

PARKS & RECREATION COMMITTEE
OF THE
SUFFOLK COUNTY LEGISLATURE
MINUTES

A regular meeting of the Parks & Recreation Committee of The Suffolk County Legislature was held in the Rose Y. Caracappa Legislative Auditorium of the William H. Rogers Legislature Building, 725 Veterans Memorial Highway, Smithtown, New York on June 16, 2010.

MEMBERS PRESENT:

Leg. Lynne C. Nowick, Chairperson
Leg. Wayne R. Horsley, Vice Chair
Leg. Thomas Barraga
Leg. Rick Montano
Leg. Steven H. Stern

ALSO IN ATTENDANCE:

Presiding Officer William J. Lindsay
George Nolan, Counsel to the Legislature
Sarah Simpson, Assistant Counsel
Ben Zwirn, County Executive's Office
Renee Ortiz, Chief Deputy Clerk
Jill Moss, Budget Review Office
Joe Montuori, appointee (Commissioner of Parks Department)
Paul Perillie, Aide to Majority Leader
Linda Bay, Aide to Minority Leader
Greg Moran, Aide to Leg. Nowick
Bob Martinez, Aide to Leg. Montano
Dot Kerrigan, AME Legislative Representative
Dennis Brown, County Attorney's Office
Marge Acevedo, Aide to Presiding Officer
Patrick Boyles, Park Police
Steve Tricaraco, Aide to County Executive
And all other interested parties

MINUTES TAKEN BY:

Diana Flesher, Court Stenographer

THE COMMITTEE WAS CALLED TO ORDER AT 1:15 PM

CHAIRPERSON NOWICK:

Okay, I'd like to call the Committee of the Parks and Recreation Committee to order. We will start with the Pledge to the flag led by Legislator Horsley.

SALUTATION

Okay, welcome to the Parks and Recreation Committee. We do not have any cards for public portion. So with that we can go to the agenda.

What I would like to do is to take out of order IR 1653. I'll make a motion to take IR 1653 out of order, second by Legislator Barraga. All in favor? Opposed? **1653 is before us. (Confirming the appointment of the Commissioner of the Department of Parks, Recreation and Conservation - Joseph J. Montuori) (Co. Exec.)**

IR 1653, I will make a motion for purposes of discussion, second by Legislator Horsley. And I will ask Mr. Montuori if he would like to come up and give us a little background and discuss the Suffolk County Park System with us.

Welcome.

MR. MONTUORI:

Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON NOWICK:

You have to press the button and speak into it.

MR. MONTUORI:

How's that?

CHAIRPERSON NOWICK:

Right. After a while your thumb will hurt.

Would you like to start first and tell us a little bit about your visions and your ideas and where you feel the Parks in Suffolk County should head and where they're going and what needs to be done?

MR. MONTUORI:

Well, I have toured half of the County Parks now. I think the County Parks, they're not in bad shape, not as bad as the State Parks. I expected worse. I think there's a lot of new things that we could do in the County Parks. I think it's very important with the times being so hard now for our residents and that we really need to supply recreation. People are working six days a week. They need a place to go on the weekend.

We need to update the Parks a little bit. We do rent like row boats. And I think that we can change that and go to something like paddle boats. People don't know how to row anymore unfortunately. And I think that's a nice, good, healthy recreational activity for our residents.

I also looked into how we can increase our revenue a little bit in Parks and somehow try to get it back into Parks, the revenue, also. I toured some parks and I see that with the storms, that we had a lot of down trees and there's firewood piled up in a corner. Why don't we take that firewood

during the winter months, split it, sell it? Why not make the profit? 7-Eleven's doing it. We should do the same.

So these are different things that I'm looking at. I think the paddle boats will increase our revenue into our County Parks. So, I'm looking into that.

I'm looking into seeing if we can get some more grants, get some more trails. People are into exercise people. People want to walk. We have the dog parks. I was thinking, also, one of the things I did when I was Superintendent of Heckscher, I did something a little bit different. Like I said, each area you have to look at, some areas, yes, would need a dog park. Sometimes people like to run with their dogs for exercise. So what I did was I did -- I set up a special area where people could run with their dogs and get exercise. And also for the dog also.

So these are the different things that I'm looking at. The biggest thing is I want to create safe and clean parks for our residents. That's my main thing.

CHAIRPERSON NOWICK:

Okay. Thank you for that. I just want to ask you since you did do the touring, on the dog park, had you noticed if they have any sponsors on the dog parks with little bags and plaques and stuff like that?

MR. MONTUORI:

No, but that's a good idea. I like that because I was thinking about putting sponsorship on the paddle boats if we get the paddle boats, yes.

