30TH . APPROXIMATELY 40,000 PEOPLE.

Mr. Reilly provided an overview of the event and said this will be the 47th year that the festival will be held and is held to restore and rebuild Sheffield Island Lighthouse and get the kids to learn about the maritime heritage and is their wish to get every fifth grader out to see the beautiful lighthouse, and this is a major fundraiser for that.

**** MS. DUNN MOVED TO AUTHORIZE THE ITEM.**

**** THE MOTION PASSED UNANIMOUSLY.**

J. APPROVE THE USE OF MATHEWS PARK AND IMMEDIATE SURROUNDING GROUNDS BY STEPPING STONES MUSEUM FOR THEIR ANNIVERSARY GALA TO BE HELD ON SATURDAY, MARCH 29TH, 2025 FROM 5:00 P.M. TO 10:00 P.M. SET-UP TIME BY 10:00 A.M. THURSDAY, MARCH 20TH WITH TEAR-DOWN BY 1:00 P.M. SUNDAY, MARCH 30TH, 2025. APPROXIMATELY 400 PEOPLE.

Mr. Jacobacci provided a brief overview of the event and said this is a change in an existing event and has changed the event to a gala but will not be a public event and is an invitation-only event and will start in the museum and go into the gala tent.

Ms. Dunn asked about the parking based on the projection of 400 people attending. Mr. Jacobacci said they will be offering valet parking and will be using the great lawn parking lot like they have done in the past and there has never been a

problem, and it will be easier than it would have been if they had not changed the event from a circus to a gala.

**** MS. SHANAHAN MOVED TO APPROVE THE ITEM.**

**** THE MOTION PASSED UNANIMOUSLY.**

VII. DISCUSSION

A. ON THE SECOND WEDNESDAY OF MARCH 2025, A PUBLIC HEARING WILL BE HELD TO REVIEW RECOMMENDATIONS AND MODIFICATIONS FOR FEES AND CHARGES. DURING THE SAME MEETING, THE COMMITTEE WILL VOTE ON THE RECOMMENDATIONS.

Mr. Stowers said a financial study was done into the fees and charges and looked at two different ways of modeling those fees so there could be an ongoing policy and has put together some recommendations on a new pricing policy as well as recommendations for changes and modifications to some of the fees and charges. He said they are in the process of going through a briefing with the mayor and once it is approved by the mayor, they will send the packets to the committee to review well before the public hearing.

B. PRESENTATION OF THE DRAFT TREE MASTER PLAN, PLANIT GEO LLC

Mr. Stowers said WestCog ranked the tree canopy very low a few years ago and only covered 43% at that time compared to the average of 61% in Connecticut and their goal is to try to not only increase the number of trees as well as maintain them in the urban core. He said in 2022 they began a study of the tree canopy.

Ms. Cruz introduced Mr. Peiffer of Planet Geo and said he would run through an overview of the draft version of the plan and how to apply what is laid out in the plan over the next 10 or so years.

Mr. Stowers said they would welcome written comments and or recommendations from the committee before the draft plan is finalized as they are moving toward the approval of Norwalk's Urban Tree Master Plan and are in the last phase.

Mr. Peiffer said he is the Director of Urban Forestry Strategy at Planet Geo. He provided an overview of the timeline of the project and said the project began in 2022 and going into the beginning of January 2024, there was extensive engagement with stakeholders gathering input, preferences, priorities, and desired outcomes that helped them to arrive at summaries and reporting that will lead to the strategies. As they start to draft the strategies there will be extensive engagement to weigh in on priorities, new programs, or where effort should be focused in 2025 in the draft plan that is being presented tonight and refining it based on the feedback they receive from these presentations and plan reviews, so by the end of the quarter in March of 2025 there will be a delivery and closeout of the project.

