

OAKLAND RECREATION COMMISSION
MINUTES OF REGULAR MEETING FOR JANUARY
Monday, December 19, 2022

The regular monthly meeting of the Oakland Recreation Commission was called to order at 8:00PM by Chairman Guadagnino, held at the Danny D'Elia Building under the public sunshine laws. Commissioners Guadagnino, Rotondo, Logatto, Wall, Roy, Scalabrini and Catalano were in attendance. Commissioner Ives and Bleeker were absent.

A motion to excuse commissioners Bleeker and Ives was made by Commissioner Logatto and seconded by Commissioner Rotondo. The motion passed unanimously.

Chair's Report: Chair Guadagnino stated that he is aware that many are here from wrestling and reviewed his plan to address the issues brought to the commission. He stated that he will review what was brought to his attention and read the letter sent out by Coach Jay Siverstein. Following, we will open to public comments, and he will address every comment.

Chair Guadagnino stated: About five years ago wrestling moved to NJ Sports House. The Recreation Department paid for the mats that are currently housed and used there. Oakland Recreation has always been a feeder program for Indian Hills High School sports programs. We all understand it is ultimately the parents and child's choice of which high school they would like to attend. Oakland Rec has many shared services, fields, wrestling mats and the high school coaches from IHHS and have a great working relationship.. The idea of the feeder program is to introduce players to the school and the coaches.. We have had numerous meetings with the new AD and we discussed how to close holes with our feeder program. In September we held a "Meet the AD" night we saw which was a full house. We have been working on initiatives with our wrestling head coach on how to bridge the gap with the feeder program and give the Hills coaches and opportunity to get in front of the kids. So we made plans to move the older kids 2 nights a week to practice at Indian Hills. He stated that from his understanding, the Oakland Wrestling Coaches felt it was best to have all of the kids at the High School rather than splitting up the program between 2 sites. Two weeks into the process there were a lot of issues with rumors that were completely unfounded as well as concern of chaos with the hectic environment and kids running around unsupervised and parents standing on the basketball court while Hills basketball practice was in session We met with the AD to discuss possible solutions such as adding additional seating. There were also alleged safety issues that were discussed with the AD. The AD reviewed the whole space and said that he didn't think there were any issues especially for the older kids. Following, there was a meeting between Chair Guadagnino, Bobby Sherrow, and Coach J Silverstein to discuss concerns and how we can smooth things out. Chair Guadagnino stated he took responsibility that the transition was not as smooth as it could have been and went through all of the issues and see how we can work together to make everything work out. to figure out.

Chair Guadagnino stated that Coach Jay stated he felt the space was not safe for the young kids and believes only the older kids should be at the High School if we were to use it. Following that, Chair Guadagnino agreed as originally all the commission wanted was the older kids at Hill,

and that the younger kids should be moved back to NJ Sports House. The older group would be at the High School twice a week. We wanted to make it so Jay wasn't running back and forth as he is a volunteer and we didn't want to make it too difficult for him. On Friday Coach Jay said he wasn't sure if he wanted to continue coaching. Chair Guadagnino said that he asked him to continue coaching because he was very good and wanted to keep him on.

Chair Guadagnino read the following letter sent by Coach Jason Silverstein to the participants of the Wrestling Program:

"Wrestling Parents,

I want to let you all know that I will be continuing to coach the rec program this season, however this will be my last year. I made a commitment this year to coach your children and I'm going to stick with that commitment. I have always told my own children that once you make a commitment you must stick with it, and I believe you should lead by example.

My reason for leaving has to do with my philosophical differences with the rec commission on how this program should be run. I was told by the rec commission chairman that the commission's mission was to make sure as many kids as possible attend Indian Hills High School.

This is the reason why the commission has forced us to practice in the IH's wrestling room this year despite the mats being unsafe and unsanitary. Putting the kid's safety first is my number one priority, a priority that is not shared by the commission.

