

Round Lake Area Park District
Regular Board Meeting
March 10, 2022
6:00 p.m.

PLACE OF MEETING:

Robert W. Rolek Community Center
814 Hart Road
Round Lake, IL 60073

I. ROLL CALL

Park District Board President Paul Hollingsworth called the meeting to order at 6:00 p.m. Commissioners in attendance were Sarah Green, Timothy Pasternak, Nick Metropulos, and Christine Gentes. Staff in attendance included Executive Director Bob Newport, Business Services Director Carl Hauser, Superintendent of Recreation Katie Gamroth, Finance Department Manager Jennifer Baker and Superintendent of Parks Ane Olivares.

II. PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE

III. AUDIENCE COMMENTS

Jessica Findley stated that she wanted to speak because she felt that she was being used as an excuse for changing to SRACLC. She added that she was the manager for the Round Lake Area Park District Special Recreation program since 2009 and left in January 2022. She stated that she resigned her position, as she felt programming was not aligned with the goals of the program. She stated that she felt heartbroken that she was no longer working for the district and had no control over what was happening with the program. She added that Katie Gamroth informed her at the time of her resignation that the agency was looking at its options. Gamroth asked her to reach out to see what participants needed during her final weeks. Gamroth also indicated to her that a CTRS certification was a district goal going forward. Findley stated that she did not have this certification when she was hired, nor was she required to obtain it, prior to Gamroth being hired by the district. Findley stated that Gamroth offering to add a superintendent of recreation position to help her with the workload was an insult to her. She indicated that she had heard the programs being run were subpar and she did not receive direction. She stated that she was not told that programs were not adequate. She questioned where management and the board were if programming was bad and needed to be made better. Findley stated that she was at a breaking point and did not want her name associated with something she could not control. Staff reached out to Human Resources and management and was told that cuts made were due to COVID. She wanted people to know that she was not staying home with her children after 17 years at the district. She felt that HR did not take the time to hear her. She stated that she has a vested interest, as she has children attending programs, she is a member of the community, and has an interest in these programs.

Jenny Simpson stated that she was the program supervisor for seven years working alongside Jessica Findley. She asked the board if they had read her, or other participants', letters to the agency. She wanted to congratulate Robert Newport and Katie Gamroth for dismantling the program and breaking up the employee team offering quality programs. She questioned why break up the program as she had been

with some of the participants with some starting as children. She stated that staff were mistreated and bullied and asked who gains from this move, other than SRACLC. She added that Robert Newport and Katie Gamroth also win, as they won't have to hire and train staff. She stated that other staff wages were frozen while Gamroth had a \$25,000 increase over three years and other employees got a \$5,000 bonus. She asked Bob if he was aware of EEOC labor laws regarding bullying. She stated that HR let this happen by letting this behavior continue. She indicated that Gamroth showed a lack of empathy toward the participants at the parent meeting. Turning to the audience, she asked that if others in the audience were there to speak on Robert Newport's behalf, that they need to tell the truth. She stated that staff was not treated with respect, and she did not want to resign, but could not take the lack of leadership. She suggested to the board to invite former staff to come forward to hear what was going on.

Nicole King stated that Amanda was her sister and a 12-year participant in the program. She indicated that it appears internal issues were affecting staff with reduced hours and resignations. Amanda had friendship and stability when attending the program but was now confused as her friends were missing or not there for no reason. She added that the park district was about community and dismantling the program was a shame.

Maria (no last name indicated) said that her 20-year-old son Cesar was two years old when diagnosed with a developmental delay and five years old when diagnosed with autism. She became a single parent and moved back to Round Lake and started the summer programs at the district. She stated that she was looking at fees and SRACLC were higher. She added that he had recently been diagnosed with seizures and that she now works part-time with no benefits. She stated that she had nowhere to go when he aged out, so he attended the Today Club. She is now looking to move to Wisconsin, where costs for him will be higher. She stated that her son does not talk much and felt that he was being hurt but tests were inconclusive at the hospital. She felt that the park district was a good fit and that she could possibly work full-time. She was not talked to about what they wanted or needed. She is stressed about the future and must move on and that no one considered the parents' situations.

Mary Albert said that her son, Jeremy, was 17 when he was in a near-fatal car accident and given a nine percent chance of survival. He is now 33 years old, but his traumatic brain injury causes him to have days where he has the mental capacity of a nine-year-old and other days a 33-year-old. She added that he will not be normal again or be able to live on his own. When she received an SRSNLC brochure, he liked the programs and sports he could participate in, and he was proud when he went downstate with Special Olympics and had been a gold-medal winner many times. She added that he was in the Today Club from the beginning and stated that it was a rough start, but his experience improved, and he made many friends, and they became part of the special needs family. She added that she is an employee of Round Lake's special recreation staff and is sad that when she started it was wonderful and now it is being dismantled and the family is being torn apart. She added that he has not attended since January of 2022. She felt that it was important for the board to understand what they are going through. The program is needed not only for current families, but future families who may have a need.