CHAIRPERSON NOWICK:

Yeah, I think sponsorships would be a great idea. I think you can go to Petco, Costco or any -- it doesn't have to be a store. It can be someone that just has a love for dogs. It could even be *in memory of Fido*.

MR. MONTUORI:

That's a good idea.

CHAIRPERSON NOWICK:

Or Fida.

COMMISSIONER MONTUORI:

One of the things we do, I notice in the dog parks, we supply plastic bags to pick up after the dogs. Why don't we go to something like Petco and see if they can supply us with the plastic bags instead of us buying the plastics bags and they get the advertisement? Then we don't have to buy the plastic bags.

CHAIRPERSON NOWICK:

I think that that would -- there should be no reason why we're buying them. I think that we could have sponsors on every dog park with a pole, with the sponsor's name, with the plastic bags. And that would be their sponsorship fee, so to speak. I think that would be a great idea. And I think -- I think sponsorships, anywhere you can put them, if there is a need, whether it's for bags or whatever, I also think -- and I don't know how you feel about it -- any time you can -- I want to say, like, sell a brick and make a little money, have somebody -- I see that all over in Florida and other states. They're very big on sponsorships. And it defrays the cost, which to me, is worthwhile. And it's a twofold thing.

Now you mentioned paddle boats rather than row boats.

MR. MONTUORI:

Yes. I think this going around talking to the staff, a lot of people don't know how to use row boats anywhere.

CHAIRPERSON NOWICK:

I hate to ask this but what's a paddle boat? Is that like a bicycle?

MR. MONTUORI:

That's a boat where normally two to four people can sit on it and they have like a -- picture like a paddle, a paddle on the front and they just paddle with pedals.

CHAIRPERSON NOWICK:

Do they move it like a bicycle? Like they're bicycling? Is that foot power?

COMMISSIONER MONTUORI:

Yeah, on that principle, yes.

CHAIRPERSON NOWICK:

Oh, okay. They do that in some of the parks, I guess, like Hershey or whatever. Okay. And when you say *update the parks*, how would you do that?

MR. MONTUORI:

What I'm saying update is, like one example, would be like with the paddle boats. And other things like -- other activities that maybe we can bring into the parks. I'm looking into maybe, we do have softball fields. Maybe we want to bring in cricket fields. We can -- they're very easy to set up and we can charge a fee for that. People are looking for fields to do what all these new activities that everybody's doing that we -- you know, like I said, cricket's a very big thing now on Long Island. Of course, soccer has grown, lacrosse. So things like that I'm look into seeing -- if we have a field that the public is not going to use, that we can convert it into a field and generate revenue, that's a plus for us.

CHAIRPERSON NOWICK:

Would you think there would be any way in any of the parks that you visited, you talked before about people liking to walk, just as something that I think might be a good idea, and it's not a revenue increasing thing, but it's a recreation, it's health, what about -- depending on the park, what they would call a heart walk? So it doesn't cost any money really to do it but I think it's measured off. There's a stop where somebody can do pushup's. There's another stop where they can do other different things. I think that you find -- those are also in other states. A heart walk wouldn't cost a lot but I think people would use that. Are you familiar with that concept at all?

MR. MONTUORI:

When I was the Superintendent at Heckscher State Park, I applied for a grant. And what I did was I extended the walk path, bike path at Heckscher State Park. And also what I did was, we had a foundation and I received money from them. And I put an exercise course in, exactly what you're talking about.

CHAIRPERSON NOWICK:

And then further at each stop, maybe you could have Golds Gym be a sponsor. I just pick out Golds. Golds Gym sponsor one, Bali's Gym a sponsor, just to create heart walk exercise and bring it all together, some place on a Sunday morning, a father and a son or mother and son or daughter, whatever can go and say let's go do exercise, let's go take a walk. And that would be also something I'd like to see done.

And I'll let my Committee go on from there. But I just wanted to ask you one other thing. I don't know how to word this, our golf courses are -- our golf courses are beautiful in Suffolk County. And I would love to do everything we can to make sure our golf courses get the attention they deserve. And I say it because also they are, and correct me if I'm wrong, they are our largest park's revenue stream. The fees are very, very fair. The courses are beautiful. All located on various waterways.

I would love -- I would like to get a promise from you that these golf courses will be right on the top of your list not only because I love to play golf, but because they are a very, very large source of revenue for us. And I think that you have to maintain them.

MR. MONTUORI:

Just for your information, rounds are up this year. And rounds at Bethpage State Park are down. So I guess our fees are very good and our golf courses are in good shape and they will continue.

CHAIRPERSON NOWICK:

Well, that black course is what, \$75?