One of the reasons I moved to Oakland was because kids have a choice to attend either IH or Ramapo. My goal as wrestling coach was to make the rec wrestling program so good that both IH's and Ramapo's wrestling teams would benefit equally and kids could choose to go to either school for other reasons besides sports. I don't think this town should actively be trying to make a student athlete attend one school over another especially when the schools are part of the same district. That should be a choice between the student and their parents.

Moving forward the 1st group no longer has to practice at IH. All of their practices will be at the Sports House. The 2nd group must still practice at IH two nights a week despite my best efforts to get the commission to change their minds and let them practice at the Sports House until IH's mats get brought up to proper safety standards. I will be driving between the two practices so that your children still get my full attention. I am truly sorry that my tenure had to end this way.

From what I understand this whole practice at IH issue started because 4 parents contacted the mayor and complained that the wrestling program does not do enough at IH, even though we are there for our Saturday matches, our dual meets and our wrestling tournament.

Thank you all for allowing me to coach your children for the last 5 years and let's make this one the best!

Coach Jason"

Following the reading of the letter, Chair Guadagnino made the following comments: He stated that he never said that the goal of the recreation commission was to get as many children from the program as possible to go to IHHS and that he explained our programs are feeder programs to IHHS but that our goal is never to push kids to go there.

Chair Guadagnino stated that Coach Silverstein's accounting of his priority of safety not being shared by the commission in the letter was defamation and that the commissioner's number one goal of their programs was safety. He felt this letter was a misrepresentation and mischaracterization. The commission is not forcing the program to practice at the High School. We asked for space to practice at the high school two nights a week for the older kids. Following receiving this letter, Chair Guadagnino reached out to the AD at IHHS regarding the concern of the mats and the AD stated that the mats were safe to use.

He also reiterated the commission agrees that the choice of school should be made between the student and the parent and that we do not interfere with that decision.

In response to the section regarding the older group being forced to continue to practice at IHHS despite his feeling that it was not safe, Chair Guadagnino stated that Coach Jay said that the mats were fine for the older kids to use..

In regards to parents reaching out to the Mayor complaining about the program not doing enough at the high school, Chair Guadagnino stated this was not the reason for the move to IHHS and reiterated that it was because the program is a feeder program.

Chair Guadagnino closed by stated that there are disagreements regarding what was actually said during the meeting. That Chairman Guadagnino met with he and the head coach to work on some solutions to make the program work, rather he was given ultimatums by Jay Silverstein.

Open Session- A motion to open to the public was made by Commissioner Scalabrini and seconded by Commissioner Logatto. The motion passed unanimously.

Rosemary Lee (51 Hiawatha Blvd)- Asked when they were anticipating having safe mats delivered. She also asked if her son could practice with the first group until there were new mats. Chair Guadagnino said to speak to the coaches regarding practicing with a different group. Coach Jay said it depends on the size of the child due to safety. If he is larger, it would be unsafe for him to practice with the smaller kids.

Karla Rodriguez (9 Oak St.)- Asked if there was there an option to buy new mats? Chair Guadagnino said yes it was something to look into. We are looking at making something work. Ms. Rodriguez wanted to know if it's an option for Indian Hills to get new mats and Chair Guadagnino stated the AD feels there are no issues with the current mats. He also said we could move our mats tomorrow if that's what we wanted to do. She followed up asking since we pay for NJ Sports House, if we moved to the school, would the wrestling program be cheaper? The commission stated it would not because the cost for NJ Sports House comes from fundraising not wrestling dues.

Ms. Rodriguez closed by stating that she has kids at both schools and likes both schools that Indian Hills needs the feeder program because the numbers are much lower than Ramapo. She is hoping the new AD will make the changes needed to make it a desirable program.

Katrina Larsen (71 Spear Street): Asked if there is a 3rd party person who can review the mats who are not part of the recreation program or the school? Commissioner Wall said he spoke to the AD at Indian Hills about the mats and they do not believe they are a safety issue, however we are looking into options to get new mats regardless of what happens but it will take time.