Linda Colmyer stated that she is a volunteer at SRSRL programs. She was a support worker for Tony, who is a participant in the program, and she saw him daily and he improved and talked more. She volunteered because of Jessica Findley and Jenny Simpson. She said that Tony is now working with the

Round Lake Area Park District maintenance department. Program participants and families are very special and felt chances of participants being driven to where SRACLC may run their programs was lower. She concluded that local programs make a difference and would be sad if they are not local anymore.

Regina Divozzo stated that her son is Tony and in 1998 they started with camp at SEDOL's recommendation. She added that Tony was involved in all Special Olympics sports with his support worker. Tony has many Special Olympics medals and he gained confidence in himself and even taught himself how to use Zoom meetings during COVID. She was sad to see changes, as she works locally, and Tony could walk to the SRSNLC facility. Her hope was that the program would stay local, and she is not paying tax to the Round Lake Area Park District but does live in Round Lake. She thanked SRSRL staff.

Nancy Wamser said that her son, Eddie, runs track in Special Olympics and participates in other sports. She said that they live in Grayslake and came to Round Lake, as the coach was amazing. She heard the program was being shut down and did not know why. She wanted to know what the motivation was, and she then read a quote by Eunice Shriver. She stated that Eunice Shriver started Special Olympics and that her message was of hope and honor to communities. She asked why break up community. The special recreation community showed up in support when Justin, another athlete in the program, who later became a coach, died at the age of 21.

Mike Findley stated that he sent an email to the board and Robert Newport. He added that today he had a Facebook memory pop up that staff starts budgeting this time of year and that his wife asked people for supplies, as her budgets were being cut. He said that camp is a safe place for parents to send children, but the budget was being cut. He does not get it, as it is taxpayer funded. He stated that the Today Club was profitable, and it was disgusting to send to SRACLC when funds could be used here in the community. He stated that he is fed up with the amount of money the Today Club is bringing in that would be going to SRACLC. He did not feel the change to SRSNLC should be made, as three board seats are up at the next election, and he felt that this is a lame duck board. He stated that in the past he was told he could not run for the board as his wife was an employee. He directed a comment to Robert Newport that "she is not working here anymore".

Mickey Wamser stated that he is a part of the special recreation community and that he had heard what is happening from the other participants. He had coached and refereed and had been out of the community for five years. He felt this was a burden for families that can't be explained and when his mom told him that the program was being shut down, he was blown away. He hoped that the special recreation community could do something.

Heather Edwards stated that her brother is Mark Peters and he left when he was 22 years old and lives in a Waukegan group home. She said that he came to Round Lake programs with positive experiences and had heard through the Exchange Club that the program was being changed. Mark is now 29 and thriving. She felt that a 30-minute commute is big for families, and it would be sending money to a more

profitable area. She made friends through Mark's attendance in programs and that Mark was at a church group and was praying that the board would not make changes. She stated that Mark was also a gold-medal winner in Special Olympics. She felt that the idea of moving the program would be hard to explain.

Martin Simpson felt that his wife was being bullied by Robert Newport. He added that Robert Newport and Katie Gamroth were breaking down the program and felt it was time for the board to step up and lead the community. He said that people are pleading for leadership. He asked if there was any follow-up to his allegations brought up at the February meeting. He said his wife makes about \$40,000 but was not working for the money but for the participants. He stated that the board let management break up the program. He wanted the board to step up and make the right decision. He added that if they can't make a decision then they should leave the board.

Tony Serna stated that he is just a member of the local community. He moved out of Round Lake but came back because he loves the town. He said that the board was not transparent about information or forthcoming with answers. He was angry that they were not getting information. He was not sure why they are leaving local control and sending programs elsewhere. He asked if the move was a cost-saving measure and said that they still need volunteers to help run programs. He asked why they did not want to keep the program local. He stated that he liked seeing the happy faces of the special needs community and the willingness for community members to volunteer. He had thought about the traffic going to Mundelein/Vernon Hills area and that it takes a long time to commute there, and he would not want to put kids on a bus where anything can happen. He stated that the board are elected officials and are elected to make a decision.

Cheryl Calcesz stated that she has paid taxes for over 40 years. She indicated that Jessie, Jenny, and other parents helped her granddaughter, who has autism and other disabilities. Her granddaughter is now able to walk up to people and make conversation. She felt that moving the program out of the community is criminal and felt that if staff is not being treated right then those responsible should be disciplined or fired. She stated that her granddaughter Vera is now outgoing but it took years being in the programs to improve and be able to talk conversationally. She asked to think of those who elected you and the people asking for the right decision. She added please don't hurt the children more and make the right decision.

Eddie Wamser stated that he is a Special Olympics athlete. He said that Jessie and Jenny changed his life, and the program meant a lot to him. He added that he participated in many programs and that he is autistic and has ADHD. He said that it was hard to see the community and program being taken away from friends and family.

The Board thanked all audience members for attending.

IV. APPROVAL OF THE AGENDA

No changes to the posted agenda.

