

MINUTES OF THE SPECIAL MEETING BOARD OF PARK COMMISSIONERS March 26, 2024

The Special Meeting of the Board of Park Commissioners was called to order by President Cohen at 6:45 p.m. in the Patty Turner Center. Executive Director Harvey called the roll, and the following were:

PRESENT: Brown, Caron, Cohen and Serota (4)

ABSENT: Patinkin (1)

Staff: Executive Director Jeff Harvey

I. MATTERS OF THE PUBLIC, VISITORS AND GUESTS

A. Comments from the Public, Visitors and Guests

Dara Steinbach is extremely pleased a pause was placed on the drastic action that would affect a large amount of the Deerfield community, but would like to know more about the plans. Her family, consisting of two working parents, a first grader and a future kindergartner, rely heavily on Park District programming at Walden. The thought of their daughter missing the programs due to lack of transportation saddens her. It would result in her paying for babysitting rather than allowing her daughter to be active and learning art, cooking, yoga and Ninja Warriors. Ms. Steinbach is thankful her child can stay in school and participate in enrichment programs and it is very significant to their lives. President Cohen understands her frustration but nothing has changed since the email went out.

Dale Blum has two children at Wilmot. She understands the Board cannot make everyone happy but questioned when and where the thoughtful conversation with parents happened and what the Board was thinking. President Cohen explained the Park Board was not part of the conversation. Commissioner Caron explained nothing has happened since the regular Board Meeting because of Spring Break. The Board was made aware of the email after it went out.

Ms. Blum would like to know the thought process moving forward and why parents were not given notice. President Cohen suggested speaking with the School Board. Ms. Blum explained the School District suggested taking it to the Park District. President Cohen explained the Park District found out about the email when it was sent out and is trying to find a solution to please most of the people. They are trying to develop a plan but nothing has happened since the meeting last Thursday.

President Cohen knows what the parents want and believes there are two ways to get it done. Everything can be expanded at the school or the school can provide busing so everyone can participate in a program. The Park District does not know what will happen but will have conversations with both the schools and the public. Commissioner Caron added Park District staff, who are not at this meeting, will have to be present. President Cohen noted Park District staff and school staff have had multiple conversations. Ms. Blum and Ms. Steinbach suggested putting out a survey and volunteered to be parent liaisons. Ms. Steinbach noted the Deerfield Park District website states an agency goal is community outreach and engaging the community through extensive marketing. This is such a drastic change and needs community feedback. Commissioner Caron explained the Board is aware of the parent's concerns. This has been an ongoing issue for several years but the letter went out prematurely as no one has come up with a good solution.

Commissioner Caron noted there are a number of issues including space at the schools and the ability to have enough participants signed up so programs do not get cancelled. This has to be a partnership between the School District and the Park District as it is a complicated issue. There has been ongoing conversation for a number of years but no one has come up with a way to accommodate everyone. The Board would like a meeting with a Park District Board member, a School Board member, Park District staff, School staff and the PTO.

Ms. Steinbach believes there was a disconnect between the email and the idea that this change was meant to provide more equity, availability and variety. She does not believe this is equitable or provides any equity at all. The Park District has provided enrichment and recreational programming at different Park District facilities. She noted people that are in private schools or homeschools may have more flexibility in their schedules than those in public schools who rely on before and after school programs as well as enrichment because they cannot pick up their children at 3:25 or earlier.

President Cohen believes the crux of the matter is the Park District does not have busses and cannot provide transportation. The School District has to provide transportation. He has been pushing for the School District to supply one bus from each of the four schools to come to Jewett. A lot of the classes get cancelled because there is not enough interest from one school for a club. There is also not enough staff to have the same club in four schools.

Ms. Steinbach believes if transportation is totally untenable, the idea should have been dropped for this upcoming school year. President Cohen explained if the Park District Board knew about the email ahead of time, it would not have gone out. The Park District has to find a solution with the schools help. There may be other ideas, but there are a lot of issues involved.

Scott Sortal has a kindergartner at Kipling and one that will start pre-kindergarten next year. Many families hope to use after school activities as a way to get their kids involved without have to deal with the mid-afternoon pickup. His family lives too far from the bus stop and doesn't qualify for bus service, making it difficult to participate in after-school care. Despite not needing full-time care, his daughter has greatly benefited from after-school activities, particularly due to her hearing impairment. These activities provide her with a less crowded and confusing environment where she can pursue her interests, such as cooking and art classes. Additionally, the school team uses a microphone connected to her cochlear implant, which may not be feasible if she has to travel to different locations for after-school activities. Mr. Sorrell emphasizes the importance of equity and ensuring that his daughter has the necessary support and accommodations to thrive after school.

President Cohen explained they are going to try to help the most people possible. Maybe the PTO will take back the enrichment programs or pay for the busses. The Park District pays a 20 percent fee to hold classes at the schools. A legal issue was raised that Illinois has bussing laws that prohibits what we want to do.

Katie Witenko expressed concern about the priority registration being removed. Because of COVID, they want to remove priority registration for those currently enrolled to allow accommodations for everyone.

Audrey Pam, a teacher, explained transitioning students from one class to another, particularly when they come from a rushed dismissal and need to quickly switch gears, is difficult. She mentioned that despite the popularity of her classes, the transition time shortens the actual instructional time. She questioned how schools can maintain the quality and variety of offerings with the new changes and expressed concern over the lack of communication about the changes, including the elimination of after-school care.

II. ADJOURNMENT

Commissioner Brown moved to go into Closed Session to discuss the appointment, employment, compensation, discipline, performance or dismissal of specific employees of the public body or legal counsel in the District, in accordance with Section 2(c)1 of the Open Meetings Act. Commissioner Caron seconded the motion. The motion passed unanimously by the following vote.

AYES: Brown, Caron, Cohen, Serota (4)

NAYS: None (0)

The meeting was adjourned to Closed Session at 7:22 pm.

March 2024 Special Meeting Minutes - APPROVED

Commissioner Brown moved to re-open the Special Meeting at 8:15 pm. Commissioner Caron seconded the motion. The motion passed unanimously on a voice vote.

Executive Director Harvey called the roll, and the following were:

PRESENT: Brown, Caron, Cohen and Serota (4)

ABSENT: Patinkin (1)

Staff: Executive Director Jeff Harvey

Commissioner Caron moved to approve the IAPD professional services agreement for the Executive Director search. Commissioner Serota seconded the motion. The motion passed by the following vote:

AYES: Brown, Caron, Cohen, Serota (4)

NAYS: None (0)

Commissioner Brown moved to adjourn the meeting. Commissioner Caron seconded the motion. The motion passed unanimously on a voice vote. The meeting was adjourned at 8:16 pm.

Respectfully submitted,



Jeff Harvey, Secretary

Transcribed by: Jeri Cotton