

# ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT COMMISSION

MINUTES of the Meeting of October 3, 2012

Present: Commissioners: Cyrus Settineri, Chairman, John DePalma, Robert Kapusta, John O'Neil, and Robert Stanton  
Robert Gregory, Advisor

Absent: Commissioners Victor Ferrante and Susan Patrick, Advisor  
Kathy Alagno

- I. Chairman Settineri called the meeting to order at 8:35 a.m.
- II. The minutes of the meeting of August 22, 2012 were approved as presented.
- III. Public Comments – None
- IV. Guest Speaker – Paul Piscitelli, Director of Recreation – City of Milford

Mr. Piscitelli gave his background with the Department as the Director of Recreation for the City of Milford, a position he has held since July, 2011. Prior to becoming the Director, Piscitelli was a Supervisor with the Department for 17 years and counting his seasonal employment he has been employed by the Department for 32 years. He is a graduate of Jonathan Law High School and Bryant College and lives in Milford with his wife Joanna and 4 children.

He believes the Recreation Department is an essential City service. Just as Public Safety, Public Works, and Public Schools are considered essential public services; Recreational services and parks, are vitally important to establishing and maintaining the quality of life in a community. Our programs and facilities ensure the health of our residents and visitors and contribute environmental and economic well-being of the community.

Mr. Piscitelli would like you to think of a park as a community gathering place where generations of Milford's diverse population can go to interact and build relationships.

This is especially important in today's digital age where very few people and businesses talk face-to-face with each other. The days of neighbors talking to each other over the fence or in the driveway has been replaced with texting, tweeting, and other forms of social media - and while this form of communication is instant and most times is

efficient - we have lost contact with each other. He gave examples of how a park can create relationships.

This relationship and interaction builds trust between our diverse residents, which builds friendships. These friendships result in a less fractionalized community. A number of studies confirm that a deeply connected community is more philanthropic, has a lower crime rate, higher graduation rates, and higher property values. All things that make the community a better place to live, work, and raise a family.

Director Piscitelli touted the benefit of youth programming.

The standard answer is to keep the kids off the street, to keep kids safe, to reduce crime. While that is very true an indirect benefit, our goal of youth programming is to build the citizens of tomorrow.

He said our programs are designed to be fun, but they are also designed to teach and re-enforce those life lessons taught at home and at school; and to enrich the minds of our participants. They nurture important values, including team-building skills; respecting alternative viewpoints; and appreciation and awareness of different cultures and traditions.

For example, our CSI program is a cool program where kids get to solve crimes using high tech crime lab tools but what they are really using are their math and science knowledge learned in middle school. And this program as well as our Lego and Robotics camps help them understand how those two subject areas are important for all jobs.

Our music, pottery, drawing, art, drama, and fashion programs are all ways to expose children to the arts. These programs stimulate imagination and critical thinking, they promote the development of self-confidence and discipline, and they lead to overall academic achievement.

Our Marine Biology, SUNsential Science Camp, LI Sound and Nature Camps teach children about our environment. They leave with a better understanding of the environment and as a result they promote conservation, begin to think long-term, and become socially responsible.

Well-rounded programs equal well-rounded citizens who will develop into educated, competent, skilled members of our community and

future workforce. We all know that when businesses think about where to locate or relocation one factor they consider is the availability of a reliable workforce.

These programs along with our traditional sports activities promote health & wellness across all age levels and abilities. For seniors and those with disabilities, Recreation programs provide social and physical opportunities that foster self-esteem, improve quality of life, assist with their ability to live independently and to contribute to the community.

Finally, Piscitelli said, the Recreation Department is an Economic Driver. Parks, programs, and recreational assets and activities generate money.

Nationally, Parks, Beaches, and recreation facilities contribute 730 billion dollars per year to the US Economy, support 6.5 million jobs, and contribute to cleaner air & water, and higher property values.

Locally we provide approximately 200 seasonal jobs, many of these are kids first jobs that teach responsibility, accountability, creativity, etc., which relates back to us building the citizens of tomorrow. Plus we employ almost 100 more people as officials or instructors each year. These are all local people who buy goods and services in Milford helping our local economy.

Our leagues and programs generate revenue for the City and the money spent by participants on the purchases of equipment, clothing, etc. related to those activities; generate hundreds of thousands of dollars.

The Director said our parks and beaches are used for events almost year round. The Milford Green is a good example. A well-known weekend craft show brings in vendors and visitors from all over New England. In addition to going to the craft show - what do these people do when they are here – they spend money!! at hotels, at restaurants, at gas stations, and hopefully they enjoyed themselves so much that they tell a friend about the experience and that friend decides one day to take a trip to Milford and spends his or her money here and continues the cycle.

