

April 17, 2018

Good evening:

First let me thank you all for your service.

I know how much time you devote to this job, the extra hours at home and attending all of the committee meetings. I want you to know I appreciate your efforts.

And thanks to everyone in the audience for coming out tonight.

I'm David Winston, Chairman of the P&R Commission

For the record the P&R Commission policy is to support Parks Police and to advocate to increase their numbers.

Our Parks & Facilities Manager, Kevin Murray & Parks Officer Peter Gould could not be here tonight due to prior commitments but have told me they will be more than happy to answer any questions you may have.

So, talking about Parks Police tonight is not intended to discredit all of the good work being done by the SPD.

In fact, I think we have statistics that show Stamford to be a safe city. This is good.

The Stamford PD has also increased its patrols through our Parks. This is good.

The recent budget has reduced the Parks Police funding from three officers to two, offering instead a very vague Ambassador program. **This is not good.**

Statistics are all good indicators of SPD efforts and useful, however, what remains lacking are the statistics that show Parks Police efforts. Parks Police do not call dispatch every time they go in or out of a Park because their assignment is to be in a Park. SPD does not always call and say I'm driving down Seaside Avenue now because that is part of their regular district patrol. So, an SPD car doing a parks patrol might do 2 or 3 loops though a park per shift, that's 30 minutes of presence in a Park. That is good, but how does that compare to a Parks officer in the Park for two hours?

Be careful with statistics, not for what they show because that's probably accurate. But for what they do not show. If Parks Police are spending more time in a Park does that not make you feel safer?

That is what this is all about.

Stamford is really very fortunate. Mostly because we are so close to NYC that people would work in the city and come to the suburbs to have that backyard and the greenspace environment.

Over time our success has consisted of converting that environment into more housing.

Now as residential areas have been built our Parks are fulfilling the outdoor space needs we have, but for more and more people.

I have been on the Parks & Recreation Commission for about 8 years.

I worry that we do not have enough Parks or Greenspace

I worry most about our planet and the fact that mine is probably the first generation to have to admit to our children that we are not leaving this planet better off than when we were given stewardship of it.

I worry about our environment a lot.

In a city as developed as Stamford our Parks are about all that is left of that environment. The one place where apartment dwellers with no backyard can go to experience what is left of the environment in Stamford is a city Park.

In Stamford more apartments means more and more people depend on the same number of Parks to provide as safe and enjoyable an experience as possible.

Our parks needs all of the protection we can give them.

So for example you are at Cove Park. There's an off-leash dog having a good pee on the beach and a romp in the water, neither of which is permitted.

You're having a picnic and your child or grandchild is on a blanket. Do you feel safe when that dog runs up to that child? How many people will return to Mianus River Park knowing all of the loose dogs are not responding to their owners and will jump on you after they got all muddied up in the river?

Go to Lione Park and smell the pot in the air. People and their drug dealers are business as usual. We do not have enough Parks Police to patrol this park as frequently as it needs and SPD patrols cannot be in there as much as they need to change this behavior. We're lucky Parks Police can cover Cove and Cummings as well as they do.

I mention this because it is a very slow transition from a nice neighborhood park to a park that you would not want to visit. What good are your Parks if you no longer feel SAFE in them? Forget the Safe City statistics. Do you feel safe in your Parks is the question?

I bet I get a very different answer from women than men on that question.

Guys walking through a park passing a large group just see a bunch of guys drinking and having a good time. Couple of thumbs up and smiles and all is good

Women going past must get a little tired of the crude jokes, come on's and often sexual harassment. Women have told me the men in Cummings have exposed themselves when they walk by. That does not happen to men. Do you think a woman feels safe in your Parks when this is going on? Would you really expose your wife or daughter to this type of behavior?

Where are the statistics about how this behavior has increased or decreased?

Isn't it just easier to stop going to parks where this behavior takes place?

How do we get residents back to these parks?

How does this complaint fit in the overall priority list of things SPD has to deal with like domestic violence, traffic accidents or robberies?

Sure, they will respond when they can. But they will always have different priorities than Parks Police. If a Parks officer is on duty he is always in a Park, not just driving through.

Problem is we simply do not have enough of them and this administration has now cut them again.

Let's say for instance you wanted a Permit for an event in Cummings to celebrate being outside last Saturday and 1,000 people will be invited.

SPD would require you to pay \$1,000 for two special duty officers for the event.

But 1,000 plus people congregate in Cummings or other parks quite often and how many police are there?

We can afford this. This budget is asking \$300,000 for an Ambassador program.

At \$50,000 per Parks Officer this would pay for 6 Parks Police, maybe 5 because you need to make a benefits contribution.

SO, this budget says we can afford this.

The Ambassador idea to support Parks Police is not a bad idea but you need Parks Police there for this solution to make sense. If you are cutting Parks Police in this year's budget you seem to be eliminating part of your own equation.

It's just not the right solution for right now.

The right solution is to cut the Ambassador request

The question is how do we increase the Parks Police to a number that would make an ambassador program successful?

Respectfully

David Winston

Chairman

Parks & Recreation Commission

