

Rutland City Recreation Committee

April 28th, 2025, Meeting

Members Present: Chair Clifford, Vice Chair Tadio, Alderman Gillam, Alderwoman Davis, Alderman Whitcomb

Others Present: Board President Allaire, Alderman Cupoli, Treasurer Markowski, Attorney LaChance, Director Dahlin, Program Director Cioffi, Program Director Cassell, Program Director Bonasera, Program Director Bose, Program Director Shattuck, Executive Director Bove, Tyler Richardson, Karin McGrath, Shelley Lutz, Nathan Nesch, Andrew Shinn, and Peggy Shinn

This meeting was convened to address multiple agenda items referred to the committee. Due to the proximity of summer and the urgency of operational concerns, the chairman prioritized discussion on aquatics and summer camps.

Director Dahlin and staff presented a detailed overview of disruptions resulting from the administrative leave of longtime Recreation Superintendent Kim Peters. Key challenges included staffing shortfalls, procedural confusion, operational gaps, and growing concerns over public trust and program sustainability.

The city pool, which supports both public use and summer camps, is facing a critical lifeguard shortage, with only 17 confirmed out of the 45–60 typically required.

Board President Allaire asked Tyler:

If the feedback you've been getting from people who were previously employed and worked for the Department and for the summer aquatic program previously, and they are not coming this year, did they specifically say the reason is because Kim's not returning?

Director Dahlin responded:

Yes, staff have cited Kim's absence as a specific reason for not returning.

Certification logistics have become strained. Previously, Kim Peters conducted certifications in-house, with a cost of her time and approximately \$43.00 per participant paid to the American Red Cross. The city now relies on an outside contractor who is more affordable than other vendors but has limited availability. The city has agreed to pay for certifications and recertifications for recreation staff to offset this barrier.

There is also a shortage of swim instructor certification, which threatens the delivery of swim lessons included in summer camp fees.

To prioritize camp needs, limiting group visits with RCPS, Boys and Girls Club, Local School Field Days, and reducing public pool hours or limiting access is under consideration. As a result, pool pass sales have not started, creating uncertainty in projected revenue.

Several committee members emphasized that swimming is more than recreation—it's a life-saving skill with broad public value:

Director Cioffi

"If a child doesn't know how to swim, that then puts them in [danger]... A public pool is a public service that actually helps people gain a life skill."

Alderman Whitcomb

"It's also a mechanism for socialization... Over the summer is an opportunity for all of the children in Rutland to intermix, to build confidence in themselves."

Director Dahlin:

"The moment you realize your child knows how to swim, it removes a huge fear for a parent. Water is scary, and learning how to survive in it is a defining moment in childhood."

Alderman Cupoli added:

"I have concerns about some of these failures in retaining employees and pool hours disrupted, what does that say for the following year? I see issues even moving forward."

Summer Camps

Summer camps are currently at full capacity, with waitlists for most age groups. The program has generated approximately \$190,000 in revenue, which could be impacted if refunds become necessary due to service limitations.

Camp staff training is scheduled for May 21–22, including CPR training—a responsibility previously handled by Kim Peters, which still lacks a confirmed instructor.

All camps are now hosted at the pool location, increasing pressure on aquatics staffing.

Staffing & Administrative Issues

There is no formal written policy for hiring, onboarding, or conducting background checks for recreation staff. This gap has exposed the department to risk and created confusion.

Alderman Whitcomb asked:

“Is there any kind of competency sign-off related to expectations to hiring people? If I go in your file (Director Dahlin), will I find that you have completed any kind of competency training on how to bring people on and how to do background checks?”

Director Dahlin responded:

“No, I have not been trained in any of it.”

Attorney LaChance added:

“We haven’t been able to find one [a process]. Background checks were being done in the past, across various departments. We haven’t necessarily found it in writing. That’s been a systemic failure, I think, in the past just that it had never got written down. That is not a new issue for here or anywhere else.”

Alderwoman Tadio stated:

“It would be my preference that when a person is hired, the HR Department for any department would run a background check. But specifically for the Rec Department, because these folks work with children, I think it makes sense to be doing a background check when somebody is onboarded—regardless of if you’re a minor.”

Director Dahlin stated:

“We are not trained in HR. This is not our job to do that.”

Attorney LaChance committed to HR taking over the background check process moving forward for consistency and safety, especially due to the department’s direct work with children.

Regarding minors: Attorney LaChance clarified that while background checks are not legally required for minors, it is best practice to conduct a limited screening.

Other concerns raised:

- No clear policy on who can sign hiring paperwork.
- Staff were unaware of training requirements like mandatory reporter certification, which only appeared in a newly drafted seasonal job description.
- No formal training or competency sign-offs exist for leadership staff managing hiring or onboarding.

Staff expressed feeling unsupported and fearful of retaliation for speaking out, further impacting morale.

There is strong community support for Kim Peters, and widespread frustration with how her departure was handled. The handling of her leave has raised concerns about long-term damage to trust, staff retention, and department morale.

It was stated that Kim offered to return temporarily to help stabilize summer operations but was instead barred from contacting city staff.

Aldermen warned that failure to recover swiftly could result in multi-year impacts on program quality, staffing pipelines, and public perception.

Alderwoman Davis added:

I find this ironic, following our last board meeting, we signed a resolution for due processes, we signed a resolution that supported peoples right to have a voice, yet we stifled Kim. We also stood up to stay we are going to reaffirm our oath, to support the city, I may not always agree to something but that is the oath I take, that is the one that the mayor takes as well, what ever problem we have fix it, deal with it, because it is the city that is suffering, it is the community members that are suffering.

In response to the department's current challenges, the committee passed the following motion:

Alderman Whitcomb made a motion, seconded by Alderwoman Davis:

“To recommend to the Mayor the reconsideration of Kim Peters as Rutland City Recreation Superintendent.”

The motion passed 5–0.

Alderwoman Davis moved to adjourn at 6:50 PM, seconded by Alderman Gillam

Motion to adjourn the meeting was made by Alderwoman Davis, the meeting was adjourned at 6:45 PM