

Board of Recreation Commissioners

Egg Harbor Township, NJ

SPECIAL MEETING

Tuesday, February 16, 2021

5:00pm

MINUTES

Call to Order

The meeting was called to order at 5:03 pm by Chairperson Rispoli followed by the pledge of allegiance.

Statement Pursuant to the Open Public Meetings Act

Chairperson Rispoli read the opening statement

Roll Call

Roll call showed 7 members present and 1 absent. The Alternate #2 seat is still vacant.

Charles Gallagher	Present	Paul Trinkle	Excused
Christine Gras	Present	William Warrell, Vice Chairperson	Present
Toni-Lynn Rispoli, Chairperson	Present	Paul Weldon	Present
Amy Smith	Present	Stan Russ, Alternate #1	Present
		Alternate #2	Vacant

Also present at the meeting were Deputy Mayor Laura Pfrommer, Township Committeeman Ray Ellis, Recreation Director Rick Audet and Program Manager Dena Danz.

Public Comment

Chairperson Rispoli opened public comment at 5:04 pm. No one from the public came forward and the public portion was closed.

New Business

Chairperson Rispoli advised the first item is EHT Youth Softball's request to allow Hamilton Township residents to play recreation softball. In the absence of Commissioner Trinkle, Chairperson Rispoli sent an email to all commissioners on his concerns with this request. A copy of his email is attached to the minutes.

Vice Chairperson Warrell, Commissioner Gras and Commissioner Russ agreed with Commissioner Trinkle's email. Vice Chairperson Warrell felt strongly about #2 of the email. It stated that softball should do everything they can to get back into the local league before the commission allows out of town players at the recreation level. An organization should not be rewarded for getting thrown out of a league, if in fact that is what happened.

Commissioner Smith asked if that had occurred. Chairperson Rispoli stated that was correct. She continued that the ABRSL was a vote of 7 towns including Mays Landing. They voted to remove EHT because a travel team played at the recreation level then continued on to district, regional and World Series tournaments. They did not like the way EHT put their teams together. It has always been if someone had a request for a coach, those players were placed on that team. She was unsure how their teams are decided now.

Director Audet stated that there should be clear bylaws on how teams are put together. Chairperson Rispoli didn't think they had that in place.

Commissioner Gras said that she reached out to Ventnor, Mays Landing, Somers Point and EHT parents to inquire on the issues with EHT and the League and why they left. The parents she spoke with stated it was because EHT stacked one team. The team was stacked with the best pitchers and other players. Unlike other towns where they may put their number one pitcher with their number three catcher and vice versa. Director Audet stated that this is more of an extended practice and not a bylaw. Commissioner Gras advised she has not reviewed their bylaws.

Commissioner Gras continued. There was once a comment that was made by EHT that the ABRSL league needed EHT more than EHT needed the ABRSL league. Now the tables are turned and the league is in no rush to allow EHT back in. Chairperson Rispoli confirmed that a comment to that nature was made.

Director Audet, it is not that people like how teams are put together. There should be procedures on how teams are established. Chairperson Rispoli said that the organization takes requests. Those players assigned to a team move up with that team. When they have players age out or not return, they fill those vacant spots. To her knowledge that is how it has been done in the past.

Chairperson Rispoli mentioned there could be some validity to the stacking of teams. Some EHT residents have complained that some teams end up with three pitchers and some end up with none. She asked Commissioner Gallagher, the softball liaison, if he was aware of how they are doing things. He stated he was not aware.

Commissioner Gras said the other issue was that their registration fee was \$145 for spring. Baseball ranges from \$90-\$125. Some parents advised they could go play in another town for less money. Vice Chairperson Warrell asked if this included T-batters paying the same price. It was confirmed they do and if they have two kids playing it is \$230.

Commissioner Gras continued that many organizations have come to us in the past for the same thing. We have always said no for recreation. We have made exceptions for travel. Travel you can justify playing time. She feels it's hard to say in a township this size we don't have enough players. We have to focus on the tax payer. No one wants to look that resident in the face and say I'm sorry your kid didn't play because of a Mays Landing player in Rec.

Commissioner Gras feels it is an organizational issue. A program in their peak season only has 68 kids registered. They have a million dollar complex and one of the best facilities in this Township and they can't field teams. They need to be more welcoming. The fees need to be lowered. Not being involved in their organization, Commissioner Gras did her due diligence in researching the issues at hand.

Chairperson Rispoli advised that the stand fee is included in registration. That fee is refunded to the parent when they complete their stand duty. It used to be \$25. Commissioner Gras looked up their flyer, the cost includes a \$35 mandatory fundraiser and \$50 stand fee. It breaks down to \$95 to play with the refundable \$50 if the parent completes their stand duty. She continued with that was a more reasonable fee to play.

