

NEWINGTON PARKS & RECREATION
BOARD MEETING
TUESDAY, JANUARY 20, 2026

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IN NEWINGTON, CT

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Adam S. Krysztof
Town Clerk

I. CALL TO ORDER

Bill DeMaio called the meeting to order at 6:03 p.m.

II. PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE

III. ROLL CALL

Board Members Present: Mia Colopy, Trish Feeney, Eileen Francolino, Tim Hutvagner, Austin Knowlin (Virtual), Phil Knowlton, Tim Manke, and Diana Serra

Board Members Absent: Carol Anest, Beth DelBuono, and John Patz

Council Members Present: Nancy Cappello (Virtual) and A.J. Tiniakos

Staff Members Present: Bill DeMaio - Superintendent, Sam Lostocco - Administrative Secretary, and Roderick D Smith-Recreation Supervisor

IV. ELECTION OF OFFICERS

- Bill DeMaio asked the Board for nominations for the Chairperson. Trish Feeney nominated Eileen Francolino for Chairperson. Diana Serra seconded the nomination. After vote, the nomination passed unanimously.
- Eileen Francolino nominated Phil Knowlton for Vice-Chairperson. Trish Feeney seconded the nomination. After vote, the nomination passed unanimously.
- Phil Knowlton nominated Trish Feeney for Secretary. Diana Serra seconded the nomination. After vote, the nomination passed unanimously.

IV. APPROVAL OF THE MINUTES – November 18, 2025 Meeting

- **Motion:** A motion was made by Diana Serra to approve the minutes of the meeting on November 18, 2025. Trish Feeney seconded the motion. The motion passed unanimously.

V. PUBLIC PARTICIPATION

- Don Woods (82 Ivy Lane) congratulated Eileen, Phil, and Trish on their new positions as officers on the board while emphasizing the importance of board participation. He also highlighted Bill's decade-long leadership and team-building skills that have driven significant achievements for the board, town parks, special events and the Parks and Recreation staff. He wishes Bill well in his retirement and encourages him to enjoy the time with his family.
- Christopher Riley (169 Forest Drive) shared his experience of knowing Bill for about seven years and being involved in the Kindness Counts program. Christopher also explains that Bill gave him permission to start a page called Positively Newton and talks about their growing friendship through community events and a cat rescue effort involving his wife. He wishes Bill well in his retirement and expresses that Bill will be missed.
- Pat Mahoney (119 Goodale Drive) introduced herself as a Newington resident since 2013 who moved from Oregon after 40 years. She mentions her involvement in the General Federation of Women's Club and maintaining local gardens, appreciating the positive community atmosphere in Newington. She praised Bill for his excellent service to the town, indicating respect and recognition from community members.
- Tom Gil expresses gratitude for Bill DeMaio's contributions as the park and recreation director, acknowledging his successful tenure and the strong foundation he laid for the community.
- Sharon Berretta (50 Mill Street in New Britain) emphasized Bill DeMaio's irreplaceable role and dedication, noting that he constantly thinks about improving the community and that subsequent directors have continued his work. She praised the Parks and Recreation department as the hardest working after police, recognizing the sacrifices made by staff to serve residents, and reiterates Bill's exceptional leadership.

VI. CORRESPONDENCE

a. Donation from Maria Rizzo

The Department received a letter from Maria Rizzo, a resident of Audubon Ave, which included a \$250 donation to be used toward upcoming community special events.

b. Donation from Jill Price

Jill Price made a generous donation, in the amount of \$1,300.00, to be used for summer camp scholarships. Jill, a resident of Maple Hill Avenue, has been donating for nearly a decade and previously received a "Building a Strong Community" award from the board.

VII. SUMMARY REPORTS

The Monthly Report and Tree Warden Report for November 2025 and December 2025 were given to the Board to review.

VIII. OLD BUSINESS

NONE.

IX. NEW BUSINESS

a. Newington Goes Country (June 11,2026) and Food Truck Friday (June 12, 2026)

Bill DeMaio requested the Board's approval to allow these Special Events to be planned at Mill Pond Park.

- **Motion:** A motion was made by Tim Hutvagner to approve the hosting of Newington Goes Country on June 11, 2026 and Food Truck Friday June 12, 2026 at Mill Pond Park, sponsors to be forthcoming. Also, to approve the staff to apply for a state liquor permit to sell refreshments at the event. Trish Feeney seconded the motion. The motion passed unanimously.

b. Life. Be in it. Extravaganza State Liquor Permit (July 15 – 18, 2026)

Bill DeMaio requested the Board's approval to allow this Special Event to be planned at Mill Pond Park.

