

MINUTES OF THE SPECIAL COMMITTEE OF THE WHOLE MEETING HELD ON  
DECEMBER 7, 2010 AT 6:30 P.M. AT MEMORIAL PARK

Committee Members Present: Fred Bilotto, John Murphy, John Spizzirri, Raeann Zylman, and Joanne Ring

Committee Members Absent : None

Park Staff Members Present: Jane Kawanna, Mark DeRango, Chris Sobczak, Chris Hobson, Tina Morin

Others present: Carol Kaiser, Gerald Hall, Tommy Brown, Carmine Bilotto, Charlotte Westcott, Elaine Lentz, Stephanie Bilotto, Louie Gallo, Roberto Sarli, Dexter Johnson

Commissioner Bilotto called the meeting to order at 6:30 pm. First item on the agenda is the Santa House. Chris Hobson stated that the first few days of the Santa House has been slow. He feels that as more people find out about it, business will pick up. Commissioner Zylman asked if the Santa House is on our website. Chris Hobson stated that the 12 Parks of Christmas is on the website. Commissioner Zylman suggested putting a sheet in the Santa House for names and email addresses so that we could get a more accurate count for next year to see how many actually used the Santa House. Commissioner Spizzirri felt that the Santa House has not been properly advertised. Commissioner Spizzirri felt that the Santa House should be headlined on the website. Will Cazares should be spending time each day working on the website. Commissioner Zylman would like to contact the maker of the website to update some features on it. Jane Kawanna suggested that now may be a good time to do that because the park district is more aware of their needs than they were when the website was first put in place. Commissioner Zylman will set up a meeting with the web designer. Commissioner Spizzirri would like to add videos to the website.

Commissioner Spizzirri discussed the Polar Express. Chris Hobson stated that he is finalizing the volunteers for Polar Express. Commissioner Spizzirri stated that it is important to keep the children busy while on the train. Commissioner Zylman discussed the music. One of the train cars last year had a better music system. Chris Hobson discussed a few options for music this year. Commissioner Zylman volunteered to have children from her school assemble coloring books like they did with Lunch with Santa. Commissioner Spizzirri wants Commissioner Zylman to get a camcorder to record the event from start to finish for posting to the website. Chris Hobson stated that this week they are assembling the bags, program books, and finishing touches. Jane Kawanna inquired about how the decorating was done last year. Commissioners Spizzirri and Zylman informed her of last year's set up at the Rail Grill. Jane Kawanna stated that she and Tina Morin would be at the Rail Grill to decorate the morning of the Polar Express and would be taking care of distributing the hot chocolate. Maintenance would be bringing over the wooden decorations and the Santa Sleigh. Tina Morin suggested having the Polar Express cups at the Rail Grill and that we could fill them right before the train pulls in. That way there would not be a long line for hot chocolate.

Commissioner Spizzirri began discussion of the Ice Rink. The general consensus between maintenance, staff and commissioners is that if the weather continues as it is the Ice Rink will be opening ahead of schedule. Chris Hobson has composed a schedule after January 1, 2011 which is the officially advertised opening of the Ice Rink. The schedule includes, lifeguards, maintenance, Will Cazares and Chris Hobson. Maintenance has already installed the windows. Skate rentals will be \$1.00 and skates in larger sizes need to be purchased. Commissioner Zylman stated that if we put lifeguards there we would have to pay them. Jane Kawanna stated that

whomever you put there is getting paid. She feels that salaried persons get paid too much to staff the Ice Rink. Commissioner Zylman stated that each person who is normally here 40 hours per week should spend part of their time working at the Ice Rink that way no additional money is being paid. She also stated that 2 district 130 schools will be collecting shoes for the "Share your Soles" program so that we can exchange them for ice skates.