Commissioner Smith asked if they should even be opening their stand during COVID. She was under the impression that it was not allowed. So working the stand should not even be included. Commissioner Russ stated it should all be prepackaged items or individually wrapped items.

Chairperson Rispoli also advised that the girls are provided uniform shirts, shorts/pants and socks that they keep for the registration fee.

Commissioner Smith said that besides the cost of the program, this is a slippery slope. You do not want to say to township girls they can't play because there isn't enough kids to play. However, you can't tell one organization they can take out of town recreation players and not do it for all organizations. Agenda item B brings up the same situation. Lacrosse numbers are not small, but to take out of town kids from Mays Landing because their

organizations folded. Lacrosse had their own issues in the past with having a large number of kids on one team and some kids not seeing play time. They made adjustments within their own organization to allow the kids to play. You didn't bring in non-residents to fill out the team you split. Those kids ran their tails off but no one complained of playing time.

Commissioner Smith continued with if you say yes to A, then you can't say no to B. Then it brings up the organizations that have a lot of numbers like soccer. It's tricky when its rec. Travel sports are different and have different expectations. Commissioner Smith doesn't like going to a rec game and watching kids sit. They are there to have fun. Who cares if they win.

Commissioner Gras agreed. She mentioned that the presidents cannot monitor all the coaches to ensure that every player is getting in the game. Vice Chairperson Warrell agreed with Commissioners Smith and Gras. Some of the issues he sees is there are 68 kids playing in a million dollar facility. Other organizations like lacrosse, who have larger numbers would love a facility like this. An organization that cannot get the numbers needs to fix the organization or disband. Is it just a softball issue? Is there not enough interest in the sport anymore?

Vice Chairperson Warrell compared it to Pickleball. Right now that's a hot sport, but if it were to slow down would we keep maintaining the facilities? That park is one of the best in South Jersey and they have an \$800,000 building for 68 kids. Softball needs to do their due diligence with getting people registered. Facebook cannot be the only means of recruiting. Other organizations are growing, why is softball dropping.

Vice Chairperson Warrell said there are organizations that are growing, however softball is declining year after year. Is there an obvious issue or is there a true lack of interest in softball. Commissioner Smith mentioned Hammonton, Vineland and Millville are true softball towns. They don't normally see a decline. Part of the issue is lacrosse and year round soccer have taken away from both baseball and softball.

Vice Chairperson Warrell questioned what the real issue is and why such a large number of players are leaving softball. He feels that the answer on Mays Landing girls playing should be no and that softball needs to fix their issues. Fix it right and not just for this year. Taking on Mays Landing this year would be temporary. If Mays Landing has a team next year, then what we do if the numbers are still down.

Commissioner Gras stated she was struggling with the fees. She questioned what softball's fundraiser was and why the need to charge a mandatory \$35. In addition if the snack stand is selling food, then they should be making their own money to stay in operation. That is extra money coming into the organization.

She continued, softball has all this money in their account, they should be lowering their fees. They want to build a pole barn that will cost \$30,000. This will allow them to make additional money, but they still are not lowering their fees. If you need players, you lower your fees and you give up the building you want to build. Parents are still without a job due to the pandemic and on unemployment. They have additional cost burdens due to schooling being hybrid and other costs in day care. They are looking at the upfront cost of putting \$145 out of their pocket. They are not looking at getting that stand money back down the road.

If these parents don't volunteer for the stand, who is running the stand? Softball needs to stop looking at it as they need to make money. They need to make their organization better.

Commissioner Smith asked if they are not in a league, who they are playing, themselves. That's not happening because they only have two teams and they need at least three. Maybe softball needs to look at holding clinics and reintroducing kids to the sport. Take the two teams you have and the money for the pole barn you want, enter them in a tournament. Offer a one day clinic. Don't charge for the first one. Get kids back involved in the sport.

You building interest in the community. Commissioner Gras added that the high school team to run the clinic. Those players can use it for community service.

Chairperson Rispoli asked the Board their thoughts:

Commissioner Russ stated he agreed. Commissioner Gallagher abstained. Commissioner Weldon stated he agrees with allowing it at travel but not for recreation. Usually when the high school does well in a sport, the town does well in the sport. Our HS team has done well, so why are kids not playing at the lower level.

Commissioner Weldon continued with he didn't think about the cost factor. It's a lot of money up front. We need to help them get back on track. What guidance can we give them?

