

**TENAFLY RECREATION COMMISSION
SPECIAL MEETING
SEPTEMBER 25, 2006**

ROLL CALL: Chairman Jerry O'Brien, Vice-Chairman Naomi McDermott, Tony Favorito, Tom Swift, Pam Walsh, Rich Rodriguez, Peter Fidler, Tim Roetman, Robert Sabatino, Councilman Robert Thompson

ABSENT: Mark Aronson, Board of Education Liaison, Ann Shaner, Alpine Liaison

AUDIENCE: Mayor Peter Rustin, Councilman Michael Latiff, Councilman Patrick Rouse, Elizabeth Morrow School Athletic Director Andy Escala, Tom Giordano, Scott Smilen and Andrew Economos Co-Presidents of Tenafly Youth Basketball, Walter Merzin, Lorraine Kapagian.

BUSINESS: Mr. O'Brien opens the meeting with the question of why there is a meeting tonight. Mr. O'Brien believes the Commission has already voted on the EMS permit application. Also, Mr. O'Brien has received several emails and phone calls about this issue. Mayor Rustin told Mr. O'Brien that Mr. DiGiacomo had suggested a special meeting be held to reopen the discussion about the permit application. Mr. DiGiacomo has today sent an email to Mr. O'Brien stating that he never ordered a special meeting, only the fact that he explained to the Mayor and Council the Recreation Commission can change their vote in a public meeting only. The Mayor has called Mr. O'Brien and some of the other Commission members in an attempt to clarify his position on the permit issue. Mr. O'Brien feels disappointed in the way this situation has been handled. Mr. Sabatino believes the vote has already been taken and it should stand.

Mayor Rustin explains that he reached out to the Recreation Commissioners about this permit request after the initial meeting because he believes they did not have all the facts. After speaking to a few of the Commission members the Mayor was told there was no formal motion and vote made on the permit request. Mr. Roetman confirmed they had spoken about the permit and turned it down, but never made a formal motion. The Mayor then asked the Recreation Director to address the Commission and ask the Chairman for a special meeting. The Borough Council would not address the issue.

Mrs. McDermott would like to receive input from the representatives of Tenafly Youth Basketball. Since they borrow gym space from Elizabeth Morrow School in the winter, they have the biggest need. Mr. Rodriguez and Mrs. Walsh both feel they did not receive enough information the first time and would also like to hear from TYB.

Scott Smilen from Tenafly Youth Basketball enters the conversation. He reports the facilities at Tenafly Middle School and Alpine are the only suitable gymnasium facilities for the 5th grade and older basketball players. Both spaces have been used to their limits. The travel teams and older players can not practice at the elementary schools because the gyms are too small. The EMS gym is large enough to accommodate the needs of these players.

Andy Escala, Athletic Director at EMS reports the school expanded from an elementary school to include a middle school a couple years ago. They originally had a field in Englewood Cliffs to use for their soccer and softball programs but after the first year the field was in disrepair. At that point in time Mr. Escala approached Tenafly for use of the fields as a trade off for gym space.

Mayor Rustin suggested Sunnyside Park is not a viable option. The field wears down too much through regular use by Tenaflly's youth sports programs. Mr. Sabatino disagrees, he thinks Sunnyside is in much better shape now than years past.

Mr. Andrew Economos, also of Tenaflly Youth Basketball re-iterates how important the court at EMS is to the 600+ participants in TYB. Mrs. McDermott asks if Tenaflly Youth Basketball is being charged for usage of the EMS gym, Mr. Economos reports they are not.

Mr. Tom Giordano would like to know if Tenaflly's recreation programs are affected. Mr. O'Brien lets the Commission know that Jr. Football moves over to the Middle School field or off to one side of the Municipal Field to accommodate the EMS practices. Mr. Favorito reports sharing has not been a problem.

Mr. Rodriguez would like to know if issuing a permit to this out-of-town group for an exchange of space would reduce the chances of Tenaflly passing the Municipal Field lighting project.

Resident Walter Merzin opposes the lighting system. He lives along Foster Road and notes several problems. First, the town needs a plan for better sanitation conditions. He's noticed groups using the tree line between the field and the residences as a restroom. Also, he's concerned about noise and traffic along Foster Road produced by the use the field already gets. Another resident, Lorraine Kapagian wants to know what the trade guidelines are. She was told in an earlier meeting between Borough officials and Foster Road residents that there would be no outside groups permitted on the field. Since there is now a discussion about EMS using the Municipal Field she feels she was lied to at the earlier meeting.

Councilman Michael Latiff is concerned with a usage policy regarding the Municipal Field. Commitments to a policy have to be made with the force of a legal body behind them. Currently there is policy, but little enforcement. Second, the Councilman questions how long the field turf will really last. When it was originally installed, the manufacturer could only promise up to 8 years because the product was only available for that duration of time. Councilman Latiff also mentions that Ed Craumer, High School Athletic Director appeared at the Council meeting last Tuesday. Councilman Latiff realizes Mr. Craumer has an interest in how and when the field gets used, but should not be governing the use of the Municipal Field, it should come from the Commission.

Mrs. McDermott thinks the gain outweighs the negatives of EMS using the Municipal Field three days a week for approximately four hours a week. In gym time, Tenaflly is receiving ten hours a week in the winter which makes a great deal for the children in Tenaflly Youth Basketball's program.

Mr. Swift believes there should be a schedule for shared services. He does not like the fact that EMS or anyone else for that matter can come in and attempt to leverage field time for space at another facility. He believes priority of field use should be established, and if EMS is to use the field they should be at the bottom of the chain.

Mrs. Walsh is uneasy with being uninformed the first time. She would like to set a procedure in the future for determining who plays where and when.

Mr. Rodriguez does not want to dishonor commitments made to residents living near the Municipal Field. He thinks using Sunnyside Park may be a better alternative.

Mr. Fidler believes the meeting originally held with the Foster Road residents was not handled as well as it could have been. In regard to TYB, the field space vs. the gym time being proposed is a good deal.

Mr. Sabatino does not believe sharing the Municipal Field is a good option. Sharing Sunnyside is a better one.

Mr. O'Brien states Tenafly's taxpayers paid the cost of the Municipal Field. It should be used for Tenafly's kids and not for out-of-town residents. Mr. O'Brien is not pleased with Tenafly's kids having to move out of the way for out of town groups.

Mr. Rodriguez motions to deny the EMS request to use the Municipal Field for its soccer program. Mr. Sabatino seconds the motion. Mr. Swift, Mr. O'Brien, Mr. Sabatino, and Mr. Rodriguez are in favor, Mrs. McDermott, Mrs. Walsh, and Mr. Fidler are opposed. The EMS request is denied by a vote of 4 to 3.

Mrs. McDermott motions if permissible at the discretion of Tony Favorito, EMS may use Sunnyside Park to practice soccer. Mr. Fidler seconds the motion. The motion is approved by all members except Mr. Sabatino. EMS is permitted to use Sunnyside Park for soccer practice at the discretion of Mr. Favorito examining existing permits for the field by a vote of 6 to 1.

ADJOURNMENT:

Mr. Fidler motions to adjourn, motion is seconded by Mr. O'Brien.

Meeting adjourned 9:16 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Tim Roetman
Asst. Recreation Director