

Borough of Norwood Recreation Committee March 20, 2024

The Public Meeting of the Recreation Committee of the Borough of Norwood was held in council chambers on the above date.

The committee members present during the meeting were:

Gene Huelster
Frank Fanelli
Nicole Rivera
Rakesh Ramessar
Steven Whaley
Kevin Wilson
Kieran O'Mullane
Pete Rinaldi
Peter Moylan
Lou Macchiaroli
Matt Alberti

Also present:

Anthony Foschino, Council Liaison
Anthony Plescia, Recreation Director
Robert Tracy, DPW Director
Lindsay Volpitta, Recreation Secretary

Mr. Huelster called the meeting to order and asked the Committee members to stand for the flag salute. The statement of compliance was read.

Mr. Whaley made a motion to approve the January 17, 2024, meeting minutes. Mr. Rinaldi seconded the motion and the Committee unanimously agreed.

Directors Report

Mr. Plescia said he is working with Director Tracy to have lights installed on the light poles for the helicopter landing at a different part of Kennedy Field. Mr. Tracy said the helicopter has to land at least two hundred fifty (25) feet away from the turf blankets.

Soccer Report

Mr. O'Mullane began by reading the email that was sent to the Recreation Committee by Mr. Cort Gwon regarding the incident at the recreation soccer game the previous Sunday. Mr. Gustavo Badolati, 50 Briarwood Ave, and Mr. Ermin Suljic, 816 Broadway, were invited to speak in regard to the incident.

Mr. Badolati said he takes full responsibility for bringing in a guest player but only did so because he did not have enough players and wanted the team to play and even game. Mr. Badolati also said that games against Northvale are very rough with players being hit in the face and having cleat marks on their legs. He has coached for the last five (5) – six (6) years and has always been a standup person to the kids letting them know it's ok to lose. He used the guest player because he did not want to play the game a player short.

Mr. Suljic said he did not want to sign up to coach in this league. They do not have good officials, sometimes using high school and middle school students. Mr. Suljic said things getting heated with Northvale during games but the next day they are friends.

Mr. Badolati said there is a deeper issue because there were text messages from a coach of the Norther Valley Soccer League telling parents they don't like there coach.

Mr. Alberti said they broke the competition rule and he has not heard an apology or any accountability for their actions.

Mr. Huelster asked Mr. Badolati if he asked a girl to say a fake name. Mr. Badolati responded that he would not dignify that with an answer.

Mr. O'Mullane said this game was not any more physical than any other game and if it was he would have stopped it himself.

Ms. Rivera asked if anyone was aware that the girl was a guest player. Mr. Badolati said they did not alert anyone of the guest player.

Ms. Rivera asked if they had used a guest player in any other game. Mr. Badolati said they had not.

Ms. Rivera asked if the girl was a registered Norwood player. Mr. Badolati said she was not.

Mr. O'Mullane said the Soccer Board recommends that Mr. Badolati no longer be allowed to coach in the soccer program and if Mr. Suljic would like to continue coaching it would have to be decided if he was complicit in the matter.

Mr. Badolati said he would appeal any penalty made against him.

Football Report

Mr. Macchiaroli asked if the football budget had been approved. Ms. Volpitta advised that the governing body is still discussing the budget and she should have more information in the next week. Mr. Macchiaroli also asked if he should be paying vendors directly. Ms. Volpitta stated she will send an email to the Committee outlining the proper procedures and regulations for Borough purchasing.

Cheer Report

Ms. Rivera said all uniforms have been collected and that they have not yet had a meeting to discuss the 2024 season. Ms. Rivera asked if the Borough has to pay the school for gym time if the custodians are already there. Ms. Volpitta said she will find out.

Baseball/Softball Report

Mr. Rinaldi advised the Committee that baseball/softball registration has closed. There will be five (5) 3rd/4th grade softball players joining a Harrington Park team, and five (5) 7th/8th grade baseball players joining the tri town (Closter, Demarest, Haworth) Knickerbocker team. The Minors and Majors schedules have been set, the Pee Wee schedule should be ready by the end of next week. The softball schedules are in the process of being finalized and should be ready next week. There will be no 7th/8th grade softball team.

