

APPENDIX A8

PARKS & RECREATION



Beaches

As noted within the roundtable sessions organized by the League of Women Voters in 2003 and 2004, the two existing beaches in Town are considered by many to be two of the most valuable community resources.



Darien's two beach areas provide water-based and non-water based recreational opportunities. As described herein, there is a need to make the most efficient use of these valuable resources, and perform long-range planning relative to their future. In addition, the community should consider the potential for adding onto the two beach properties, which will allow for flexibility for meeting future community needs. The Town must balance the need and desire to provide recreation facilities in these areas with the protection of the waterfront resources. The recommendations herein relate to the first two policies listed above relative to increasing water-based recreation activities, and protecting Darien's fragile waterfront resources.

Pear Tree Beach

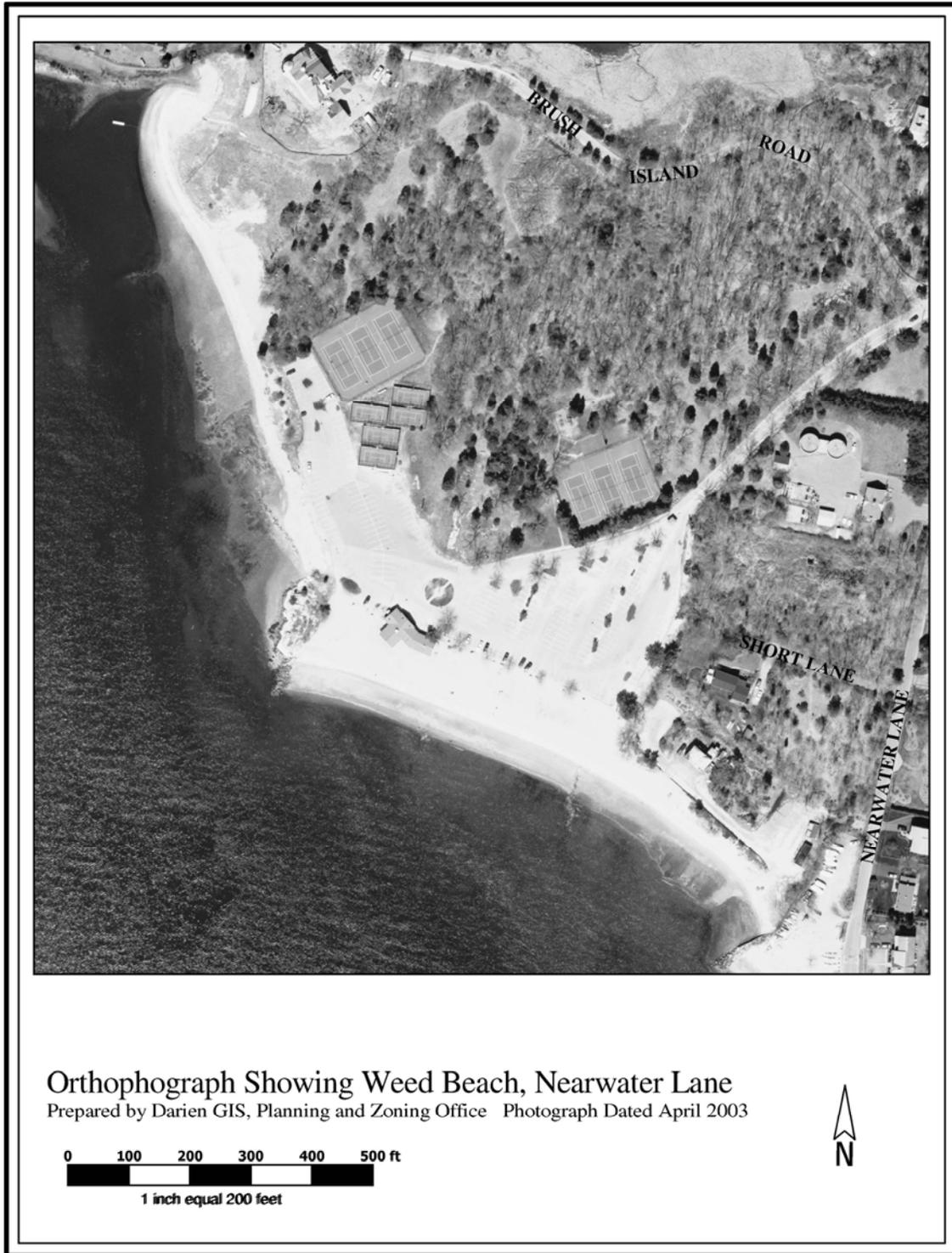
Within the 10-year time frame, it is likely that a new or renovated concession stand and bath house will be needed at this facility. The new stand and bath house should be ADA compliant. A fishing pier either here or at Weed Beach would provide for improved organization and safety for that activity. One idea would be to have an area along the rock jetty be used. This would be separate and distinct from the swimming and beach areas, leaving these areas undisturbed. The Town should consider purchasing adjacent properties, which may allow for future expansion of the beach and/or picnic area.

