

Y/Rec Center Transition Meeting

June 26, 2019

3:30pm to 5pm

Present: Shannon Barsotti, Al Bashevkin, Sarah Callanan, Jeanne Conner, Carrie Fabricius, Stu Hurd, Eleanor Madison, Andrea Malinowski, Betsy Rathbun-Gunn, Jessie Rumlow, Greg Sellei, and Beth Wallace.

1. Update on New Programs at the Rec Center and Senior Center.

Highlights include:

- Jessie Rumlow distributed a packet outlining new programming and scheduling.
- Adult swim lessons with support of Master Swim Group. This is based on a grant-funded model used at other Berkshire Y locations. Parent-Child swim lessons also rolling out this weekend. Many grandparents are bringing the children to swim lessons, representing a target audience for the Y.
- Morgan is going to begin teaching two Water Aerobics classes while Andrea takes a break from instructing. Taylor has been Group Fitness and Silver Sneakers certified, Morgan has been attending trainings at Berkshire Y locations.
- Taylor is kicking off Silver Sneakers programming and will be piloting a Eat Smart, Spend Smart program.
- Taylor initiated a bootcamp fitness class at Willow Park. Free for members, non-members have the option of purchasing a \$35 punch card. Many participants have chosen to become members, a goal for the Y/Rec Center staff.
- Lunch break workout – 30 minutes, 3 times/wk (Monday, Wednesday, Friday). Slow to start, but the hope is that increased outreach will improve attendance.
- Adult Kickball League - \$40/team. 4 hours on a couple of Saturdays over the summer, beginning in July.
- Camp Green Mountain is underway and began Monday, June 23rd. Preregistration required. Enrollment has been great and is over 55 children per week. Drop off is 7:30am and pickup is 5:30pm. Children as young as five years can attend and this is one of the only full-day camps in Bennington that is conducive to working parents' schedules.
- Thirty-six four to seven-year olds participated in T-Ball. Surveys were distributed and data should be available by next meeting. This was a good turn out for the first season.

Andrea Malinowski recognized that Morgan and Taylor are very mature and have brought energy, professionalism and initiative to their positions.

Al asked how families are informed of all the new opportunities. Jessie talked about utilizing the Town, Rec Center and Berkshire Y Facebook pages. It was suggested to advertise in schools and doctor's offices. Another suggestion was adding events to the Bennington Banner Community Calendar and Front Porch Forum.

Al asked if participation crosses socioeconomic lines. Jessie reported that the cost for camp (\$80 per week) is very affordable for families, in addition to scholarship opportunities. Currently six children attend camp on scholarship. No families requested scholarship for the T-Ball program, which cost \$20 for three weeks. The cost of Kids Night Out (\$5 per child) was also affordable for families and only one family was funded.

Jessie reiterated that the goal is “affordable for all.” There have been occasional offers from donors to sponsor child participation. The scholarships that have been offered to date have been made available from the campaigns in North Adams and Pittsfield.

Jessie spoke to next long-term steps, including possible extending from a one-year management contract to a three-year contract. Jessie does not want the Y involvement at the Rec Center and Senior Center to be seen as a “take-over” but instead as a community partner that is expected to be at the table. The hope is that the focus can move from fear about pricing and loss of control to how the Y can be integrated into the community and bring services and opportunities.

The idea was shared that perhaps Jessie’s update to the Select Board could include an explanation of “what is a management contract? And what is it NOT?”

Jessie explained the differences in contracts with Bennington versus North Adams. The North Adams contract exists much more like a lease, while the agreement with Bennington is based on **partnership** with the Town. Jeanne suggested sharing examples of these sort of partnerships between towns and Y’s in other communities. Betsy offered that Y-Head Start partnerships are very common nation-wide.

2. Update on the UCS Expansion at the Rec Center

Betsy presented the latest floor plans for the first floor and basement with the new UCS addition at the Rec Center. She discussed how the UCS space will provide shared uses for the community, such as a new playground available after school hours, a multipurpose community room and bathrooms after school hours, and a community café adjacent to the new Rec Center/UCS reception area. Head Start programs at the new addition will also introduce more children and families to Rec Center/Y programs and to the neighboring community garden. UCS will be adding a children’s learning kitchen to teach kids about cooking with their garden produce.

Pulse Meetings: These will be bimonthly meetings beginning on August 21 at 5:30 p.m. at the Senior Center. Pulse meetings will offer the opportunity for community members, Rec Center members and stakeholders to receive updates on construction and programming, improving transparency, and to ask questions and give feedback. Meetings will take place at the Senior Center every-other month and will be jointly facilitated by town, Y and UCH staff.

Jeanne asked if the new facility will free up space at existing Head Start facilities. Betsy explained that the presently leased River Road facility will transfer students, staff and furnishings to the Rec Center location, but that there will also be expanded staff and child slots in the new downtown location. It was clarified that the North Bennington Head Start/Early Head Start campus will remain intact.

3. Communication Plan:

The town has heard the request for increased public input on programming and changes at the Rec Center and Senior Center. Pulse Meetings will help meet this goal. Another form of improved communication will be a new online newsletter that shares news and events from both the Rec Center and Senior Center.

Al shared his previous experiences working as the executive director at the Northern Berkshire Community Coalition in North Adams, where he created a popular newsletter. He suggested rethinking the Senior Center newsletter to include programming updates for the Rec Center, the Senior Center and the Town, a united calendar and articles describing new initiatives in more depth. Al will be working with Carrie Fabricius and Chris Barbagallo with the goal to have the newsletter available electronically by September 2019.

A first step is creating a database of email addresses. Email addresses are not presently requested from Rec Center members, but staff are slowly beginning to collect email contacts on various program applications. The committee should look to creative ways for collecting email contacts and building a more robust database. There are various community recreation groups who could assist with this task including RiseVT, BATS, Catamount Connections, etc.

Carrie shared the most recent Senior Center newsletter and described the challenges of putting together a three-month newsletter containing the most up to date information. She would appreciate the option to use Constant Contact for more timely announcements.

Al requested that folks reach out to him with ideas for building the database and interesting content.

Carrie had a meeting this morning with the directors of the Senior Centers in Grafton and Hoosick Falls and At Home Senior Care in Manchester to discuss coordinating programming. The Senior Center is open to all and there are no dues or memberships. Carrie is exploring partnerships to support seniors in skill development around technology.

Jeanne confirmed that the hospital is connected to these various initiatives. Jeanne brought up Bubble Ball as another fun kid's activity.

Al wondered whether there is an opportunity to inform the public of pertinent presentations prior to Select Board meetings. Stu explained that the press is provided the Select Board Agenda at about the same time the Select Board members receive their packets. Shannon suggested that she can put together a press release about the Town/YMCA partnership when we have more clarity about the long-term plan and to announce the new community newsletter.

The Transition Committee will meet again on September 25, and will then roll into the ongoing, scheduled Pulse Meetings.