Chairperson Rispoli said going back to the Babe Ruth side of it, the league is revamping. District 4 which is what EHT plays in, has no more teams. They are looking to consolidate EHT into District 3 (Millville, Buena, Vineland, Mays Landing and Folsom) or District 2 (Waretown, Stafford, Pt. Pleasant and New Egypt). With the redistricting, they will have teams to play, but they will have to travel.

District 4 used to be 8 towns, and last year they were down to 2. No one else chartered. Some went to play in ABRSL. Some chose to play in house and they didn't allow EHT to play. Commissioner Weldon asked what other teams play in ABRSL. Chairperson Rispoli responded Ventnor, Brigantine, Galloway, Absecon and Mullica. Commissioner Weldon said that EHT's numbers should be so much higher than these other towns.

Commissioner Weldon noted that in Lacrosse places like Millville and Vineland don't want to travel to EHT to play because there are enough teams near them. Chairperson Rispoli responded, if Babe Ruth moves their district, the other towns would not have a choice.

Commissioner Smith advised that they have a few teams, softball can go forward with what they have. Add in a possible tournament. There are opportunities for them to play, you need to present that to the parents. We are going to enter tournaments. Chairperson Rispoli said that in some cases the teams could be annihilated in some tournaments. Commissioner Smith responded that is the name of the game. Sometimes you win, sometimes you lose. That is how you build character, not everyone gets the trophy.

She continued, now you have all these other girls who may be interested in clinic times. No tournament, hold a practice. Commissioner Gras advised if their fees were \$70 you would have 50 more kids. Commission Smith advised there are three things we just gave them to build their program. Cut fees, enter tournaments and hold clinics. Commissioner Russ added, advertise better.

Chairperson Rispoli mentioned that when Soccer advised they had a marketing person, she wanted to tell softball to talk to them. Find out how they are doing it. Find out how it can help you. Commissioner Weldon advised it was called geofencing. Commissioner Gras advised they could use the pole barn money to advertise and market their program. She doesn't like the idea of a pole barn.

Chairperson Rispoli, when first asking for a new fieldhouse, a butler building was proposed. Township Officials said no to the butler building. The new building was constructed of brick and is presently used as the prototype. Needless to say, if they do a pole barn it becomes the property of the Township. It will not belong to EHT Softball. Commissioner Smith asked if they were aware of that. Chairperson Rispoli did not know if they were. During their season they would have access to it when they needed it, but there is nothing stopping the Recreation Department from running clinics and things out of it. Commissioner Weldon stated they have bigger issues to figure out first.

Chairperson Rispoli stated that everyone has had a chance to discuss the topic and asked if there was a motion to approve or deny EHT Softball's request for Mays Landing players.

Motion	To DENY EHT Softball's request for Mays Landing Players. Motion made by Commissioner Russ Seconded by Commissioner Gras
Vote	Motion Carried 7-0 Gallagher, Gras, Rispoli, Russ, Smith, Warrell, Weldon

Chairperson Rispoli continued with agenda item B. EHT Lacrosse Association's request to allow Hamilton Township residents to play EHT Lacrosse. Vice Chairperson Warrell commented that in staying consistent with what we just voted on, he believes we need to deny this application as well.

Motion	To DENY EHT Lacrosse Association's request for Mays Landing Players. Motion made by Vice Chairperson Warrell Seconded by Commissioner Weldon
Vote	Motion Carried 7-0 Gallagher, Gras, Rispoli, Russ, Smith, Warrell, Weldon

Chairperson Rispoli added that the final item on the agenda is item C. Facility use fees for adult recreation (sports leagues). Commissioner Weldon began, when this topic originally came up I thought of Street Hockey. I look at adult recreation different then out of town youth teams. Those parents have made a conscientious decision to leave our youth groups and create a new team for an outside organization. He doesn't have an issue with adults coming in to play baseball.

Commissioner Gallagher had no comment at this time. Commissioner Russ added that if it goes back to street hockey, it shouldn't be looked at different. Are they charging registration fees, if so how much is it. For street hockey, does that money go to USA Hockey for insurance? Commissioner Weldon advised he does not know if they fall under their own insurance or street hockey's. In addition, the adult leagues for hockey have always donated back to the youth organization. Director Audet advised the adult leagues get their own insurance.

Commissioner Smith inquired if adult street hockey just gets approval to use the courts from street hockey and then they donate back to them. Then the adult league covers their own fees (uniforms, refs, insurance). Director Audet confirmed and advised that they also do a field use application. Their court times are scheduled with street hockey around the youth times. Commissioner Smith asked if that was the only adult recreation that existed right now. Is there basketball or would this be the second Adult recreation that we would be allowing. Director Audet confirmed.