Weed Beach

Weed Beach has the most potential of any Town owned area for expansion and improvement. This is because the Town currently owns a number of properties in the Short Lane area and owns portions of Weed Beach that are currently under-utilized. It is imperative that a Weed Beach master plan be completed in the near future to explore a comprehensive improvement of this facility. Currently there are both water-dependent and non-water-dependent uses at the beach. Water-dependent uses include: a Junior sailing area, beach area, swimming, picnicking, bird watching, kayaking. Non-water dependent uses include: informal walking paths, tennis courts, paddle tennis courts, children's play area, parking area, and gatehouse. It is important as part of this comprehensive plan for Weed Beach to preserve the natural scenery and atmosphere of the beach while providing adequate public recreation facilities for the entire community. As specifically noted in the 1995 Town Plan, it is important for the Town to purchase the existing properties on Short Lane to allow for flexibility in design of the Weed Beach area. See Exhibit 8-1 for an air

photo of the area. Desired improvements could include a more formal walking/nature observation trail, defined sail and kayak launch area, reclaiming beach area by relocating parking, an improved children's play area and pavilion area. Preparing a Weed Beach Master Plan would review these issues in more detail, and provide a long-term plan for the property. It will also provide guidance for appropriate uses of the Beach, while addressing the sensitive environmental aspects of this unique location on the sound. It must address how to preserve and conserve this beautiful spot; how to increase water-dependent activities; and how to protect important habitats of animal species.

EXHIBIT 8-1 WEED BEACH



Existing Fields and Courts

Because of Darien's extremely high land costs, it is more costly than ever to obtain property to create or expand parks. Thus, the community should make the most efficient use of the space it has. This would include the following:

- Installation of artificial turf on select fields, which can allow for increased use, especially during rainy or wet weather.
- Irrigation, similarly
- Lighting in certain key locations that would allow for use during dusk and into the evening hours.
- Expansion of existing fields, to allow for increased flexibility of use. This may require relocating and/or modifying existing facilities to accommodate higher-demand activities.
- Continue proper maintenance of the existing facilities.

However, it is imperative that in each case, the specific site details and potential impacts of these changes be analyzed. By implementing these types of improvements, the Town may be able to meet increasing community demands, while minimizing the need to purchase additional property.

Other Parks and Recreation Facilities

Woodland Park

Woodland Park is the largest remaining natural public open space in Darien. It currently consists of a number of walking trails as well as a limited gravel parking area accessible from Middlesex Road. In order to provide better access, the construction of an 8 to 12 space gravel parking area off of West Avenue or from another access road should also be considered. The purchase of an adjacent property could assist in providing a limited number of parking spaces without disturbing the existing park. This could provide for enhanced use of Woodland Park, as no on-street parking is allowed on either Middlesex Road or West Avenue thereby limiting the number of people that can visit the park by automobile at any one time. Woodland Park should remain a passive park with no ball fields, tennis courts, basketball courts or the like. Turtle Pond and Old Maid's Pond, two of the main attractions at the park, may need to be dredged in within the 10-year planning period. This dredging may be a public-private partnership, with Friends of Woodland Park contributing funds to the effort. However, getting equipment into the area to be dredged may be difficult.

Frate Park

As described in the Traffic & Transportation Chapter, expansion of this park may be possible through some changes in the existing adjacent roadway system. See page A4-25 and Exhibit 4-9. By providing improved parking areas and expanding the park, increased use by residents is likely to result.



Frate Park



Tilley Park

Tilley Park

Tilley Park current consists of lighted paved walkways, green lawn area, bench seating for passive enjoyment of the site, and a stone pavilion located at the waters edge. The site is home to many interesting waterfowl and serves the community as a downtown “green space”. The northeast side of the park consists of treed woodland. Large-scale recreation events occur here, including the Post 53 Food Fair, and the Youth Commission’s regatta.

