

Borough of Somerville

25 West End Avenue
Somerville, NJ 08876

Recreation Task Force Committee Report

Task Force members and responsibilities:

On November 10, 2014 Mayor Brian Gallagher called together a Recreation Commission Task Force comprising of borough residents Granville Brady, Jr., John Fabiano, Lucien (Luc) Sergile, Jr., Gina Stravic and then Council Liaison Amanda O'Neil.

The Mayor asked the task force to review and analyze the activities of the Somerville Recreation Commission to make recommendations to Council whether or not recreation services should remain the purview of a statutorily authorized recreation commission or be transferred administratively to a Borough department. The task force was encouraged to look at all aspects of recreation in Somerville with particular emphasis on financial management, personnel and programs.

The Task Force met approximately 24 hours over 8 sessions along with several personal meetings with the administrative staff and members of the Recreation commission. The Task Force embarked on a fact finding mission that included but not limited to:

1. Interviews with Recreation Director Kathy Gerndt, Commissioners Jason Kraska and Jay Scott, Administrator Kevin Sluka, finance Officer Dena Flynn, CMFO, Amanda O'Neill (Council liaison to Commission).
2. Documents and other resources reviewed included:
 - a. Recreation Commission meeting minutes
 - b. Annual budget
 - c. Financial information provided by Kevin Sluka
 - d. Power point presentation by Kevin Sluka
 - e. National Parks and Recreation website information
 - f. Administration of Public Recreation manual
3. Task force members attended a Recreation Commission meeting
4. Task force conducted a thorough Process Gap Analysis resulting in a weighted pro/con list to determine if recreation should remain under the auspices of a Commission or become a borough department.

Recent History of Recreation in Somerville:

The Somerville Recreation Commission has existed for many years. The revised ordinance Ch. 36 Ordinance #1080 was approved by Council on April 16, 1990 and reflected the NJ statute creating and enumerating the duties and powers of recreation commissions. The Commission has 7 members with up to 2 alternate members. Commissioners are appointed by the mayor for staggering terms of 1, 3 and 5 years. The Commission is responsible for hiring staff, operating recreation programs, collecting fees and other duties as required for the operation of a recreation program. The Commission has 4 working sub-committees including a finance committee and a personnel committee.

The recreation director is accountable to the Commission. The position was, for many years, filled by recreation director Frank Quinn. Upon his retirement 2 new directors were appointed that subsequently left employment after a short time. The present full time acting director is Kathy Gerndt who has been in the position less than a year. She has a part time assistant. Employee salaries are paid from the general revenue that allocates approximately \$125,000 annually. The Borough pays for liability insurance, employee health and benefits and maintenance of the parks as well. Other expenses are covered by the Recreation Trust account that is dependent upon revenue from program activities.

A Process GAP Analysis was conducted to review key areas of administration and operations with recommendations for improvement if needed.

- 1- Does the commission define objectives?

No annual written objectives required

Recommendation: Create and approve clear written annual objectives developed and approved by the Recreation Commission and distributed to Mayor and Council and other interested parties.

- 2- Is there a process to inform the council of the commissions' scope and long range plans?

Recommendation: Develop a 3-5 year strategic plan which incorporates periodic reviews/revisions

- 3- Is there a process to establish a sound financial fiscal plan to achieve recreation goals?

Recommendation: More transparency required. Need to review, track and manage an annual budget and develop a basic written financial plan. Furthermore the need to follow general accounting procedures is required and the institution of a computerized software program is recommended.

- 4- Does the board have a process to approve the budget and exert control over expenditures?
See 3
- 5- Is there a process to evaluate services in relation to objectives?
No written evaluations or surveys.
Recommendation: Consider written evaluation of programs. Consider conducting surveys of recreation needs of the community.
- 6- Is there a process to review the effectiveness of programs?
No written documentation provided
Recommendation: Consider written evaluation of existing recreation programs. Documented review and actions-- input into strategic plan. Provide as a public document.
- 7- Are policy making and executive functions defined?
Board should strive to maintain a working relationship with recreation director.
Recommendation: Board should clarify roles in a succinct job description with clear annual goals and objectives defined annually and measured with appropriate performance evaluation tools.
- 8- Are administrative details well defined?
See item#7
- 9- Does Commission have written policies?
Recommendation: Review Policies annually and input into the annual report.
- 10-Does the commission have by-Laws?
Not provided.
Recommendation: Unclear if they exist. If they do exist they must be reviewed/updated and given a 3-5 year re-review. If they do not exist they should be drafted.
- 11-Is there a process to appoint commissioners based on commission need and individual qualification?
Good process in place
Recommend appointments to assure diversification. Seek appropriate skill sets to satisfy the needs of the commission.

12-Is there a process to conduct committee meetings?

Good. Task force members attended a recreation commission meeting.

The meeting was held in an appropriate manner with

- i. Opinions discussed and shared
- ii. Cohesive strategy concluded
- iii. Agenda and meeting flow were observed

13-Does the commission have a cooperative relationship with Somerville Schools, YMCA, senior centers, and churches?

Unsure of contracts or contract custodians.

Recommendation: Contracts must be reviewed for specifics and contracts must be reviewed annually.

Discussion of Findings and Recommendations:

The Task Force members were impressed with the enthusiasm shown by Commission members. They seemed to be genuinely interested in providing quality recreation programs to the people of Somerville. A clear strength was that the Commission members are all volunteers that reside in Somerville. This is perhaps their greatest strength—committed volunteers.

While the GAP analysis found several areas needing improvement, especially in financial and personnel management, these do not seem to be overwhelming nor are they issues that could not be corrected with the assistance of the borough's administrative/financial staff and the of appointment new commissioners with specific skills sets. The National Parks and Recreation Association (NRPA) website, contacts in the NJ state NRPA, and other training opportunities can also provide resources to support change. Somerville is fortunate to have a widely diverse population including a highly education citizenry and enthusiastic community minded individuals. Their skills can and should be tapped.

Therefore the Task Force recommends that recreation services remain under the control of the Board of Recreation Commissioners. The Task Force further suggests that the information contained herein be shared with the Recreation Commissioners and that Council request the Recreation Commission to consider the Task Force's recommendations for improvement and submit a remediation plan to Council.

If Council concurs with these recommendations, Task Force members are willing to follow up with the Recreation Commission, as appropriate and report back to Recreation Commission Council liaison quarterly.