Director Audet asked to take our adult baseball team on Sunday mornings and be consistent. How do we charge them the fee that is in our handbook, but not charge the new team that Mr. Wright is looking to bring in. Commissioner Weldon inquired if they were in the same league. Director Audet said different leagues. Commissioner Weldon advised that they are both considered teams. They are not a league like women's hockey.

Vice Chairperson Warrell advised that if a decision is made, then both teams would be treated the same. Commissioner Weldon noted they would be in the same category. Director Audet confirmed, they are both local teams playing in two different leagues. Some games are home some are away.

Commissioner Smith didn't understand the fee structure. Some are charged, some are not and some are giving back to the youth groups. She asked for clarification on the tiers if this is something we are going to stay with. Or does everyone get their own insurance and get permission from the organization who uses those fields and donate back to them.

Vice Chairperson Warrell thinks the tiers need to be kept. We need to adjust the adult groups. It needs to be user friendly for adults. Some of these adult teams, under the current guidelines, would be paying over \$6000 for the entire season. That is a lot of money for guys to pay for a couple of months of ball. Commissioner Smith asked who then is covering the light costs, the tax payer. That is an issue. Chairperson Rispoli advised that is why the tiers are in place. Commissioner Gras advised we could make it easier and non-residents can pay more.

Vice Chairperson Warrell thinks if we come up with a plan we need to be consistent for all adult teams that are looking to use the fields. We need more adult recreation, but we have to be fair. Commissioner Gras suggested that if an adult team comes to recreation to use the fields maybe an out of town player pays an additional fee to the township. This could be used for field maintenance and for the facilities. It takes the burden off of the tax payer. The team can cover the out of town fee if they so choose.

These fields are currently not being used. The teams in question would need to supply the rosters to recreation. She was in favor on no additional charge for residents who are already being taxed for the fields. She continued that she respects the fact that they are asking for permission, but we need to take care of our taxpayers.

Vice Chairperson Warrell agreed. It will stop the taxpayer from asking why they are paying for out of town players. It is not unreasonable. It is no different than out of towners playing Pickleball. We have to be consistent. Chairperson Rispoli added that adult recreation should fall under the Recreation Department. Pickleball comes under them, so should hockey and baseball. Non-residents for recreation pay a little more. Adult recreation needs to be maintained under the Recreation Office.

Chairperson Rispoli continued that once we have the Betterment property additional adult activities will be had out there. We will need to have a recreation person out there to ensure that people are playing during their allotted times and they are registered to play there. A staff member will need to be there to provide the equipment such as horseshoes. I don't see anything different with this.

Director Audet was in agreement that we needed to look to adjust the field policy for adults. He feels there needs to be a charge for the lights. He is in agreement with the non-resident fee. Recreation is not collecting their registration fee, we can charge a nonresident fee to be added when they drop off their security deposit.

Director Audet advised that he sees the Betterment property as more of a drop in and play. There will be key times that it will be open play and rented out later. It will not be an all day, every day. Chairperson Rispoli advised that if we do that, equipment will walk. Director Audet advised it will be used to run programs and tournaments.

Director Audet advised he could create an adult rec field use fee. I think the non-resident fee is fine. I would ask the teams to verify their residents for us. They are independent and I don't want to take that on. We can collect their rosters and charge that fee. He envisions dealing with the outside group for the field use fees only. He does not envision parks and rec taking over their registrations.

Chairperson Rispoli said whatever we choose will need to be consistent. Non-residents fee, men's hockey gave one donation, women's hockey gave a different amount and co-ed gave a substantial amount. Vice Chairperson Warrell we have to remember that some adult leagues will have fill in players, his concern is if it all falls under rec that would hurt street hockey with their donations.

Commissioner Smith inquired if an adult team comes in to use our fields, could we have them supply a roster with their request. This way recreation looks it over, identifies the non-residents and charges them accordingly when the field use is approved. Recreation would then collect the security deposit and the non-resident fee along with the use of facility and their insurance.

Chairperson Warrell asked could they run through EHT Baseball and then give back a donation. Chairperson Rispoli added that the street hockey organization has allowed the men's and women's teams to come in under them and allow non-residents to play. We have no idea if they pay a registration fee. The men gave back \$800, the women gave back \$2000. That is a big difference.

Vice Chairperson Warrell advised that the men no longer play here. He did advise that the co-ed league gave back \$10,000 through their tournament. Commissioner Smith advised that as of this meeting we will have parameters. We advise everyone this is how it is going to be.