Diller Property

The 5+/- acre Diller property located on Nutmeg Lane adjacent to the Darien High School provides a limited possibility for either active or passive recreation. This site is severely constrained by not only the presence of regulated wetlands, but also by the location of those wetlands, which traverse down from one corner of the property to the other. Thus while some development of the property is possible, it is difficult and severely constrained. The Environmental Protection Commission should be consulted when designing possible development plans. This is dedicated parkland, and any possible sale of the property would require that it be replaced with a property of “comparable replacement land” (see page A8-8). One option for this property would be a walking path providing for a passive recreation area near the high school. Another development option would be for some tennis courts to be placed on each side of the brook that traverses the property. In any case, development will be difficult because of the wetlands issues. And this is not the optimum location for either active or passive recreation.

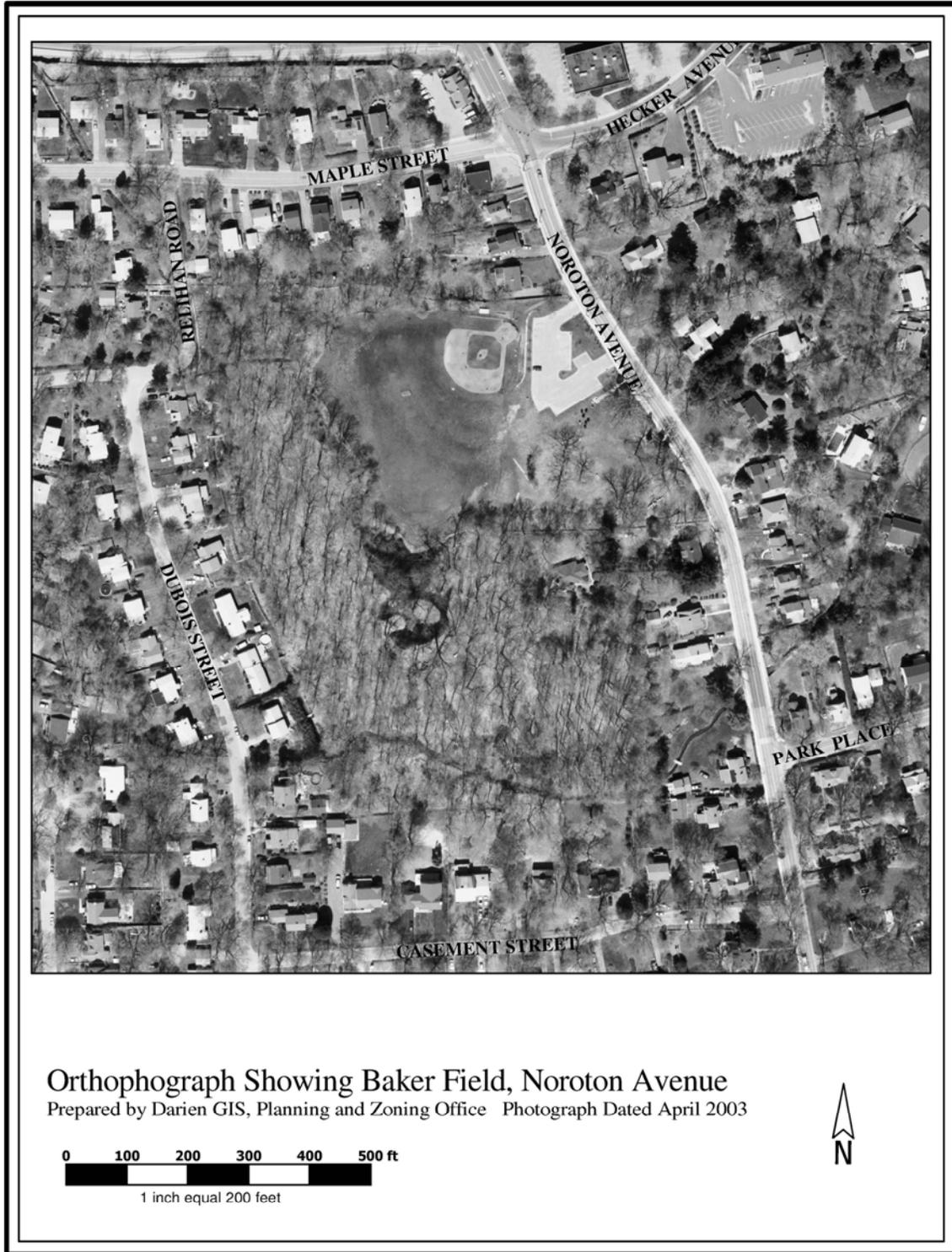
Cherry Lawn Park

Since the 1995 Town Plan of Development, a number of changes have occurred at Cherry Lawn Park, which have both intensified the use of the Park, and enhanced its surroundings. First, a new Nature Center with associated parking was constructed in the southwest corner of the Park, and the building that housed the Nature Center, storage facilities, and a tenant space was demolished. Casey Field was approved for expansion in 2004, thereby providing the opportunity for additional playfield space. The expansion of Casey Field was recommended in both the 1995 Town Plan of Development as well as the 1996 Parks & Recreation Open Space Plan. Over the next 10 years other possible changes to Cherry Lawn Park considered. This would include the possibility of adding public restrooms and monitoring parking (as is currently done at all parks) to determine if 10 to 15 additional parking spaces may be needed on the property. However there is a delicate balance between over-building parking and preserving the aesthetics of the Park. That should be considered first and foremost. At Cherry Lawn Park, as in other community parks, the overall need for tennis courts, basketball courts and paddle tennis courts should be considered, and the number of each should be carefully planned throughout the community and the location of one or the other should be done on an as-needed basis.

Baker Field and Woods

It is unlikely that changes will occur in Baker Field and Woods in the next ten years. However, the Town should continue to consider the possibility of purchasing the property adjacent to the field, to allow additional flexibility for design and expansion. Exhibit 8-2 on the next page better illustrates the location of that house relative to the existing field and woods.

EXHIBIT 8-2 BAKER FIELD



McGuane Park

In recent years, McGuane Field and Park has been expanded to include a fieldhouse; new playground; new special needs “Challenger” field; increased the size of one of the existing ballfields. It is unlikely that any changes will occur to the park within the 10-year planning timeframe, unless adjacent properties become available for purchase.