MR. MONTUORI:

It depends if you play on the black. But still I did a little research, we are like one of the lowest around.

CHAIRPERSON NOWICK:

Oh, we are. And, also having said that, we talked about this -- it could have been at the last meeting or the meeting before -- our fees are so fair, I don't even know that half the golfers in Suffolk County know how fair they are. And although having said that also, are we inundated with golfers where there are no tee times or could we afford a little advertisement to let people in the County know that we have the best fees there are?

MR. MONTUORI:

That's a good point. I'll take that under consideration. Let me do a little bit more research on that. I don't think we're going to have to really do advertisement, but we're doing pretty good.

CHAIRPERSON NOWICK:

That was very good, *I'll take it under advisement*. I will open questions up to the Committee. Legislator Horsley and then Legislator Stern.

LEG. HORSLEY:

Hello, Joe. It's always a pleasure. Joe and I have worked together for the last, God knows how long, 30 years maybe, Joe?

MR. MONTUORI:

30.

LEG. HORSLEY:

Something like that. State Parks, that's where I came from originally. It's not about me. I was the Finance Director of State Parks.

One of the things that just to follow up on what Legislator Nowick was just talking about and yourself, the team of Long Island Parks and Rec were complaining the other night that our fees are driving people away, or they're blaming it on, the reason why they were -- that their rounds were down, which I thought was testament to some of our conversations with Legislator Barraga, where we're saying, *listen, on Long Island during a recession people go to their local parks and they'll go to the place that maybe we can give them the best buy for their recreational dollar*. So I think that's a good thing and it's good that our rounds are up. And not to say that it's a good thing for theirs to be down, but it certainly a credit to this County.

I want to do a couple of things. I wanted to congratulate you on winning the Maple Leaf Award, which is, for those who don't know, which I'm sure you don't, goes to a State Park Superintendent who is -- and I looked up the criteria -- the most innovative, the most industrious, been around a number of years, runs a good park, and all these kinds of things, there's only one given per year to a park manager in the State of New York. And Joe was the recipient in 2009, I think, it was or '10?

MR. MONTUORI:

Yes.

LEG. HORSLEY:

2009.

MR. MONTUORI:

(Shaking head yes)

LEG. HORSLEY:

Which goes a long way to saying that your fellow park managers recognize your capabilities. And I wanted to mention that today, terrific.

I also wanted to query you, Joe, because I think this is something that we should do here on the County parks is, the State pioneered a concept of -- it's called SPIF, which is -- because they also, as does the County Parks, has problems with a numbers of employees, who just can't -- it's not like the old days where we had a lot of extra employees to go tackle difficulties.

What they did is, they put together, and I'll let Joe explain it, a team that would go attack a specific problem, maybe it might be roofs or maybe it might be sidewalks or whatever the issue might be, they had experts or technicians including engineers and stuff like that, that as a unit, that'll go into a particular park and tackle an egregious problem in that park. And it goes a long way once you get this thing rolling. And I think maybe we might want to, because I know it was centered out of Heckscher State Park. And you might want to, you know, just give us a little background about it, do you think it's a good idea for County parks and what is your thinking?

MR. MONTUORI:

I think it's an excellent job because what happens is that we all know especially here in the County, we have 200 plus buildings, okay, and we have old buildings. And the worst thing in a building is when the roof goes. And one of the main things setting up this crew was going around and repairing roofs before more damage was done to a facility.

What they did in State Parks, was they took money that they collected at the tolls and they put it into this crew where they hired a couple of engineers, they hired supervisors, they hired all kinds of trades people. They hired plumbers, electricians, masons, any, you know, anything that would do repairing facilities.

What I would like to do is, I'd like to do the same thing but a little bit different. That's why I'm looking to see where we could generate funds to where we could take these funds, these new funds and put it into this capital fund and see if we can fund that to hire people just to go around and do these things and stabilize our buildings.

Like I said, they'll go in there and they'll completely rebuild a comfort station. And the long run, one of the things I do want to say it is cheaper to have people on staff build a building. And that's what they did in State Parks. They built comfort stations, they built police stations, they built bridges. I mean they've done a lot of things. And I would like to do the same thing.

It's going to take a little while to do it. And like I said, we're going to have to find out how we're going to fund this. And like I said, one of the biggest things I'm looking to see how we can generate funds to put into there without, you know, raising fees.