Commissioner Bilotto began discussion of the Tax Levy. He asked what the pleasure of the board was for the Tax Levy. Commissioner Bilotto stated that the tax levy is not raising taxes. It is the percentage that we want to levy for taxes. He gave an example that School District 130 is levying 25% for taxes. They will not get 25% because the county will not give it to them. The county determines what amount we will get on the levy. We can throw any number out there but will only get what the county gives us. Commissioner Bilotto stated that we have gone for a 4.9% increase for the last few years. Commissioner Zylman asked why we didn't just go with 4.9% this year. Jane Kawanna stated that she asked the commissioners if they had any objection to the 5.04% and no one responded to her stated that there were any objections. Jane Kawanna explained that last year, the park district levied 4.9%, but the park district did not receive \$18,000 of that levy. Commissioner Bilotto stated that because of all the foreclosures no matter what we levy we will probably be getting less than last year. Jane Kawanna explained the various pages of the commissioner's packets, showing them the levies since 2006. She explained that you must increase the levy to account for properties perhaps that may be coming into Blue Island, increase in property values, new construction etc. or those amounts will be lost forever. Commissioner Bilotto stated that Olympia Fields Park District is levying a 60% increase for 2010. This is something we do every year. If we don't levy, we have no tax income to run the park district on. Jane Kawanna explained also that the taxes are based on the assessed value. If the assessments go down, so will the amount the park district collects.

Commissioner Spizzirri stated that he did not appreciate the way that the levy went down and that it was not explained properly. Nothing was mentioned about an increase, only those funds were being moved from the Recreation Fund to the General Fund. Commissioner Bilotto explained that the levy is a separate issue from the overage in the Recreation Fund. Commissioner Bilotto stated several times that the levy is not an increase. You cannot raise taxes in Illinois without a referendum because of the tax caps. Commissioner Spizzirri asked why Jane Kawanna put the article in the paper stating that it was an increase. Commissioner Bilotto stated that it is legal language required by law if the tax levy is more than 5%. Jane Kawanna stated that past boards always published the levy, but the past board did not. It is only legally required to be in the paper if levy is more than 5%. Commissioner Zylman explained that the general public is looking at it as an increase. Commissioner Bilotto and Jane Kawanna both explained that taxes must be levied and that the information must be sent to Cook County before the last Tuesday in December. We must vote on this issue next Wednesday so there is ample time to do the things required by law. Jane Kawanna stated that this levy will set next year's budget. Whatever is levied here will determine what can be spent next year. Jane Kawanna explained to Commissioner Murphy that our General Fund has a \$223,000 deficit and that we need to fix it. Commissioner Murphy stated that all our maintenance comes out of the General Fund. Jane Kawanna stated that the accountant has been notified that we are in need of some changes in the way we account for maintenance.

Commissioner Bilotto opened the floor to the public for input on the levy. Elaine Lentz is against raising taxes. Charlotte Westcott doesn't feel that taxes should be raised and that her taxes should not go up because of those people who are in foreclosure. Roberto Sarli asked if this is an annual procedure. Commissioner Bilotto stated that every taxing body must levy taxes and file with the county by the last Tuesday in December or they will receive no tax revenue. Roberto Sarli stated that the park district has been able to balance their finances very well and feel that they should

just continue what they have done in the past. Elaine Lentz asked about the \$900,000 cushion that was in the bank. Commissioner Bilotto stated that the money was still there, but that we will be expending that money on the stadium and Centennial Park. She also questioned as to whether we are over budget. Commissioner Bilotto stated that right now, we are not over budget.