Mr. Peiffer provided a brief overview of the plan and said the shade of trees covers 43% of Norwalk citywide and found there was a loss of 790 acres of canopy and an additional analysis showed where the losses and gains throughout the city and the plans address those gains and losses. He said that while looking at various social demographics data they found a score of 86 out of 100 for Norwalk and Norwalk does stand at a higher level than the average for the region but there is work to be done. Last year around this time a survey was conducted with 23 different internal stakeholders participating in representing various departments and committees as well as addressing the top five challenges that are either caused by trees or are challenges facing trees which worked into the strategies and recommendations of the plan and for sustainable urban forest requires a shared commitment not just from the city but all members of the community.

Mr. Peiffer said one overarching goal of the plan is to increase tree canopy cover because of the many different benefits and ways to measure this goal over time to provide that compass as the plan gets implemented and the 43% canopy based on the assessment and a 10% increase to 53% by 2053 and estimate 2,130 trees will be needed annually for 30 years and 70% of the planting would be led by the city which equates to approximately 1,500 trees per year, keeping in mind that the zoning

regulations and development projects incorporate trees as well with a no net loss approach for public trees.

Mr. Peiffer reviewed the next steps and noted there will be a stakeholder's workshop held on February 26th and a workshop for the public on February 27th.

Mr. Cruz said that an urban forest is all-encompassing of all trees and green spaces throughout a given city or town and affects every single resident within Norwalk, and looking through this scope for trees will help to manage the trees and strategize for the future and get buy in from folks and this plan will affect folks so want to be sure through this committee and the workshops and surveys that they are getting input and feedback from folks.

Ms. Young thanked Mr. Peiffer for the report and she is glad to see all of the work that has been done in a concise way that will move this initiative forward, one of the biggest things they need to do is this is part of Planning and Zoning in a much deeper way and that there is a solid plan to replace or plant trees as Norwalk continues to develop.

Ms. Shanahan said the two things that struck her were the loss of tree canopy over the last 15-20 years, which is so upsetting to see, and that 40% of the trees are only in fair to worse conditions, which need to be addressed. She also emphasized what Ms. Young said and really needs to talk Planning & Zoning into having a lot of stricter rules and may need rules like other jurisdictions have about clear-cutting, and how many trees can be removed, and part of this there will need to be public education so people have a better understanding of why trees are good for them, and can work with DPW who is spearheading the stormwater discussion.

Ms. Shanahan said she heads the Land Trust and works closely with other conservation groups and is all in for being helpful on the education piece.

Ms. Cruz said the draft plan is in the agenda packet for this committee meeting and will be launching it on the city's website next week. She also emphasized that the tree inventory that was completed was just a sample primarily in South Norwalk, Calf Pasture Beach, and Veterans Park, but over the next year or so plans to inventory another 25,000 trees citywide and there will be some form of a public map where people can zoom into their neighborhood to see the species of tree. Additionally, there are a lot of other documents that Mr. Peiffer and his team put together.

Ms. Dunn said it seems like Planning & Zoning has specific guidelines for trees and asked if that is equitable to surrounding cities. She also said it does not look like complete streets have any measurable guidelines for trees. Ms. Cruz said the complete streets ordinance is a guideline to how trees fit in more types of spaces when rethinking the streetscape but not necessarily any kind of measurement or thresholds of how many. Ms. Dunn said that with the high density in Norwalk, she sees a lack of accountability for including trees overall and would like to know how other communities deal with that. Ms. Cruz said that will be the topic of one of the workshops, there is a set amount of space in one block area and needs to work in the set amount of space and ensure we are getting equitable distribution of green space within a certain area and multiple priorities and balance are depending on the site. Mr. Stowers suggested that the zoning regulation could require a certain square footage of green space in certain areas and as he has mentioned there will need to be some ordinance changes. Mr. Peiffer suggested tracking what is going on with trees for development projects.

Mr. Lopez asked what would be most effective in terms of communication and working alongside the community to increase the tree canopy. Mr. Peiffer suggested using the Tree Alliance and the Tree Advisory committee to get the word out so it's not just coming from the city but is also supported by those community organizations and listening to the community needs.

VII. ADJOURNMENT

**** MS. SHANAHAN MOVED TO ADJOURN.**

**** THE MOTION PASSED UNANIMOUSLY.**

The meeting was adjourned at 8:35 PM.

Respectfully submitted,
Dilene Byrd