Charles D.- Stated he feels that there are more issues than just the safety of the mats with the switch to IHHS. The mats are very old and need to be replaced. The space is very worn and needs updating and feels it is not the space you want to bring people into if the goal is to encourage them through the feeder program. He feels that all of this was poorly thought through and executed and from a parent's perspective, you can see these are bad mats. He stated he was unsure how the high school coach hasn't approached this issue on his own. The mats are old and it's time for an update.

Commissioner Wall stated that the issue was brought up on Monday and it's hard to deal with in 5 days. He also just started prior to the beginning of the program and was not part of the planning. We are working as quickly as possible to fix the situation.

Commissioner Guadagnino stated there are several issues with the Sports House. First of all, using the building for wrestling practices during the offseason was uninsured. God forbid someone got hurt, or fell down the stairs or anything related to the facility, the town and the wrestlers were not insured. There is a question as to whether there is a lease on the facility, can they throw us out, can they keep the mats and lock the door etc. Also, the construction in the room was never inspected by the town, I did not know that the coaches did construction in the facility until last Friday. Last year the wrestling budget did not use all the monies that the program collected, yet the program still had the parents fundraise. Internally we need to fix these issues.

John Yessis (55 Oneida Ave.)- Agrees this is poorly executed. He feels that there was no buy in from the great people who are part of this program. Going to Indian Hills quickly was the problem.

Commissioner Logatto stated that this all happened very fast following the meeting with the AD. We had great intentions, but the timing was not great.

Mr. Yessis stated that they have made this a great program and the parents are bought in. Bobby Sherrow has done a great job and has made everyone feel like they're a part of it. However, there is a lot of chaos. He doesn't feel that Commissioner Wall and Bobby Sherrow have a great relationship. There are top-down issues with this program.

Commissioner Wall said that he believes money has been wasted, as stated earlier and Bobby Sherrow is not following town protocols and that is where there has been some disconnect between them. Commissioner wall stated that many of the issues are due to things that have

happened before he took charge of the wrestling program. Although there may be issues personally between himself and Bobby Sherrow, Bobby and Commissioner Logatto set up a great program. His goal is to let it be and his final response was that if Bobby Sherrow continued to be negative and did not want to cooperate with fixing the financial aspects, the inusrand etc so that is when he told Bobby if he couldn't help, then he would need to find someone else.

Commissioner Logatto stated that the unspent money was his mistake. He was concerned because in the past, the program has overspent due to lack of communication between Bobby and Commissioner Logatto and therefore he was very conservative with the spending last year thinking it would balance out in the following year. He misunderstood how the budget split between two years as the program falls in the winter between two different budgets. He underspent one year not realizing that when the new year came, that money was no longer available and went back to the town's general budget. There was no misappropriation on Bobby Sherrows part, just incorrect budgeting.

Chair Guadagnino followed stating that there was nothing wrong and no money was missing, it was just unspent which we want to avoid in the future by closing loops and following protocols. He resumed the conversation regarding the mats.

Coach Jay stated that he felt NJ Sports House was the perfect venue for the wrestling program. The bathrooms are easily accessible to the space the program is held in. In the high school, they are so far away that coaches need to chaperone trips down the hall to the bathroom. He feels that NJ Sprots House is more appropriate for their program. He also said that the wrestling room was built by the wrestling families at NJ Sports House. He doesn't feel it should be taken away. The new owner has fixed the facility. The bathrooms and parking lots have been fixed and updated.

Ms. Rodriguez asked Coach J if he would be open to having the kids wrestling at Indian Hills if the mats were replaced.

Coach J replied that he wanted to go wherever the kid's wanted to be however he does not believe in it's current state that IHHS is a safe place to wrestle for anyone. He would like to finish out the season at NJ Sports House.