Another example is Walnut Beach, with the Pavilion, the Boardwalk, and the beach itself – it has become a destination.

Since the pavilion opened in 2006 it has hosted an average of 24 permitted events a year, prior to the pavilion's existence Walnut Beach averaged 6 permitted events a year.

Now many of these are family birthday parties or reunions; however, many of them are large scale events drawing hundreds of people – but regardless of the number of attendees -- they still spend money like those going to the craft show.

But the true benefit of the recreation assets at Walnut Beach is that it has become the cornerstone for the other improvements that have been made - that now make Walnut Beach a Recreation Destination.

This past summer, beach attendance was at the highest in recent memory. We saw 1862 non-resident cars visit the beach and pay for parking. If just half of these cars stopped in the area for gas, food, ice, etc., imagine what impact they had on local business.

The direct evidence of this impact can be measured by the businesses that are opening along the beach end of Naugatuck Avenue, residential vacancies in the area beginning to drop, developers are once again interested in the area, and property values are increasing.

In closing Mr. Piscitelli offered the following values of Recreation to a community;

- Parks & Recreation Programs are a tangible reflection of the quality of life in a community. They provide gathering places and health/wellness opportunities for all families and social groups, regardless of age, ability, or economic status. P&R services are often cited as one of the important factors in surveys of how livable a community is. In a recent survey in Fairfax County, VA 8 out of 10 households listed P&R extremely important to their quality of life.
- Parks and Recreation Programs contribute to health and safety of children, adults, seniors, and those with special needs. Parks & Public lands are proven to improve water and air quality and provide a place for families to connect with nature and learn to respect the environment. According to the CDC improving and promoting parks and programs for people to be physically active

can improve the health of a community by 25% if those residents participate 3 times a week, resulting in lower health care costs.

- Parks and Recreation Programs are an economic driver. P&R improves the local tax base and increases property values. A 2007 study in Philadelphia found that properties within 500 ft of parks or park land were worth an average of 5% more than those without this proximity. In a number of studies P&R are cited as one of the top 3 reasons why businesses choose a city/town to relocate in. While P&R programs generate revenue directly from fees and charges, they more importantly, as I showed earlier, provide indirect revenue from festivals, tournaments, and other special events. Economic activity from hospitality expenditures, tourism, fuel, and equipment sales is a true and sustained value to the local economy.

As Milford grows and people like you look at creative ways to improve the economic stability and desirability of our City, the Recreation Department is also looking to grow and improve the quality and quantity of services we provide to ensure Milford is a livable community for years to come.

When asked about needs, Mr. Piscitelli said that more lighted field space would expand the potential for youth tournaments that would provide economic benefits. Responding to a question about the Avalon Bay project he said that a couple of 90' baseball diamonds would be welcomed. Mr. Piscitelli did not know how many acres of land were under the Recreation Department jurisdiction. When asked about Fowler Field, the Director said we could not afford to lose the recreation assets that we have there but he would be willing to look at alternatives. He said Eisenhower Park should be developed for more activities, both passive and active.

Mr. Piscitelli said that multi-purpose lighted fields with a synthetic surface that would allow a lot of traffic would be ideal. He said that space next to the YMCA would be suitable for this type of field. Cost is the major factor.

He talked about other sports that might be introduced if fields were available.

When asked about maintenance he said that the Public Works Department was responsible for that aspect of the fields. Mr. Piscitelli acknowledged cutbacks had affected the maintenance work.

Mr. Piscitelli said that he did not know how many people participated in Recreation programs.

Mr. DePalma suggested bocce as an additional activity for seniors.

V. Economic Development Activity

Mr. Gregory presented the report as attached to these minutes.

Mr. Kapusta met with the Mayor who spoke about Lamor, a company that relocated to Milford. It was suggested that we might meet with them. The Mayor thought that the new principal at Platt Tech would make a good guest speaker. The Mayor also said that there is a federal program to provide high-speed rail. There is a dispute about the route that would be in the middle of the state instead of along the shoreline.

VI. Committee Reports

A. Brokers Showcase

Chairman Settineri said that this project would be deferred to the spring.

VII. Old Business

A. CEDS Meeting

The meeting was set for Conference Room "A" at 8 a.m. on October 24<sup>th</sup>. Guests to be invited include the Mayor, Board of Aldermen, Board of Finance, Planning and Zoning Board, Milford Chamber of Commerce Board, and MPI Board.

The meeting was adjourned at 9:35 a.m.

Respectfully submitted,  
Robert B. Gregory