Commissioner Gras asked if the street hockey leagues could be grandfathered in. Commissioner Russ added that maybe it is a onetime donation to the group. Set it at \$1000-\$2000 like women's hockey has been doing and say here it is. Vice Chairperson Warrell said that's fine if there are 20 players, but what about the teams that have 10.

Program Manager Danz added that the Commission should look at the differences between the two types of uses for adults right now. First is the leagues, hockey is a league using the courts and everything is in-house. Baseball is a team looking to use a field for home games, not for the entire league they are playing in.

Commissioner Russ then said that the leagues should then fall under the youth groups, they are all in house. If a league wants to run using the courts or fields, then the donation goes to the youth group. The individual teams asking for one field for a game should be looked at differently.

Commissioner Gras questioned if Mr. Wrights team was looking for just practice or for games as well. Commissioner Russ said we stick with the fees and if they want the fields they pay the cost or they go to Ventnor. Commissioner Gras said if they are 75% EHT why should they have to go Ventnor. Our large field isn't being used, someone should be playing on it.

Chairperson Rispoli asked Deputy Mayor Pfrommer and Committeeman Ellis if they had any insight they would like to share on this topic. Deputy Mayor Pfrommer agreed that adults should be looked at differently than the youth. We should look to keep them here, especially if it is 75% resident. This gives our people a place to play in their town where it doesn't cost them a lot of money. I don't see a problem with them playing without a fee, however if lights are involved there should be some cost.

Vice Chairperson Warrell asked who would be lining the fields. Director Audet advised that currently for the Sunday group, public works does it on Friday. The group will touch it up on Sunday if they need to. They do some field work.

Committeeman Ellis agreed the lights cost. Director Audet suggested a reasonably priced season fee to include the lights. In addition to the out of town resident cost. We keep it cost effective for our tax payers. It would change based on lights/no lights and residents/nonresidents. I think if the commission is inclined, like Commissioner Russ suggested, to allow some of our youth groups to sponsor some adult play we could include that in the revised policy. If women's ball hockey is willing to donate \$1000 back to the kids, that is almost a no brainer to allow it to happen. The money received by street hockey goes right back into the courts. They do a lot of their own maintenance.

Vice Chairperson Warrell inquired if the money going back to the Township to help pay for electric, but our budget for the year is \$200,000 to be divided amongst 9 groups or projects doesn't it make sense to allow the donations to the organizations that are already putting \$100,000 worth of improvements back into our facilities.

Deputy Mayor Pfrommer stated as long as the money is going back into the program for repairs or for improvements and not into their general fund. I want to see that kind of money go back into the facilities because in the long run that saves us money.

Vice Chairperson Warrell said street hockey may cost us \$2,000 in lights but the money they received is going back into our facilities. Commissioner Gras added that they just put \$45,000 into new decking.

Program Manager Danz pointed out the use of facility for Mr. Wright included giving back to the baseball organization. They are looking to do a donation as well as hosting clinics for the youth.

Deputy Mayor Pfrommer said that you have to look at the fact there is a different cost for every sport. Some sports cost more and that is where it is hard for you to find a balance.

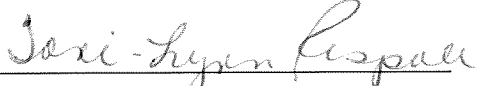
Commissioner Russ asked if Mr. Wright's team would be an EHT team. Would they have an EHT name? If they are giving back their time with clinics and a donation, let them play. Commissioner Weldon asked what their original cost would be. \$180 a day? Director Audet confirmed and that was for three hours with lights. Commissioner Weldon advised if we started surcharging youth groups for leaving the lights on, no one would have to worry about paying for lights.

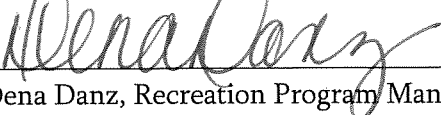
Chairperson Rispoli advised that Director Audet will draft up a policy with respect to the adult leagues. He will take into consideration the ideas that were discussed tonight. Percentage of residents, donation to youth group, light costs, season fee, non-resident fee. He will only address adult teams at this time. Adult leagues will be addressed at a later time. Director Audet will have the draft proposal for the next regular meeting.

Adjournment

Motion	To adjourn the 2/6/21 Special Recreation Meeting at 6:57 m Motion made by Commissioner Russ Seconded by Commissioner Gallagher
Vote	All voted in favor. Motion carried 7-0.

Minutes as heard by Dena Danz, EHT Recreation Program Manager.


Toni Lynn Rispoli, Chairperson


Dena Danz, Recreation Program Manager

Approved 3/10/21