Bloomfield Parks and Recreation Committee
Meeting Minutes

There was a meeting of the above-mentioned committee held on **Monday, April 6, 2026, at 5:00 pm.**

Committee members present: Louis Blumenfeld, Nazy Fayaz-Shoucair, Paula Jones, Shenda James
Absent: None
Others: David Melesko, Director of Parks, Recreation and Leisure Services, Matthew Mace, Assistant Director of Parks, Recreation and Leisure Services, Peter Russell, Michelle Kraczowski

I. Call to Order

The meeting was called to order at 5:01pm by Chair Louis Blumenfeld.

II. Approval of Agenda

The agenda was reviewed. Additions were made, including the FY27 Proposed Budget discussion. The agenda was approved as amended.

III. Approval of Previous Meeting Minutes

The minutes from the previous meeting (February/March) were reviewed. Minor corrections were noted. A motion was made, seconded, and carried to approve the minutes as corrected.

IV. Old Business / Updates

A. Rockwell Project Update David Melesko provided an update on the Rockwell project. The application is currently in the Inland Wetlands review process (initial submission March 16). It will proceed to public notice with the meeting being held on April 20. Core drilling samples were taken; results will be reviewed at the upcoming commission meeting. The project remains in the permitting phase with continued meetings.

B. La Salette Invasives Management Update Public Works deployed a brush hog at La Salette this week and plans to use it at Wilcox and the Park School complex. Ron Pitts marked trees to be saved. The Cummins volunteer group is scheduled to return on April 22 to assist with follow-up work. Paula and Peter provided additional details on site conditions and progress.

C. Maplewood Open Space – Riparian Enhancement Project Michelle Kraczowski presented a comprehensive proposal to enhance the Maplewood Open Space area (~10 acres), focusing on riparian buffer improvement through native tree and shrub planting, stream habitat assessment, reduced mowing, and creation of a more wildlife-friendly meadow/shrubland.

Long-term vision elements include possible bridge restoration (leveraging Central Connecticut State University engineering students), community engagement, walking paths, and potential future amenities (e.g., pavilion – noted as very long-term and subject to neighborhood input).

The project requires no immediate town funding:

- Trees and initial planting costs can be covered by the Farmington River Watershed Association (FRWA).
- Baseline stream monitoring can be done at minimal or no cost.
- Grants and volunteers (including Tree Keepers and community members) will be pursued.
- Michelle is coordinating with town staff (Dave Melesko, Nick Gabuzda, Peter Castaldi, Rob Tartier – Town Engineer) on permits and wetland considerations.

Committee members praised the thoughtful, science-based approach and community engagement. A motion was made by Paula Jones and seconded by Shenda James to approve/support the proposal and grant permission to proceed with planning, permitting, tree planting, and habitat assessment. The motion passed unanimously.

V. New Business

A. FY27 Proposed Budget – Major Reductions to Parks, Recreation and Leisure Services David Melesko presented the Town Manager's proposed FY27 budget for the department, which represents a significant 41.39% reduction from the requested maintenance-level budget of $1,493,599 down to $820,414.

Key impacts if approved as proposed:

- Reduction of full-time positions from 4 to 2 (eliminating Assistant Director and Administrative Analyst II – Recreation Coordinator).
- Total elimination of the school-year budget, resulting in closure of the Alvin & Beatrice Wood Human Services Center for evenings/weekends after August. This would eliminate ~6,290 programming hours and affect ~5,575 participants, plus after-school, instructional, health & wellness programs, special events, and facility rentals.
- 95.5% reduction in the pool budget (only $11,750 for building maintenance retained), meaning the Bloomfield Municipal Pool would not open for Summer 2026. This eliminates ~6,250 pool visits, Learn to Swim for ~700 participants, pavilion rentals (~10 events), and ~30 summer youth positions.
- Elimination of ~15 year-round part-time positions and all aquatic staff.
- Town-wide special events (Memorial Day, summer concerts, Food Truck Festival, Juneteenth 5K, Holiday Light Up the Town, etc.) would be severely impacted due to lack of staffing, even if some funding lines remain.
- Parks budget remains largely intact but capital improvements were not funded.

David emphasized that the two eliminated full-time positions oversee the majority of programming, staff supervision, special events, parks planning, and compliance. Without adequate staffing, even funded events cannot be executed. He plans to present these impacts clearly at the Town Council budget meeting on Wednesday, April 8, 2026, at 6:30 PM in Council Chambers (also available via Zoom).

Discussion followed regarding potential alternatives (e.g., self-sustaining programs via user fees/revolving account, as done in other towns like South Windsor and Simsbury), volunteer

support limitations (liability, consistency), and the broader effects on the community. Committee members stressed the importance of public attendance and feedback at upcoming budget hearings.

B. Forest Stewardship Plan After discussion it was moved by Paula Jones, seconded by Nazy Fayaz-Shoucair, and passed unanimously.

C. Naming of the Bloomfield Greenway after Joe Merritt Sharon Manns previously requested support for naming the Bloomfield section of the East Coast Greenway (multi-use trail from Tyler Street to Blue Hills Avenue) in honor of Joseph Merritt, a long-time advocate and former CEEC attendant. The Trails Committee and Conservation, Energy & Environment Committee (CEEC) have already supported the request. Joe Merritt has expressed his approval.

A motion was made and seconded to support the naming request and refer it to the Governance, Policy & Economic Development Subcommittee for further review (per Town policy, including a required public hearing). A motion to support this request was made by Paula Jones, seconded by Shenda James, and passed unanimously. Minutes and supporting letters will be forwarded.

C. Save Our Parks Volunteer Initiative (Sharon Mann's / Beautification Committee) Discussion on a proposal to establish an ongoing volunteer program for park beautification, invasive management, and maintenance across multiple parks, coordinated with the department. The concept aims to supplement (not replace) town efforts, leverage volunteers, and potentially reduce long-term costs.

Concerns included budget for supplies/tools (~$6,000 total), need for strong departmental oversight on priorities, and alignment with the Forest Stewardship Plan.

A motion was made by Nazy Fayaz-Shoucair and seconded by Paula Jones to endorse the Save Our Parks initiative, with the condition that all activities be coordinated through the Parks Department and guided by the Forest Stewardship Plan. The motion passed unanimously.

VI. Department Reports (February & March)

Matthew Mace and staff provided brief updates on ongoing operations, noting preparations for summer despite budget uncertainty. Hiring interviews for lifeguards and seasonal staff were paused pending budget clarity. The department is proceeding with "Plan A" (status quo) while preparing contingencies.

VII. Public Comments

No members of the public were present or provided comments.

VIII. Adjournment

A motion was made, seconded, and carried to adjourn the meeting at 6:29pm.