

SPECIAL TOWN MEETING

Town of Bethany

March 27, 2025, at 7:00 P.M.

The meeting was called to order at 7:05 p.m. by First Selectwoman Paula Cofrancesco. There were approximately 60 people in attendance. Everyone stood for the Pledge of Allegiance.

Before beginning the meeting, Paula Cofrancesco gave thanks to Jenn Cafasso for setting up the new media equipment in the gym today. She also recognized the work of the Parks & Recreation Commission and stated that the Bethany Hoops program was very successful.

Paula Cofrancesco made a motion, seconded by Amy Lestinsky, to nominate Steven Thornquist as moderator. There were no further nominations. Steven Thornquist was elected moderator by a unanimous voice vote.

The moderator welcomed the assembly and outlined meeting procedures. He then gave the floor to members of the Parks and Recreation Commission, who gave a brief PowerPoint presentation.

Jennifer Galik, Parks & Recreation Commission chair – Introduced other members present: Dave Pecoraro, Emily Meredith-Stein, Jaime Guthrie, and Patricia Ryan. A petition was circulated by almost 100 residents asking for a vote on the before and after school program. The Board of Selectmen voted to add a footnote about licensing. At a later meeting the board decided to send the question to referendum and incorporate the footnote information into the question.

Emily Meredith-Stein – The Office of Early Childhood (OEC) regulates childcare programs in the state. There are four different types of licenses. Towns are not required to license, but can choose to do so. A town-run program would likely fall under Youth Camp or Childcare Center.

Jennifer Galik – There are two handouts in front. One shows all the licensed childcare centers and the other lists those that are exempt. There are at least 40 towns that run before and after school care and none have a state license. Programs can still be run with high quality and high standards.

Jenn Cafasso – The town has not been pursuing licensing without a director. OEC said we could run the program under a Youth Camp license. QVHD needs to evaluate the annex after repairs are complete. The Fire Marshal has already done a safety inspection. The new director is starting on April 7. Policies and procedures will coincide with licensing requirements. Professional development now required for director and a records system will be created to ensure compliance. A community member recently asked, “You had a director before and you thought everything was fine, what’s makes this different?” This time there will be an active Park and Rec Commission to provide oversight plus HR and Selectmen internal checks and balances. Town is going file for a state license. OEC said we can be licensed, but towns are not a priority since they are exempt.

Jennifer Galik – Have a very committed commission with relevant expertise. Plan to maintain OEC standards regardless of licensing status. Except for director’s salary, programs will be self-sustaining. Hope to eventually be a revenue generating department.

Dave Pecoraro – We maintained same cost as last year due to expected full collection of fees.

The moderator opened the meeting up for general discussion and questions.

Emily Meredith Stein – Commission member but asking as a citizen. Concerned about the wording of the question. If the answer is yes – is town prohibited from licensing? If no, then do we have to outsource to a third party with a license?

Paula Cofrancesco – My hope is that the question will pass. The program will be run with licensed standards. The phrase was put in due to note, since it could not be listed separately on the ballot.

Robert Brinton Jr. – The Board of Selectmen wanted the question and note, but it was not allowed by the town attorney. The intent was not to change the meaning of the question, but just to provide the information in the note. I interpret a yes vote as not requiring an unlicensed program.

Emily Meredith Stein – Someone who wants a licensed program might read the question and think they should vote no.

S.T.M. – March 27, 2025 – Citizen Petition 2: Parks & Recreation

Steven Thornquist – Can the town attorney clarify what happens if the question is passed or not?

Vincent Marino, Town Attorney – The petition asked a simple question about before and after school care. The Selectmen were concerned that many unaware it is an unlicensed, unregulated program. If you vote yes, the town can run before and after school care. If you vote no, there is no program immediately. The licensing timeline is outside of town control. Town would have to get a license first and it could be 6-12 months.

Steven Thornquist – If you vote yes, the town can run an unlicensed program now, and license later. If you vote no, the town must license first, before running a program. You can't put explanatory material on the ballot.

Jaime Guthrie – If vote is no, who has authority if Parks and Rec is licensed?

Steven Thornquist – The town can either hire someone externally with a license to run it or Parks and Rec Commission, through the director, can seek a license.

Vincent Marino – Licensing may need to also go through the budget process and involve the Board of Finance if additional funds are needed.

Kathi Ellison – From the handouts, it appears that in other towns that have programs, the majority fall under the Board of Ed. Why in Bethany are we proposing under Park and Rec?

Vincent Marino – Statute exempts both Board of Ed and municipally-run programs.

