

Youth committee revamps programs to cut costs, but increase supervision

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The Record

NORTH GREENBUSH — The town's youth committee is taking steps to revamp its programs — including starting to charge for the summer program at Snyders Lake — to provide better services while trying to cut costs.

"We've been reviewing the program," said Councilman Lou Desso, who chairs the Youth Committee. "We're redesigning and coming up with new policies and procedures to not only improve the programming, but we're also very budget-conscious. So we're looking to save the taxpayers some money along the way."

At a Town Board meeting Thursday, the board appointed Michael Miner, the town's Building Department coordinator, to the vacant position of youth center supervisor, which pays \$15 per hour. Kevin Vooris, a parent volunteer at the center, is expected to share that part-time role once civil service approval is secured.

The Youth Center, at the town office complex on Douglas Street, operates on Friday and Saturday during the school year from 6:30 to 10:30 p.m. at no

cost. In the past, Desso said it was manned by five college-aged employees receiving about \$10 per hour and a town employee often on overtime — costing the town thousands of dollars, he said. It will now be operated by three employees and one of the new supervisors.

Membership cards will be given to keep children from leaving during the program unbeknownst to their parents, and the grounds will be watched more closely to avoid "things that certainly shouldn't have been happening on town property," as Desso said.

"The last few years prior to this year, the Youth Center really was going backwards, if you will," he said. "There was really a lack of supervision and structure at the Youth Center, and the folks in town really became hesitant to send their children there."

In addition, the town will now charge for its summer program, held at the Town Park at Snyder's Lake, instead of asking for a donation. At \$190 per child or \$250 per family for the five-day-per-week, six-week long program, the cost equates to just more than \$6s per day, including bus transportation.

Desso expects this move will cut the cost the town incurs from the program — which last summer cost taxpayers about \$85,000 — in half.

Desso also said they hope to expand activities for older children, in addition to providing the usual sports, crafts and trips.

When discussed Thursday at a Town Board meeting, Councilman Ernest Kern made sure that accommodations could be made for families for whom the cost would prevent financial hardship.

"If there is special circumstances, certainly we're going to listen to people," said Supervisor Mark Evers. "It's just reevaluating and tightening up the program a little bit to make sure it doesn't cost the general taxpayer money they don't need to spend."

The cost of the program may likely go up next year to recoup more money, as was discussed by the board.

"I think we offer a great program," Evers said, praising the work of the committee. "Whatever they think, if it's beneficial and it works for Jerry Sickles, who is our youth program director, definitely we're going to improve it."