Kristen Zingone (15 Raebe Ave.)- Stated that she appreciates what everyone has said. She has 3 boys in the wrestling program. Last year was our first year in the program and we are so happy with it. We have had phenomenal experiences in all of the recreation programs. Jason has been amazing to her boys and is the reason why they came back this year even if he wasn't winning. Ms. Zingone stated she doesn't think any changes should be made. Hoping this year is another successful year. She feels that NJ Sports House is an ideal location. She agrees that it is a lot to ask the coaches to drive back and forth for the two groups between two locations. Also the bathrooms are not great for the coaches to have to take the kids down the hall to go. She also feels that if there is any question at all about the safety that should be the end of the conversation. For her, the coach from the high schools should make the effort to see the kids, not the other way around.

Coach Jay said that he's never been asked to be in a meeting while the planning of this change was being done. He also stated that he was told that to try out the change for 2 weeks and see how it goes.

Chair Guadagnino agreed that he was asked to try out the move for 2 weeks and if the coach from the high school doesn't show up then we can reassess this decision. There is a lot of misinformation, and misquotes.

Coach Jay wanted to clarify that he is a very dedicated Oakland person and that he and his family loves Oakland and supports Indian Hills. He doesn't want to lose NJ Sports House. It's a great space. He stated that at the first practice he attended he saw the mats and got an opportunity to really work on them and realized that they were not safe in his opinion.

Robert Varcadipane (31 Minnehaha Blvd.)- He stated that he personally doesn't know anything about the mats but trusts Coach J's opinion. He stated that four kids his son's age started using knee pads due to the mats and that they were too hard. His son really learned how to play because of coach jay. His son doesn't like going to the high school. He doesn't like that there is no place for the parents to sit. With everything going on at the schools in regards to illness, why would we want to go to a space that's packed when we have an empty space that's comfortable for the parents and its significantly cleaner. There's been some issues between basketball and wrestling because of lack of space and tight scheduling. Why are we cramming our kids in there with an open room at NJ Sports House?

Ms. Zingone asked about air turnover in the space at the high school. She asked how long it takes for the room to have a full air exchange. She wanted to know how long it takes for the HVAC system to turnover the full air through the room in the high school.

Chair Guadagnino responded saying that we do not know but if we were to test it in one space, we would have to test the Sports House too and doing so would likely cause a shut down of the room indefinitely until we got them tested. He did speak with the school and that the room's HVAC system is similiar to all the HVAC systems used at IHHS.

Ms. Zingone disagreed and stated she didn't feel it was necessary at NJ Sports House as the room remains unoccupied during the day verse the school where it is in use all day.

Commissioner Catalano asked the public who was present, if we were to change the mats, would that fix the situation, and would everyone be ok with moving the program to the high school?

Ms. Rodriguez asked if the coach from Ramapo High School was allowed to come to a practice to introduce himself to the kids?

Chair Guadagnino stated he is allowed to as is any outside high school coach.

Commissioner Wall stated that his goal is to build up the sport and program because it is an easy sport to quit. Nationally the sport is down 70% in participation and he just wants to keep kids wrestling. This is the main reason he thought he could help. Right now both Ramapo and Indian

Hills High School teams numbers are below average and we'd like to get enough kids in the recreation program to be able to fill both teams.

Chair Guadagnino thanked everyone for their comments and stated we'll keep everyone at the Sports House this year and work with Jon Duncan about getting mats for the high school and reassess for next year. We will also see what we can do about getting the coach over to the program to visit. We will take the year to work on that.

Haroutyun Dovlatyan (22 Chicasaw Drive)- Stated he had the pleasure of benefiting from Coach Austin and Jay. He has a 10 year old child in his second season of wrestling. We have incredibly well intended people who want to support the town and the kids. He's become the wrestling kid "wrangler" because there are so many children in the room. For 23 year years the kids have had the choice of picking schools for academic development. The fact that we're looking at these schools regarding sports and not academic reasons is not what we need to be doing. When we look at this as an allegiance to a particular school, we are not benefiting our kids. We want our kids to not just be an athlete but a student athlete. He does not feel it is appropriate to call our programs a feeder program and it should not be the goal of the program. His concern with the high school is that we don't have environmental controls of the space and the space is not appropriate for children. Its great that were promoting a cohesive sports program, but we want well rounded student athlete.