MOTION: Commissioner Gentes moved to approve the agenda for the Regular Board Meeting of March 10, 2022, as presented.

SECOND: By Commissioner Pasternak.

VOTE: By roll call. All ayes. Motion passed.

V. DIRECTOR'S REPORTS

A. SRSNLC/SRACLCL Membership Discussion

Commissioner Gentes asked a member of the audience why they thought the program was being moved out of the community. Gentes continued to say that she felt the board was being denigrated by what was being said about the board and what was happening with the program.

Commissioner Metropulos stated that he did not want to discredit anyone regarding the community. He added that the Today Club and special recreation programs were a highlight of the monthly report to the board. The programs have a good reputation in the community and the board respects all who help. SRSNLC is not the only offering for programs. He had a great appreciation for those who helped grow the programs and the board must decide on future growth and with whom. He added that programming will be offered in Round Lake. He learned from discussions of people's concerns of programs going to other communities but emphasized that the board will be an equal partner in decision-making regarding program location. The standard set is to keep programs local and that will happen either way and staff will have good qualifications. He added that a lot goes into programs for the special needs community, which includes qualified staff. The district learned this when the survey was sent out this past summer. SRACLCL also has many offerings to grow programs. The board must consider options and have special recreation in the community to build upon going forward. It is difficult to determine the best option, but this is an important opportunity going forward.

Commissioner Hollingsworth asked John Buckner, the Executive Director of SRACLCL, to come forward to address board questions. Buckner addressed the board and families and wanted them to know that programs were not leaving the community. He emphasized that the Today Club will remain in Round Lake and is not going away and if the need is for three Special Olympics basketball teams, then they would be added. He stated that each community is treated differently based on need. He added that he did not receive any parent calls when his contact information was provided in January. SRACLCL staff would sit with families and see if the current format or an alternate format would work better. He added that no programs would be taken out of Round Lake, but participants could also go to other programs in the other communities that SRACLCL serves. People may not want to drive to Vernon Hills, but programs will be offered in Round Lake.

Commissioner Gentes asked about staffing. Buckner responded that they would bring in their staff under their policies and procedures and existing Round Lake staff would have the opportunity to work with SRACLCL after going through the SRACLCL hiring process.

Commissioner Metropulos asked what advantages joining SRACLCL would offer to program participants. Buckner responded that SRACLCL could offer more variety and more opportunities that a community of 55,000 residents could use other than Today Club. They can expand program offerings that Round Lake has not been able to offer in the past. He added that SRACLCL has financial aid opportunities and they have not indicated that they would be raising camp or Today Club fees. He invited people to reach out to him with questions or concerns.

B. Resolution 2022-03-01 A Resolution of the Round Lake Area Park District approving membership in the Special Recreation Association of Central Lake County

Executive Director Newport presented the Resolution of the Round Lake Area Park District approving membership in the Special Recreation Association of Central Lake County.

MOTION: Commissioner Metropulos moved to adopt Resolution 2022-03-01 - A Resolution of the Round Lake Area Park District approving membership in the Special Recreation Association of Central Lake County

SECOND: By Commissioner Green.

VOTE: By roll call. All ayes. Motion passed.

VI. NEW BUSINESS

A. Commissioner Comments

None.

VII. CONSENT AGENDA

A. Approval of Regular Board Meeting Minutes of February 10, 2022.

B. Approval of Cash Expenditure Transactions for the Month of February 2022.

MOTION: Commissioner Gentes moved to approve the Consent Agenda as presented.

SECOND: By Commissioner Metropulos.

VOTE: By roll call. All ayes. Motion passed.

VIII. COMMITTEE REPORTS

A. Finance

1. Monthly Statements

Finance Department Manager Baker provided the monthly financial statements for February 2022.

B. Program and Facility Monthly Reports

1. Recreation Report/CDC Report/Marketing Report

Recreation staff provided written reports. Superintendent of Recreation Katie Gamroth added that new flooring was ready to be installed in the Neighborhood area off the gym at the Rolek Center and that the area was planned to be re-opened this spring or early summer.

2. Parks Report

Superintendent of Parks Olivares provided a written report. Ane added that the park playground concrete border and mulch had been removed for a new border and mulch to be installed. Commissioner Gentes asked where the crayon fence that the parks staff were building would go? Ane stated that it was to be installed by the retaining wall outside the Child Development Center entrance area.

3. Renwood Report

Golf course staff provided written reports.

IX. ADJOURNMENT

MOTION: Commissioner Green moved to adjourn the Regular Board Meeting of March 10, 2022.

SECOND: By Commissioner Pasternak.

VOTE: By Roll Call. All Ayes. Motion passed.

Park Board President Hollingsworth adjourned the Regular Board Meeting of March 10, 2022, at 7:28 p.m.

Respectfully Submitted.

/s/Paul Hollingsworth
Paul Hollingsworth, Park Board President

/s/Carl Hauser
Carl Hauser, Board Secretary

4/14/2022
Date Approved