- **Motion:** A motion was made by Phil Knowlton to approve the Parks and Recreation staff to apply for a state liquor permit for the Life. Be in it. Extravaganza from Wednesday, July 15, 2026 through Saturday, July 18, 2026 to sell refreshments at the event. Tim Hutvagner seconded the motion. The motion passed unanimously.

c. Water Lantern Festival (September, 12,2026)

Bill DeMaio described the event in detail, noting that it is the largest single-day fundraiser, generating up to \$22,000 in four hours each year. He requested the Board's approval of the Letter of Agreement for the event to return in September.

- **Motion:** A motion was made by Mia Colopy to approve the Letter of Agreement as presented, for the Water Lantern Festival event on Saturday, September 12, 2026. Trish Feeney seconded the motion. The motion passed unanimously.

d. Spark Social Sports

Bill DeMaio informed the Board that local businessman Chad Martin and his Spark Social Sports leagues have been expanding and are interested in expanding their Sand Volleyball operation to include Churchill Park. This expansion would involve the installation of temporary or permanent lighting to extend play hours and is described to generate approximately \$24,000 in annual revenue from April to October for the Parks and Recreation Department.

- **Motion:** A motion was made Diana Sera to approve Spark Social Sports to us the Sand Volleyball Courts at Churchill Park, as described, and to approve the installation of lights at the Sports Courts at Churchill Park. Phil Knowlton seconded the motion. The motion passed unanimously.

X. REPORTS

a. Bill DeMaio' Retirement

Bill DeMaio reflected on his long tenure in the Parks and Recreation field, encompassing a wide range of sports and recreational initiatives, and shared a recent personal milestone with the birth of his granddaughter in California. He emphasized the importance of family and his desire to spend more time with loved ones without the constraints of vacation days. Bill expressed sincere gratitude to the Board and his colleagues for their support throughout his career. He also highlighted numerous improvements to local parks and recreational facilities, including the installation of ADA-accessible playgrounds, new basketball and pickleball courts, renovated tennis courts, and the construction of the Mortensen Community Center. He emphasized that he is being as proactive as possible to ensure the department continues to operate at a high level as he transitions into retirement.

b. Recreation Supervisor's Positions

Bill DeMaio expressed confidence that two new hires will be starting soon, with one beginning on February 17 and the other on March 2. He noted that both candidates bring strong resumes and relevant experience in aquatics and specialty programs.

c. Night of Lights

Bill DeMaio provided a recap of the Night of Lights event. He highlighted the fire juggler's performance on a flaming unicycle and jump rope, which impressed the crowd and was met with enthusiastic applause and cheers. The laser light show, sponsored by Callahan's Bowl-O-Rama and Ruth's Chris Steak House, was well received. He also noted that Don Wood's specialty drink and celebratory bell ringing added to the entertainment. Overall, the event was praised, including the involvement of local churches and sponsors.

d. Building A Strong Community Awards – Tuesday, December 9, 2025

Bill DeMaio thanked everyone for their participation in the Building a Strong Community Awards. It was a wonderful evening with great recognition for everyone. Eileen Francolino and Don Woods were present along with the council, who recognized the recipients. The event was positive and well-received, with recipients receiving baskets of goodies and their pictures displayed on the "Wall of Fame" in the Mortenson Community Center. Winners included Matthew Lasek of City Roofing and Siding, LLC, Brian Bunting of Brian's Famous Foods, Alan Bongiovanni of the Bongiovanni Group, Inc., and Lindsey Callahan, Cindy Callahan, and Amber Dodge of Callahan's Bowl-O-Rama.

e. Seymour Park and Starr Park Basketball Court Updates

Bill DeMaio reported delays in completing the Seymour Park and Starr Park basketball courts due to early winter weather and the Asphalt plant closing on December 12. Funds are secured to resume construction in spring, with plans to paint the new asphalt after it settles.

f. Candlewyck Park Playground

Bill DeMaio reported that this project was completed successfully by December 30th, 2025, thanks to two highly praised contractors, with a \$604,000 State grant supporting the work.

g. Creative Playtime Preschool Playground/ Installation of Road-Crossing Beacon Lights

Bill DeMaio shared that a new preschool playground, designed to resemble a Dr. Seuss-style house and very popular with preschool children, has been completed. He credited Ryan Cook and M.E. O'Brien & Sons for finishing the project before the snow. He also discussed helping to secure a \$75,000 grant ten years ago for the installation of advanced pedestrian crossing lights at Garfield Street, which have now been installed to improve safety for children and individuals with disabilities. The crossing lights include auditory signals for the visually impaired and have significantly improved pedestrian safety, particularly during large events such as concerts and fireworks. Nearby handicap-accessible parking provides convenient access to the park.