Procaccini Property

In 2004, the Town considered purchasing the Procaccini property off of Hoyt Street. Ultimately, a number of issues arose, and the purchase did not occur. It is therefore likely that this 15+/- acres will be residentially-developed in the near future, and should not be considered as a likely location for public parks, recreation or open space. It is probable that as any residential development of the property occurs, open space and recreation areas on the property will be set aside, however, those will be geared towards use by residents of the property.

Town Hall & Holohan Fields

The Town Hall site consists of active recreation such as baseball, softball, soccer and field hockey. The fields are utilized by preschool through adult age groups and serve as one of the Town’s major active recreation spaces. Little unused land on this property remains. Providing restroom facilities at this site for recreation users may be needed in the future.

Bike Paths



The 1996 Parks, Recreation and Open Space Plan contained the results of a survey showing that bicycle routes and trails were one of the facilities needed most within the community. Although bike paths are currently marked throughout Town, better publicity is needed. This may include better signage; and the possible addition of new paths throughout the community.

Walking/hiking Trails

Walking trails were also highlighted in the 1996 Parks, Recreation and Open Space Plan as “most-desired” facilities. Walking trails now exist in a number of Town-owned properties, as well as on three Darien Land Trust properties. The Town properties include: Stony Brook Park; Selleck’s Woods; and Woodland Park. The Land Trust properties include: Dunlap Woods, Traendly flood

plain property, and Olson Woods. Further work on existing trails and the addition of new trails would benefit the community.

Dedicated Parklands

The issue of dedication of parklands is important. Section 7-131n of the Connecticut General Statutes require that no land which was dedicated for park or other recreational or open space purposes can be sold, unless replaced with “comparable replacement land at least equal in value and per unit area size...”. Because of the limited amount of vacant land remaining in Darien, to find a piece of “comparable replacement land” to swap is a difficult task. The 1996 Parks and Open Space Plan recommended dedicating all of the properties listed in Exhibit 8-3. It was later determined that they had all been dedicated by use, and no formal action was needed by the RTM.

EXHIBIT 8-3 DEDICATED PARKLANDS

NAME	ADDRESS	ACREAGE
Baker Field & Woods	Noroton Avenue	11.7
Cherry Lawn Park	Brookside Road	27.5
Diller Property	Nutmeg Lane	5.0
Frate Park	Leroy Avenue	0.8
Holohan Field & Town Hall Fields	Renshaw Road	11.5
McGuane Field	Noroton Avenue	4.0
Pear Tree Beach	Pear Tree Point Road	7.9
Selleck's Woods	Parklands Drive	28.1
Stony Brook Park	Ledge Road	11.3
Tilley Park	Lakeside Road	8.6
Weed Beach	Nearwater Lane	22.1
Woodland Park	Middlesex Road	64.7
(not including D'Acunto property)		

Note: Some properties are dedicated by use, some by deed, and some by formal resolution.