Commissioner Bilotto stated that grants do not pay for stadiums because they do not have multi-recreational uses. All money for the stadium is out of pocket. Carmine Bilotto stated that the levy is a projection and that you don't receive the full amount of the projection because there are many factors involved in the calculation. Jane Kawanna stated that if the tax assessments are going down, the amount of money we get will be going down. Commissioner Murphy stated that we need to economize and asked Elaine Lentz to monitor the park district's spending. Jane Kawanna also explained that the dollar amount of the new proposed levy is less than the dollar amount for last year. Commissioner Spizzirri stated that he did not want this park district to shut down as in the past. In order to maintain things and address the needs of the community, the park district has to levy taxes. Roberto Sarli stated that he understood that the park district needed to levy taxes but that we should do so responsibly. Elaine Lentz thinks that the park district has done a great job providing services for Christmas. The park district may need to tell the children no sometimes. The park district needs to distinguish between wants and needs. Elaine Lentz asked who determined how much to ask for on the levy. Jane Kawanna stated that she did the levy. Elaine Lentz asked did you have commissioner input. Jane Kawanna stated that she did the levy based on the needs of the park. The commissioners all received copies on November 10, 2010 and were given one week to review and forward any corrections to her. No commissioners responded, therefore, the levy went as prepared. The levy was also explained at the meeting on the 10<sup>th</sup> that if we stayed with the 5.04%, there would have to be a public hearing. Commissioner Spizzirri thought that we were only transferring funds from the Recreation Fund to the General Fund. Charlotte Westcott stated that there was a hidden agenda. Commissioner Ring stated that she takes offense to that statement. Commissioner Bilotto asked what the committee wanted to do. Commissioner Spizzirri asked if he wanted a figure right now. Commissioner Bilotto stated that the committee has to come up with a levy or there will be no taxes collected and the park district will have no tax income for next year. Commissioner Spizzirri asked Commissioner Ring what she thought we should levy. Commissioner Spizzirri felt that he was being put on the spot to come up with a percentage for the levy. Commissioner Spizzirri asked the public what they thought should be levied. Commissioner Bilotto stated that we should just levy 0 then. Commissioner Ring agreed. Carol Kaiser interjected that you cannot levy 0. The park district needs to have some funds to operate. Roberto Sarli suggested that we should levy the same as last year, monitor it, and see what is necessary for next year. He appreciates that the citizens are being heard on this issue. Carmine Bilotto stated it is the board's responsibility to ask the questions relating to the levy. Commissioner Spizzirri felt that the levy was crammed down the other commissioner's throats. Mrs. Lentz stated that she heard at the last meeting that they were only transferring fees. Commissioner Bilotto stated that those were 2 different issues. Commissioner Murphy made a strong recommendation that we levy 4.9% and that the public monitor the spending of the board. Jane Kawanna stated that we would need to have a Special Board Meeting on the 15<sup>th</sup> before the Committee of the Whole Meeting. She asked if we were going go with Commissioner Murphy's recommendation. Elaine Lentz complimented the persons who worked so hard on bringing back the Santa House and doing the decorations for the parade and park district. Commissioner Ring stated that the park district staff did a wonderful job. Elaine Lentz stated that there were commissioners involved also. Commissioner Murphy stated that we cannot keep our fields maintained and purchase soccer fields without money. Commissioner Spizzirri stated that the committee just pitted the constituents against each other because Mrs. Lentz is stating 0% and Mr. Sarli is stating 4.9%. Mrs. Lentz stated that she meant the same levy as always. Commissioner Bilotto clarified that we will be getting a lot less than 4.9%, probably less than last year. Commissioner Murphy stated that we need to get grants. Commissioner Bilotto

stated that the stadium is so far behind because the archeologist put a stop work order because we found hundreds of bones. The committee agreed at 4.9%. Jane Kawanna stated that the Special Board Meeting would be on the 15<sup>th</sup> at 7pm, followed by a Committee of the Whole meeting at 7:15pm. Roberto Sarli was glad that the committee allowed all to residents present to speak and hopes that this practice will continue.

Commissioner Bilotto stated that he received a request from The Tommy Brown Association for \$1000 or 200 toys to give away at a Christmas Toy Giveaway at the Santa House on the 12<sup>th</sup>. Commissioner Bilotto stated that he did not promise Tommy Brown anything. He stated that he would present the letter at the committee meeting. Commissioner Spizzirri stated that the staff has already committed money out of their own pocket to provide gifts for a needy family and that we have already given school supplies for back to school. Commissioner Murphy stated that we have a short fall in our taxes. Commissioner Bilotto stated that we donate 200 toys. Commissioner Zylman offered to make coloring books. Alderman Johnson stated that they did not have to spend \$1000 on toys; something is better than nothing. Commissioner Spizzirri asked what Chief of Staff, Jane Kawanna thought. She felt that the staff does not have time to wrap gifts. Commissioner Spizzirri agrees. Elaine Lentz asked if we get a lot of requests like this. We should choose our donations wisely. She feels we have done enough. Commissioner Spizzirri and Commissioner Zylman stated that Tommy Brown received back to school supplies and District 130 did not. Commissioner Ring stated that we should do something. These are children we are talking about. Commissioner Bilotto stated that we should get 200 inexpensive gifts. Jane Kawanna suggested that we give them \$200 and Tommy Brown can shop. The committee wanted a \$200 check to the location of their choice. Commissioner Spizzirri stated that we should give 200 daily pool passes. Commissioner Zylman added and a candy cane. Commissioner Bilotto stated clarified: 200 daily pool passes and a candy cane. Jane Kawanna stated that that would be \$1000.00 in income. Commissioner Bilotto informed the committee that these passes were \$1000 in income. The committee agreed.

Committee adjourned at 8:25 PM

Approved:

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Fred Bilotto, Chairperson