CHAIRPERSON NOWICK:

Wouldn't that still be a capital project, though, if you did roofs and that type of thing, that would still go through the legislature as a capital project, right? You're talking about offsets so --

LEG. HORSLEY:

What Joe, I think, is envisioning here is that this would more or less like a maintenance staff that is like a hit squad to do initial fix ups on, like a comfort station that maybe they've had a leaky roof or something like that, they'd come in and they'd have the whole group work on that for a week's time. And they got the thing back up to snuff where we don't have to spend all of our capital dollars where we can make sure that our capital dollars go for the larger projects. And it spreads the maintenance around a little bit, particularly where you have big problems like all of our Parks have on Long Island.

MR. MONTUORI:

Another good example would be a bathroom. Let's say we have a bathroom that needs to be updated. They would -- right after Labor Day we would close that bathroom down and this crew would go in there and rehab the bathroom completely, you know, gut it out, new partitions, new toilets, make sure it's up to handicapped code, you know, if you need a new roof, we'll put a new roof on it.

CHAIRPERSON NOWICK:

Legislator Stern, you wanted to ask questions?

LEG. STERN:

Thank you, Madam Chair. Hello. How are you?

MR. MONTUORI:

Good.

LEG. STERN:

Our beaches are some of the finest beaches in the world. For many residents of Suffolk County, it's why we live here. And, of course, it is a major driver of our economy for our tourism and our local economy. I wanted to get your thoughts on what your -- your impression of our parks, our beach parks are at this point. Some of the challenges that they face, some of your ideas on how we can best protect our ocean front beaches as we go into the future because it's certainly going to be a challenge not just for now, but for generations to come. I was wondering what your thoughts were and what your vision is.

MR. MONTUORI:

Well, my main concern is erosion. Smiths Point, you know, that's a shame. We are going to -- we are working with the Department of Public Works. We are having a meeting, we're trying to work with FEMA and we're going to try to build up our beaches and we're going to try to stockpile, I think is the biggest thing.

Again, everything is permits. Permits, permits. And about dredging. And that's something that's going to be number one on, you know, that I want to really start pushing is that we got to build back up our beaches and protect them. And like you said, people love Smiths Point. They love all our beaches. They're beautiful. And we got to protect them. Yes, I agree with you.

And like I said I'm going to be working with the Department of Public Works and with FEMA to see if we can push this. Our biggest problem is that it takes a year to get permits. So I'm going to try to work my hardest to get pushing on that because I don't want to go through another winter like we just did this past one.

LEG. STERN:

It might not be exact. I'm wondering if you can share with us anything that you've had in your background experience that would give you and us the impression that you'd be able to handle those kinds of issues. Was there anything in past work experience that was similar in dealing with erosion and DEC issues, that kind of thing?

MR. MONTUORI:

Yes. When I was at Heckscher we had erosion problems over there. Also, we had problem with our boat basin kept filling back in again. The biggest thing is you have to work with DEC. You got to come up with ideas. What we did was, good example, would be in Hecksher is that the boat basin was filling in, but we needed sand for the beach. So I said, *listen, why don't we do this? Why don't we dredge the boat basin, take that sand and put it on the beach?* And they thought that was a great idea. So it saved the state money by doing it that way.

These are things I'm going to look at. I also want to see if we can get permits, on-going permits so we don't have to sit here and wait. That's part of the problem. One of the things I did with the boat basin was that they let the permit for dredging expire. So now you had to apply for another permit. And then it took a year or so.

So now what we did was we got a ten year permit. So these are the things I want to do. You got to work with DEC and try to get permits where you can -- you don't have to keep going back every year and asking for a permit because it's going to take a year or so to get it. So if you can get a permit, you know, that's good for ten years, you know, it would make it much easier to where we can, you know, correct all the erosion.

CHAIRPERSON NOWICK:

Anybody else that would like to ask a question? I have a question. And I'm not sure if you know the answer to this quite yet. But from what I hear, I noticed that, and there's probably a reason for it, Blydenburg Park has a sign up that says *green key required*. Now, I was under the impression a green key is an option. So that would mean, for example, let's just say my daughter, who doesn't choose to use the parks all the time but would like to take a walk at Blydenburg, and doesn't have a green key, by yet has a license with her identification on it that she lives in Suffolk County, she can't get into that Park? And I use her as an example because I don't see her at a Park but -- that doesn't sound right.

MR. MONTUORI:

No. I'll look into that for you. I don't know why. It doesn't make sense.

CHAIRPERSON NOWICK:

It says *green key required* and I don't know about the other parks in Suffolk County, if anybody's noticed but I did notice that it said that.

MR. MONTUORI:

Because you have a dog park in there, too, so I have to get back to you on that one.

CHAIRPERSON NOWICK:

I would think that you don't have to go and buy a green key. But if you are a resident, there's a way to prove it. Maybe identification is required, I don't know, but that would be something that -- I think that might be something to look into. I don't think the beaches are that way although you have a lesser fee.

