

June Youth Commission Meeting Minutes – June 24th, 2021

Member Attendance: Chris Streno - Youth Director, David Birtch, Steve Hughes, Nicole Kariam, and Jerry Warner

Call to order 6:10 pm

I. Old Business

- Continue to work on updating the Town of Binghamton Youth Commission policies - an outdated set of guidelines that was created in the late 1970s was found but does not apply to current times
- Mark Leighton is continuing to gain information on the possibility of building a Recreation Center at the site of the Pierce Creek Community Center
- An exploratory committee with various community stakeholders is still in the process of being formed - with one of the goals of the committee reaching out to local businesses to find out costs and potential designs
- The lights and poles at Jackson Park will need to be replaced in the future upon recent inspection
- When the time comes to replace the current lights, the Town would like to get similar lights to those that were put in at the SV football field
- Will explore the possibility of grants that would be available to the Town in order to offset some of the costs
- Tee Ball started on May 15th and has gone each Saturday at 10am
- Would have liked to start earlier however fields were too wet to play on during the previous Saturdays they were hoping to begin
- Program consists of skills & drills with rotating scrimmages of three teams of eight
- Each town is doing their own tee ball program

II. New Business

A. Baseball/Softball

- Both baseball and softball has concluded
- Went well overall with no major complaints from any of the towns involved
- Minimal rainouts compared to other years that allowed all leagues to finish on time
- Zack Sobolesk did a fantastic job maintaining the fields and was in daily communication with Chris Streno concerning field conditions and was open to doing anything that was needed in a moment's notice for the leagues
- Park Terrace is still available for usage although it was not needed this season due to the lower number of participants in all leagues
- Focus for next year's season at Jackson Park will be pushing the Town to improve the scoreboard and to better organize a Booster Club to reopen the concession stand
- For this season, the main goal was to get the kids on the field and the Booster Club was not a priority however at the next meeting a discussion will take place on how to increase Booster Club participation and reach out to potential interested individuals
- Booster Club will need to be formed for the upcoming football season
- 14U team has been created for the first time in roughly four years

- Combination of Tri-Town (TOB, Conklin and Kirkwood) players under the SV name participate on the 14U team
- Home games take place at River Park in Kirkwood
- The team provides an opportunity for those players that did not make the modified team to play
- All-Stars have started taking place - the first tournament for two 12U baseball teams and two 10U baseball teams is in Endwell, funded by the remaining money in the Booster Club budget and by parents
- Softball has one team participating in one tournament in Endicott, funded by parents and coached by Anthony Coppola

B. Football

- Registration forms went out to schools and have been posted online
- Megan Garlock will be running the cheerleading program, which already has a large number of participants signed up
- Practices will begin on August 2nd
- First game will be August 29th with our home games taking place at SV High School
- The Super Bowl will be October 31st
- Binghamton has joined the league
- Next meeting of the league scheduled for June 27th
- Booster Club will be vital during this season for the fundraising - not only for the football season itself but for all subsequent seasons since home games provide a large source of revenue for the Booster Club that our programs rely upon the rest of the year

C. Miscellaneous

- The annual Jordon Godbout 10U Tournament will be held at Jackson Park from July 6th to July 10th
- Fred Lawrence has resigned from the Youth Commission

D. Public Comments

- First person to speak from the public was Clara Lawrence and she discussed her concerns over the recent selection process of softball All-Stars and the lack of overall transparency and communication when it comes to how she feels some aspects of TOB youth sports have operated over the years
- She stated that there should have been a formal tryout for the softball All-Stars and it is damaging to those kids not included finding out about secret teams like this via social media, seeing teammates/friends on teams under the SV name - especially since not everyone is given a true chance to be on these certain teams that operate within the Town
- Ms. Lawrence stated her frustration with the explanation she received from Nicole Karian, the softball commissioner, that the All-Star team is not related to the Town even though the team is made of Town players, practiced on Town fields and were using the SV name
- She ended her time by saying she hopes that more transparency takes place in the future to correct the systematic failures that she believes have been taking place for some time and has damaged kids, her own included, in the process