Chair Guadagnino's last comment is that we want Coach Jay to complete the season

A motion to close the public open session was made by Commissioner Rotondo and seconded by Commissioner Roy. The motion passed unanimously.

Recreation Photography Patti, wanted to check in regarding fall photos and asked the commission if there were any issues with the packaging of sibling's photos. The commissioners responded that everything went well with soccer and football. Good communication across the board with any questions that came up.

Approval of previous month's minutes- A motion to approve the November 2022 regular meeting minutes was made by Commissioner Logatto and seconded by Commissioner Rotondo. The motion passed unanimously.

The following reports were made and unanimously accepted.

BASEBALL – Comm. Catalano – No Report

BASKETBALL – Comm. Ives – Seasons are up and running. Rec games begin after Jan 1. Travel teams have all begun and many are playing in Holiday tournaments this week. We had a big event at the IHHS Girls game this past weekend that had great attendance. We are planning to do one with the boys this January.

FOOTBALL – Comm. Catalano– No Report

GOLF – Comm. Bleeker – No Report

ROLLER HOCKEY – Comm. Bleeker – No Report

SOCCER – Comm. Rotondo – No Report

SOFTBALL – Comm. Logatto – Registration will take place the first week in January around the 10th.

SPECIAL NEEDS – Comm. Scalabrini – Basketball starts Jan 9. 14 kids are currently registered.

TENNIS – Comm. Scalabrini – No Report

WRESTLING – Comm. Wall – No Report

CHEERLEADING –Comm. Roy – No Report

LACROSSE – Ives – I spoke with Kathy from FL and after the holidays she and I are going to discuss the Lax program we do with FL. I spoke with Coach Duncan about our youth program and how we can incorporate the IHHS coaches, and Matt Myones has offered to help coach and organize that clinic.

SUMMER CAMP – Chair Guadagnino- No Report.

PARKS AND PLAYGROUNDS - Chair Guadagnino- Great Oak Park, Steve Wagner will help us build a bike path. We have funds set aside from the SAO. It will be very nice

SUMMER RECREATION PROGRAMS –Comm. Wall – No Report

MOUNTAIN BIKE – Comm. Rotondo– No Report

VOLLEYBALL –Comm. Roy – No Report

CAPITAL PROJECTS –

Truman Field – We have a meeting scheduled for January 10, 2023.

Tennis Court- Our plan is still to go out to bid for the project in February

Massive Field Upgrades- We need new quotes with the prevailing wage from Commissioner Catalano. Need 2-3 quotes.

COMMITTEE REPORT – No report

COMMUNICATIONS TO COMMISSION – No report

OLD BUSINESS- None

NEW BUSINESS – Changes to the travel sports document-

New Field 2 Shed- We will get quotes and purchase out of trust in January.

LIAISON REPORT- Councilman Kulmala- No Report.

OPEN SESSION- A motion to open a second public open session was made by Commissioner Rotondo and seconded by Commissioner Logatto. The motion passed unanimously.

Katrina Larsen (71 Spruce) We're are interested in getting an ice machine for everyone to use for injuries. It would be stored in the Danny D Building. Will get the quotes and check between SAO or the town for purchasing.

Adjournment – Motion to adjourn the meeting was made by Commissioner Scalabrini and seconded by Commissioner Rotondo. The motion passed unanimously.

THE NEXT MEETING OF THE RECREATION COMMISSION WILL BE HELD on January 30th. The Re-organization meeting will take place at 7:30pm and the Regular Monthly Meeting will follow at 8:00pm.