h. Stairs at Mill Pond Falls

Bill DeMaio shared that the Department is replacing the traditional wooden stairs, which tend to become mushy due to lack of sunlight and moisture, with more durable aluminum and steel options. Previously, stairs were replaced every 10 to 15 years, often requiring repairs to two or three stairs annually. The new aluminum and steel stairs are designed to last around 100 years, are ADA accessible, and can withstand high heels, accommodating frequent weddings held at the venue.

i. Youth Basketball Program

Bill DeMaio shared that the Youth Basketball Program, managed by Roderick Smith, has nearly 400 participants registered for the current winter season. Jersey Mike's sponsored Opening Day on Saturday, January 3, 2026, by providing 500 free subs for coaches and players, and their name appears on the uniforms. Ruth's Chris Steak House, represented by Julian Alarcon sponsors the uniform sleeves and has contributed over \$9,000 in cash toward uniforms and events such as the Night of Lights. Julian noted that promotion on the Parks and Recreation Facebook page has generated more business than other advertising methods. The partnership exemplifies a successful public-private collaboration benefiting both parties.

j. Camp RECreate Registration

Bill DeMaio reported that the Department generated roughly \$50,000 in the first day of online registration, indicating a strong potential for an expanded program. The summer camp budget line item has grown significantly to \$750,000, supporting 550 kids split evenly between the Churchill Park and Mill Pond Park locations.

k. Budget Update

Bill DeMaio reported that the Department has submitted its annual budget to the town. He highlighted considerations for local park upgrades, including an increase in the porta-potty line item. A major focus is the Little Brook Park renovation, which will feature a handicap-accessible playground and paths leading to a new basketball court, with an estimated cost of approximately \$450,000. This project is part of a broader plan to update Newington's neighborhood parks, which are popular with residents and enhance the value of nearby homes. Despite budget challenges, there is strong community interest in completing these improvements.

l. CRPA Entertainment Showcase at Mortensen Community Center (February 13, 2026)

Bill DeMaio announced the Department will be hosting the Annual CRPA entertainment showcase at the Martin Community Center scheduled for February 13th, a day with no school or preschool to minimize disruption. The event is co-sponsored with the Connecticut Recreation and Parks Association and features performances by 74 different bands and entertainers, highlighting a significant community recreational opportunity.

m. Outback Steakhouse Fundraiser (February 24, 2026 at 5:00 – 9:00 p.m.)

Bill DeMaio announced the Department will be hosting a fundraiser event at Outback Steakhouse on the Berlin Turnpike for the annual fireworks display at the Life. Be in it. Extravaganza, describing it as the first one of the calendar year. For \$20, attendees will receive a meal consisting of chicken, steak, baked potato, and salad, with drinks offered at a reduced price of six dollars instead of twelve, benefiting the fundraiser financially. The goal is to attract around 100 people, encouraging attendees to invite friends and family for a fun night.

n. Facebook Live Videos

Sam Lostocco shared the following Facebook Live videos with the Board:

- Night of Lights Special Even
- Youth Basketball Program – Jersey Mike's Opening Day Sub Giveaway

XI. COMMENTS BY THE BOARD

Eileen Francolino shared that Carol Anest has resigned from her position on the Pool Project Building Committee. A new Republican representative will need to be appointed to fill the vacant seat. Diana Serra made a motion to recommend Eileen Francolino to the Pool Project Building Committee, which was seconded by Mia Colopy and passed unanimously. Eileen also thanked Bill DeMaio for his years of service and reflected on the longstanding connections she has made through Newington Parks and Recreation, including meeting her future husband while working at Parks and Recreation.

Diana Serra thanked Bill DeMaio for his service as Parks and Recreation Department Superintendent and reflected on the fun she experienced at special events, particularly in the Beer Garden. She highlighted the professionalism of the staff and their ability to put on outstanding events, wishing him all the best in retirement.

Phil Knowlton thanked Bill DeMaio for his service and reflected on the transformation brought to youth sports organizations during Bill's tenure, emphasizing the increased equity and professionalism in the Parks and Recreation office. He expressed gratitude for the welcoming environment created by the staff and acknowledged the strong, capable team that will continue Bill's legacy.

Tim Manke thanked Bill DeMaio for his service and noted that while his work as superintendent is concluding, his role as a grandfather is just beginning. He emphasized that this new chapter will be fulfilling and wished Bill nothing but the best in retirement.

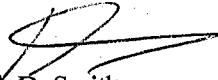
XII. PUBLIC PARTICIPATION

NONE.

XIII. ADJOURNMENT

Diana Serra made a motion to adjourn the meeting. Trish Feeney seconded the motion. The motion passed unanimously. The meeting was adjourned at 7:14p.m.

Respectfully submitted by,



Roderick D. Smith