

**APPROVED MINUTES** of the Budget  
Workshop of the City Council of the City of Rye held  
in City Hall on November 12, 2008 at 8:00 P.M.

PRESENT:

STEVEN OTIS, Mayor  
ANDREW C. BALL  
MACK CUNNINGHAM  
PAULA J. GAMACHE  
CATHERINE F. PARKER  
JOSEPH A. SACK  
Councilmembers

ABSENT: GEORGE S. PRATT

1. Pledge of Allegiance

Mayor Otis called the workshop to order at 8:05 p.m. and invited the Council to join in the Pledge of Allegiance.

2. Roll Call

Mayor Otis asked the City Clerk to call the roll; a quorum was present to conduct official city business.

3. Budget Workshop

Mayor Otis welcomed everyone to the second in a series of workshops on the proposed 2009 budget. He said the topics to be covered this evening include, Recreation, the Rye Youth Council, the Nature Center and Rye Town Park.

**Recreation** City Manager Shew said that Rye has a long history of providing recreational services and in the current tough economic times, more residents may be looking to utilize the programs offered by the Recreation Department. He then offered the floor to Doug French, the Chairman of the Recreation Commission and Sally Rogol, the Superintendent of Recreation. The Recreation Department covers almost 50% of its costs with revenue from programs and donations. Some programs, like the summer camp, recover 100% of their costs, while others, like the senior program, only return about 10%. The Rec is recognized for their quality programs, which are provided by a staff of nine full-time employees and approximately 200 seasonal employees. The “staycation” is the trend of the future and the Recreation Department is looking into how they can expand activities for residents. When people stay home they spend more money in the area, which benefits the rest of the community. The Department tries to set their fees to be appropriate to cover costs, but not so high as to price people out of participating. More people have been applying for scholarships in order to participate in

programs. The Department surveys other communities regarding pricing, but must be competitive in paying staff in order to keep good staff members. The Department has simplified its pricing structure in order to better market the Damiano Center space and increase usage. Special events revenue is down this year but attendance at many of these events is determined by weather, even though events must be planned as if they will take place in optimal conditions.

#### Senior Golf and Pool Program

The Recreation Commission developed a program to allow Seniors who belong to the Rye Senior's Organization to play golf and use the pool in accordance with the Social Membership protocol already in existence at the Rye Golf Club, by subsidizing the required fee. The program will run for 14 Thursdays from May through September. The Department is looking for ways to fund the program (approximately \$4,000) including a grant from Assemblyman Latimer's Office for \$2,000 and \$1,000 from a professional Recreation Association.

#### Questions and Comments by Council:

- Is it feasible to go forward with new field space on the Thruway property in these current economic times? (The user groups are on board and have put money aside to cover costs, but the Department must think creatively to fund the difference. The application to the State made the assumption that no City funds would be used, and a gap might have to be made up with donations.)
- How does the scholarship process work? (An application comes in along with a tax return and a down payment. The application is then, anonymously, put before the Commission for a decision.)
- It is important that scholarships are available for children who need them. (The Department is looking into a new model for scholarships, possibly a sliding scale for payments vs. partial payments.)
- Could anything be done to improve on the 47% of cost recovery? (By its Charter, the Department is only responsible for 40% recovery. Getting more use of the facility should equal more income. One way to get users back, who went elsewhere during the renovations to the Damiano Center, is to make the programs affordable.)
- The Department should look to the County in connection with the Senior Golf and Pool program to see if there is funding similar to the taxi voucher program.
- The Senior Golf/Pool Program should be tried for at least a year as a pilot program.

**Nature Center** City Manager Shew said the Nature Center is an example of a success story that looks better than ever and is now operated completely without municipal employees. He then introduced Russ Johnson, the Nature Center Director, to summarize that operation. The Nature Center provides services to 15,000 people a year, 95% of whom are Rye residents. The Friends of the Rye Nature Center match what the City provides (maintenance, plowing and electricity) with a \$450,000 budget. This year the Friends added a Sugar Shack to the property, as well as a scholarship program for inner-city children and a S.E.A.L. program for teens. In

connection with education, the Center seeks to be the “hands on” component for what is taught in the schools. They are currently planning for the 50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Celebration and raising money for a nature playground to be built on the grounds. Strategic planning goals include increasing programming and starting a capital campaign. 2007 was a break-even year and it looks like there will be a possible surplus in 2008. They are also looking into operating a deer program that involves fencing off four acres of the property in order to drive deer out and allow the forest to return to its natural state.

**Rye Town Park** The proposed 2009 amount (\$140,000) for the City’s contribution to Rye Town Park covers 2008 operations and is an average of the last three years budgets. Mayor Otis said he believed the amount should be much lower, closer to \$30,000. City Comptroller Genito said that the amount due from the City has not been under \$90,000 for the last three years, and, in lieu of a recent article in the newspaper which indicated that the Park would break even for the year and that the Town of Rye was reducing costs, we should make sure that Rye Town is not shifting costs to the City. Mr. Genito said he must book the amount for Rye Town Park at the end of the year based on his estimates, but that it is not a commitment to spend the money.

**Rye Youth Council** City Manager Shew said the City is suggesting the same base funding amount as 2008 and if Staid Aid comes in the budget can be amended.

**Southeast Consortium** City Manager Shew said that City belongs to this organization that provides recreational services for the disabled. The cost to the City involves payment of dues and allocation of a portion of Sally Rogol’s salary to cover her services to the group.

**Mayor Otis said the next budget workshop would be held on Monday, November 17, 2008, and would begin an hour earlier, at 7:00 p.m.**

4. **Adjournment**

There being no further business to discuss, Mayor Otis made a motion, seconded by Councilman Ball and unanimously carried, to adjourn the meeting at 10:25 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Dawn F. Nodarse  
City Clerk