- Next to speak was Kim Passionino who second many of Ms. Lawrence's concerns and frustrations feeling there was a lack of transparency with the softball All-Stars and felt that all kids were not given a chance to be apart of some selected teams
- Ms. Passionino also contested that fact that it was not a Town team reiterating some of Ms. Lawrence's points of Town field usage and Town players
- Ms. Passionino felt that there should have been a tryout for softball All-Stars as other area leagues have, particularly Maine-Endwell and Vestal, and proceeded to ask the softball All-Star coach Anthony Coppola why her daughter was not selected to the team - Anthony responded that her daughter was asked however she did not want to play
- Her overall hope is that this incident with softball All-Stars leads to improved decision making when it comes to All-Star selection with complete transparency taking place
- Marcy Herrick then followed Kim Passionino and addressed the Commission with a series of questions concerning the Youth Commission's operating guidelines, legalities and whether or not the Town's coaches were certified under the National Youth Softball requirements
- Ms. Herrick expressed concern over the lack of a formal rubric for All-Star selections and stated her unhappiness with fact that there was no consultation with the league's two head coaches as to who should be selected for the team, especially since no formal tryout took place
- Ms. Herrick referred to the timeline of the selection and conversations that took place between Nicole Kariam and Anthony Coppola to support her view that the team selection process was faulty and unfair to those that were left out, including her daughter and felt that the Town had an active exclusionary process and nepotism within when it came to team selections/creation which results in limiting girls' chances of success in the programs at early ages
- Ms. Herrick stated that she checked with the Susquehanna Valley Athletic Director concerning the use of the Saber logo on the uniforms of the privately funded and selected All-Star teams
- She said that she was informed in her meeting with the athletic director that the SV Saber logo should only be used by teams fully tied to the Town or school, not privately funded or selected teams
- Nate Miller spoke after Ms. Herrick and discussed that in previous years, tryouts have taken place for softball All-Stars and certain tough decisions were made in that process in which no favoritism was shown
- Mr. Miller also brought up that fact that in the past, girls' basketball teams were split evenly and in a couple of instances younger girls were asked by the coaches to play up a level based upon ability and usefulness to the team not to exclude anyone
- Mr. Miller concluded that one of the main issues that the Town is confronted with is a lack of coaches that would allow for more teams to be formed and present more overall opportunities as result, which would possibly eliminate some of the issues that have arisen in the past
- After Mr. Miller spoke, Andrea Mastronardi stated that she respectively wanted to see how the process of Youth Commission meetings worked and was simply asking for consistent transparency and fairness in the decision making process

- The last speaker from the public was Anthony Coppola, the coach of the softball All-Star team, who began by giving a timeline of the events that lead to the controversy surrounding the All-Star selections
- Mr. Coppola discussed how he approached Nicole Kariam about whether or not there was going to be a softball All-Star team with Nicole stating to him that they did not plan on having one - which was when Mr. Coppola told Nicole that he would coach it if nobody else was willing to do it and then asked if she could contact the organizers of the Union-Endicott tournament, the only known tournament, if they could get a team in
- Nicole contacted the organizers and let him know that the good news was they could get a team in but the bad news was it was set to begin the next week, not giving them a lot of time to get a team together
- Mr. Coppola then said that tryouts were planned for the end of that week but unfortunately, Nicole's son was seriously injured and she had to go a hospital out of town for multiple days and could not organize a formal tryout in enough time to get a team together for the upcoming tournament
- Mr. Coppola asked Nicole that since a tryout could not be planned due to her family emergency and short timetable, who would she recommend from her team that would be interested in doing it, be able to attend the practices and games in such short notice and who was coachable and passionate about playing
- In response to the use of the SV logo and uniforms being similar to the boy All-Star teams, Mr. Coppola said that they needed uniforms, paid for by Mr. Coppola himself, in a timely manner and decided to use a design that the company already had on hand for the quickest turnaround
- Mr. Coppola concluded by saying that mistakes were made and that his intentions were to solely give the girls a similar opportunity as the boys, which was to extend their season and he simply filled the coaching void that was on the girls side of All-Stars

E. Youth Commission Comments

- Youth Director Chris Streno spoke first stating that there were some extenuating circumstances that occurred during the week of softball All-Star selections that resulted in the eliminating of a formal tryout however we can agree that the selection process was not ideal and not the normal way it is handled. He expressed that he did not believe there was any malice intended and that once the team was selected it was agreed that since it was done outside of the ordinary process, that the town would not be financially connected to the tournament.
- With that said, Mr. Streno did not feel this unfortunate incident was indicative of the organization as whole.
- He also stated that the Youth Commission will examine areas that need to be improved upon and that the Commission is always open to suggestions and direct participation from members of the community
- Josh Spisak explained that formal evaluations are done at the beginning of the season and something similar could be done for future All-Star selection processes
- Mr. Spisak also spoke to the accusation of unfair teams being formed and stated that to ensure there is no "team stacking" during the regular season, the coaches and commissioners redraft teams entirely at the beginning of each season

- Some other specific points brought up by the Youth Commission were other local youth organizations use coaches picks for All-Star selections, that any major changes would have to be agreed upon by Conklin since some of their players also play on the All-Star teams and total comparisons to other towns are difficult because their leagues in some cases are private organizations
- Generally speaking, all the members when given their time to speak reiterated Chris' points that the softball All-Star situation was unfortunate and not the desirable way to do things and the Commission was open to examining how things can be done better, while stating the need for more volunteers and coaches

Meeting adjourned at 8:15 - Next meeting scheduled for July 15th @ 6:00