Kathi Ellison – If run by Board of Ed, is it staffed with people who already have credentials?

Jenn Cafasso – Most schools that filed exemptions were for programs such as enrichment camps.

James Stirling – Thank you to Park and Rec group for a tremendous job. In the proposal for next year's budget there is only the director's salary. In previous years there was a director and assistant director. Has the \$165,000 line item been reduced to just the director's salary?

Sharon Huxley, Board of Finance chair – Park & Rec Department also manages facilities in town, so there are administration costs beyond the director's salary. Every program is expected to pay for itself. A no vote may affect the budget if licensing is desired.

James Stirling – Of the 40 towns running a program, are any in surrounding towns?

Jennifer Galik – Southbury, Brookfield, Brooklyn, Madison, Easton and Redding are some towns that run programs. Woodbridge is run by the school system. Orange uses an outsource company. Some towns use the YMCA.

Alex Hutchinson – Will the presentation be posted on the town website?

Jenn Cafasso – Yes, it will go on the town website. This meeting is also being livestreamed on the Town Clerk's YouTube channel.

Dave Pecoraro – A no vote does not automatically mean there will be a licensing effort.

Sean Warner – We need to publish what a yes or no vote means or go back to the original question. We should vote in a town meeting, not a referendum.

Vincent Marino – Authorization for explanatory text must come from the Board of Selectmen.

Steven Thornquist – Proponents can publicize on Facebook pages to educate voters.

Paula Cofrancesco – I wanted to vote tonight. The referendum will cost more money. We need to move forward.

Gary MacNamara – The commission did a very good job and is thinking toward the future. The unlicensed part of the question may prejudice people.

S.T.M. – March 27, 2025 – Citizen Petition 2: Parks & Recreation

Kathryn Sylvester – Are we are moving towards licensure, regardless of the vote? I received 30 voter intimidation complaints from the last town meeting.

Steven Thornquist – Yes, Park and Rec will continue to pursue licensure regardless of the outcome.

Amy Gallagher-Conway – Is there something Park and Rec can mail out separately for informational purposes? The question should not have been changed from the petition.

Steven Thornquist – The town cannot spend money to sway voters. Private citizens can campaign.

Vincent Marino – The Board of Selectmen decided not to authorize explanatory text at their last meeting. The Park and Rec Commission does not have independent authority to do that.

Donna Shea – Can Park and Rec set up a table 75 feet away at the referendum with information?

Vincent Marino – Yes, anyone can.

James Stirling – It costs about \$1200-\$1300 to send a letter to every address in town. You could use private funds to get this information out.

Vincent Marino – If you send a town-wide mailing, make sure to comply with the law and have a disclosure of who paid for it.

Steven Thornquist – The State Elections Enforcement Commission website has guidelines as well.

Rose Monaco – Who will the director be reporting to? We never got any answers.

Jenn Cafasso – Right now, everyone reports to the First Selectman.

Nicole Wetmore – Why is this on the ballot for people not attending the meeting?

Paula Cofrancesco – I was outvoted 2-1 to send it to referendum.

Jennifer Galik – Yes, the director reports to the first selectman. Plan to set up a chain of command where issues go first to director, then commission, and finally selectmen. Every child that this affects is a big deal. We also want to run other programs, not just child care.

Amy Lestinsky – I want this town to move forward, and we should have before and after care and summer camp. I supported hiring the new director, who has qualifications.

Alex Hutchinson – Not just parents, but grandparents are affected as well.

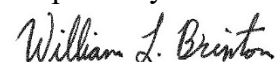
Kathryn Sylvester – What is the role of Park and Rec? Is it an advisory board? Do advisory boards have the authority to make employment decisions? Have you reviewed the chain of command for complaints? There is no mechanism for complaints with the commission.

Vincent Marino – Yes, it is advisory to the Selectmen. Employment decisions are done by the Board of Selectmen. I appreciate your concern, but do not share it. The Park & Rec Commission is well formed, well informed, and well intentioned. They know their role.

There was no more discussion. Since the Board of Selectmen, at a duly noticed meeting held on March 17, 2025, voted to remove Item 1 from the call and vote at a Special Town Meeting Referendum on April 7, 2025 at Bethany Town Hall between 6:00 am and 8:00 pm, no further action was required by the assembly.

A motion was made by Patricia Ryan, seconded by Pua Ford, to adjourn the meeting. The motion was passed by a majority voice vote, and the meeting adjourned at 8:24 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,



William L. Brinton,
Bethany Town Clerk