

Community Services and Recreation

DRAFT MINUTES/APPROVED

To: Community Services Commission Members

From: Edward J. Swinkoski, Director of Community Services and Recreation

Re: Tuesday, March 6, 2012 Special Meeting of the Commission

Meeting was called to order at 5:34p.m.

Attendance:

Present: Lou Criscuolo, Marc Fasano, Paul Kottage, Jim Marshall, Christine Orris.

Absent: Donna Malley, Krista Polinsky.

Staff: Michael J. Freda, First Selectman

Edward J. Swinkoski, Director of Community Services and Recreation

Carla Riccio, Secretary

Trudy Higgins, MS, VP of Community Services, BHcare

Beth Gaillard, MSW, Prevention Specialist, BHcare

1. Acceptance of Minutes of meeting held on February 7, 2012:

In the unapproved meeting minutes, Christine Orris was not listed as present at the February 7th meeting. Ms. Riccio indicated that Mrs. Orris would be added to the attendance. Lou Criscuolo made a motion to accept the Minutes of February 7, 2012 as corrected, seconded by Christine Orris.

2. Old Business: *Child Abuse Awareness efforts*

At the February 7th meeting, Mr. Freda indicated that he and Mr. Swinkoski would meet with a BHcare (formerly Harbor Health) in order to map out exactly what they can do to train the counselors in the Department of Community Services and to implement a 800 number as a starting platform of action. At this meeting, additional ideas of raising awareness of Child Abuse were discussed.

Marc Fasano provided the commission with a summary of what was discussed at that meeting, which took place on February 21st which included Mr. Freda, Ed Swinkoski, Trudy Higgins from BHcare, Ray Fowler and Carla Riccio. The goal of the meeting was to propose ideas and begin coordinating efforts to raise awareness of Child Abuse Prevention in the Town of North Haven.

Mr. Fasano indicated that the proposed ideas to raise awareness in Town included bringing educational components to the community through the expertise of BHcare; specifically educating the community and raising awareness of types of abuse, providing and promoting resources and support services that are available to parents, as well as supply contact information and places to turn.

In addition to the educating the Community, BHcare would be able to act as a support to the Town counselors through the Department of Community Services, providing necessary trainings and professional network of support if any cases present themselves.

In order to promote these educational outreach efforts, local media can be utilized including placing educational spots (signs of abuse, what to look for, who to call, raising general awareness). In order to promote general awareness, the idea had been proposed to place a sign on the community bulletin board

promoting Child Abuse Awareness month located on the corner of the Town Green, surrounded by blue pinwheels to attract attention.

Mr. Fasano commented that the hope would be to create this strong awareness not only during the month of April, but also ongoing throughout the year; setting an example to other communities.

He clarified that this initiative would need to be introduced in phases. First to ensure the infrastructure in place within the Town, then to present this to the Board of Education. The goal would be to have an open line of communication between the counselors at the schools and Community Services, as well as to provide training for the students (also to work through the DARE Program).

Mr. Marshall asked for clarification that the money in the Outreach Fund would be made available to support these initiatives if necessary, to which it was indicated that it would be available, and applied when the need is identified.

Mr. Freda asked the commission if they had any other ideas, thoughts or suggestions. Some of the suggestions that the commissioners came up with included looking into feasibility of having a billboard donated for the month in order to promote the program, reaching out to businesses such as Big Y who has a scrolling message board in their store, identifying other stores with strategic signage that could be utilized, reaching out to the Board of Education in order to get the messaging out to the students in the schools, and creating promotional spots on NHTV. Mr. Freda indicated that he would follow up with Walter Mann regarding getting these spots produced and placed on the air. Signage for the corner of the North Haven green will be developed in an effort to promote as well.

Mr. Fasano reviewed his ideas of proposed signage graphics (pinwheels, or children holding hands) and messaging (*April is Child Abuse Awareness Month; North Haven Stands up for Children*) ideas for the sign to be placed on the green. He also explained how the pinwheels will be placed in the ground, surrounding the sign in order to draw attention to the sign. Ms. Riccio will coordinate the details surrounding the creation and placement of the sign.

Mr. Freda indicated that the hope is to sustain the momentum after April. In order to do this, he would like to have someone from DCF come down and film a half hour NHTV spot regarding this topic (what the signs are, what to do), which can run ongoing throughout the year. Ms. Riccio will reach out to DCF to identify a representative who can perform this interview with Mr. Freda. Once a representative has been identified and has agreed to do this, Mr. Freda will work on coordinating the interview with DCF and NHTV.

Public Comment:

Col. Ray Fowler began by expressing his delight and amazement on how this initiative has taken on a life of its own. Col. Fowler recounted two incidents where a resident (who was abused as a child) approach him in the community and commended him on this initiative, indicating that they wish this was done when they were a child.

Col. Fowler indicated that it was not too long following the Board of Selectmen meeting, that three major incidents of child abuse have been covered in the media. One of these incidents was highlighted by Col. Fowler.

The incident took place in Georgia, where a 9-year-old girl named Savannah Hardin's was run to death by her grandmother and stepmother for allegedly lying about a candy bar that she ate. He indicated that authorities indicated that this child died from exhaustion after she was forced to run for three hours. The grandmother prodded her along cruelly, and the stepmother didn't intervene until Savannah collapsed in an unconscious heap, investigators say. Both have been charged with murder.

Col. Fowler utilized this opportunity to promote his "Candy Bar Campaign" in which he has been passing out candy bars in memory of Savannah Hardin, the 11-year old girl who was killed by her grandmother and step mother for eating a candy bar. He will continue to hand out candy bars throughout the month of March. He is doing so in memory of her, and to remind everyone how vital North Haven's child abuse prevention program is. The cost of the candy bars will be entirely funded by Fowler, and his wife, Sallie.

Each candy bar has a label across the front of it, "*In Memory of Savannah Hardin – The Candy Bar Campaign.*"

Col. Fowler had an interview with the North Haven Citizen regarding this candy bar campaign and the article will appear in the next couple of weeks.

Col. Fowler also indicated that he has an appointment scheduled to meet with Superintendent Cronin on Monday, March 12th. The intentions of Col. Fowler is to give Dr. Cronin an overview of efforts, seek his support in this initiative, and communicate his intentions of moving ahead with the Board of Education in the near future.

6. Adjournment:

Lou Criscuolo made a Motion to Adjourn, seconded by Paul Kottage. The meeting was adjourned at 6:12 p.m.