MR. MONTUORI:

I haven't seen it in any of the parks that I went through so I'll have to check that one out.

CHAIRPERSON NOWICK:

It's right on 347 -- is it Vets Highway at this point? Yeah.

MR. MONTUORI:

I have been there.

CHAIRPERSON NOWICK:

Maybe you get back to me on that.

MR. MONTUORI:

I'll get back to you on that.

CHAIRPERSON NOWICK:

Okay.

If there are not any other questions, there is a motion, isn't there, and a second?

MS. HOWARD:

Yes.

CHAIRPERSON NOWICK:

Clerk is saying yes, there is a motion.

MS. HOWARD:

There is a motion, a first and a second.

CHAIRPERSON NOWICK:

Who made the motion? I did.

MS. HOWARD:

Yeah.

CHAIRPERSON NOWICK:

Short term memory; it's a little problem but, okay. I have a motion and a second. All in favor?

LEG. MONTANO:

Quick question on the motion. Hi, how are you? Mr. Montuori, will you be appearing at the Legislative meeting on Tuesday?

MR. MONTUORI:

Yes.

LEG. MONTANO:

Okay.

CHAIRPERSON NOWICK:

Okay, I have a motion and a second. All in favor? Opposed? 1653 is approved. And we'll see you on Tuesday. **(VOTE: 5-0-0-0)**

Okay, we'll go to tabled resolutions.

TABLED RESOLUTIONS

1105, Waiving the Vanderbilt Museum's reimbursement for self-insurance.
(Pres. Off.) I'll make a motion to table.

LEG. BARRAGA:

Second.

CHAIRPERSON NOWICK:

Second by Legislator Barraga. All in favor? Opposed? 1105 is tabled. **(VOTE: 5-0-0-0)**

1585, amending the 2010 Capital Budget and Program and appropriating funds in connection with the restoration of the Helen Keller House (CP 7504)

LEG. MONTANO:

Motion to table.

CHAIRPERSON NOWICK:

Motion to table by Legislator Montano, second by Legislator Barraga. All in favor? Opposed? 1585 is tabled. **(VOTE: 5-0-0-0)**

INTRODUCTORY RESOLUTIONS

Introductory resolution 1592, amending Resolution No. 142-2010, authorizing a further extension of Soccer Field Agreement with the Mastic Sports Club. (Browning) Counsel, that's all in order?

MR. NOLAN:

What the resolution does is right now we've passed a resolution that authorizes a licensed agreement through 2021. This resolution would extend that authorization out to 2031. I believe the sponsor, Legislator Browning, asked for this because the group has stated that the longer term license will allow them to better attract grants and other funding.

CHAIRPERSON NOWICK:

Was there a motion? I'll make a motion, second by Legislator Horsley. All in favor? Opposed? 1592 is approved. **(VOTE: 5-0-0-0)**

1595, authorizing use of Smith Point County Park property by the Montauk Highway Merchants' Association and the Chamber of Commerce of the Mastics and Shirley, for a Summer Youth Program. (Browning) I believe this is a repeat of last year's legislation. And do I have a motion? I'll make a motion.

LEG. BARRAGA:

Second.

CHAIRPERSON NOWICK:

Second by Legislator Barraga. All in favor? Opposed? 1595 is approved. **(VOTE: 5-0-0-0)**

1606, amending the 2010 Capital Budget and Program and appropriating funds in connection with reconstruction of spillways (CP 7099). (Kennedy) I'll make a motion to approve, second by Legislator Stern. All in favor? Opposed? 1606 is approved. **(VOTE: 5-0-0-0)**

1643, authorizing use of the Long Island Maritime Museum by the Cystic Fibrosis Foundation for their annual "Sayville Run/Walk & Barbeque" Fundraiser. (Co. Exec.) There's a \$500 fee involved. I'll make a motion, second by Legislator Stern. All in favor? Opposed? 1643 is approved. **(VOTE: 5-0-0-0)**

1655, to waive fee for use of the County showmobile for the Riverhead Fire Department's Countywide Parada. (Romaine) I'm going to make a motion to table.

LEG. BARRAGA:

Second.

CHAIRPERSON NOWICK:

Second by Legislator Barraga. I know it's not our policy. All in favor? Opposed? 1655 is tabled. **(VOTE: 5-0-0-0)**

Is there anybody else here that would like to address the Committee? If not, I will make a motion to adjourn, second by Legislator Horsley. All in favor? Opposed? We're adjourned.

THE MEETING CONCLUDED AT 1:40 PM
{ } DENOTES SPELLED PHONETICALLY