Mr. Huelster asked how this year's registration numbers compare to last year. Mr. Rinaldi said there were over two hundred (200) registered players last year and one hundred thirty-three (133) registered players this year. Mr. Rinaldi has been told that participation is down to children being committed to multiple activities.

Mr. Rinaldi advised the Committee that one (1) family has requested assistance and asked if the Norwood Charitable Foundation would help. Mr. Huelster said he will talk further with Mr. Rinaldi.

The opening day ceremonies will be moved to the middle or end of the season due to the current date having a conflict with the school play.

Basketball Report

Mr. Ramessar stated that the travel season is over and the recreation season has two (2) more weeks. Registration for the summer basketball program is open. Mr. Ramessar if the playground area that is currently under construction will be ready or blocked off during the summer season. Councilman Foschino advised that the playground will not be ready but will be fenced off.

Mr. Moylan noted that the basketball program is still looking to obtain more gym time. There is an adult league that needs a gym to host games and they would also like to offer open gym times to adults.

DPW Director Report

Director Tracy said the fields are being prepped for use and should be ready in the next week. Mr. O'Mullane asked if the gate at Trackside can be locked as he sees an excessive number of deer there at night. Director Tracy advised that the gate is locked, and the deer jump it, but he will look into it.

Winterfest Recap

Mr. Whaley thanked the DPW and Borough for their support of Winterfest. Due to rain the area was saturated. Director Tracy instructed his crew to put down mulch to make the area ready for use. There was a great turnout with seventy (70) to one hundred (100) people there at any time. Each year more is added to the festival.

Field Use Subcommittee Report

Mr. Huelster advised the Committee that the subcommittee received filed use applications from Santos Baseball Academy, Vipers, Northern Valley Soccer, Thunder, and Whalers. As they are all repeat applicants the subcommittee recommends the applications are approved.

Mr. Whaley made a motion to make a recommendation to the Mayor and Council to approve all field use applications that are on the agenda. Ms. Rivera seconded the motion and the Committee unanimously agreed, with Mr. Alberti abstaining.

Mr. Wilson made a motion to open the meeting to the public. Mr. Rinaldi seconded the motion and the Committee unanimously agreed.

Ms. Joel Sausa, 50 Briarwood Avenue, asked Mr. O'Mullane if he saw the girl get punched in the face during the game on Sunday. Mr. O'Mullane said he did not see the punch. Ms. Sausa also said she feels this matter is unfair and the Northvale Commissioner should be investigated. Mr. O'Mullane asked that the Committee create an independent group to investigate the issue. Ms. Sausa stated she wanted it on the record that the Northvale Commissioner has done the same thing with teams. Councilman Foschino asked if this was common practice, to which Ms. Sausa replied it was.

Mr. O'Mullane said he would take back all concerns to the Soccer Board.

Councilman Foschino advised tabling the matter until the investigation is concluded and then meeting with the involved parties on a smaller scale.

Mr. Jim Melia, 439 High Street, said he heard from other people, not only Northvale residents, about what happened during the game on Sunday.

Mr. Ermin Suljic, 816 Broadway, said he has not received a response from the Soccer Board when presenting them with questions.

Mr. Moylan asked Mr. Suljic and Mr. Badolati if they asked a child to give a false name and date of birth. Mr. Badolati said he would not entertain that question and that this is a defamation of character and people have to know who they are doing that to.

Mr. Badolati asked Mr. O'Mullane why he did not call him back after the incident. Mr. O'Mullane said he did not want to have a conversation about the matter off the record.

Mr. Ariel Perez, 459 High Street, said his daughter has a love for the game due to being coached by Mr. Badolati and he is concerned who the new coaches will be if Mr. Badolati is no longer allowed to coach.

Mr. Fanelli made a motion to close the meeting to the public. Mr. Ramessar seconded the motion and the Committee unanimously agreed.

Mr. Huelster said he will form a subcommittee consisting of himself, Councilman Foschino, and Mr. Alberti to investigate the matter.

Ms. Rivera made a motion to adjourn the meeting. Mr. Fanelli seconded the motion and the Committee unanimously agreed.

Mr. Huelster thanked the Committee and adjourned the meeting.

Respectfully submitted,

Lindsay Volpitta
Committee Secretary