

**TOWN OF DARIEN  
PARKS & RECREATION COMMISSION  
WEED BEACH COMMITTEE  
OCTOBER 19, 2015**

**ATTENDANCE:** Lorene Bora, Chair; Werner Domittner; Mary Flynn; Dennis Conetta; Marc Ioli; Goody Gray; Amy Doering; Diane Conologue

**STAFF:** Pamela Gery, Director of Parks & Recreation

**CALL TO ORDER**

The Chair called the meeting to order at 7:30 PM. A quorum was present.

**APPROVAL OF OCTOBER 6 MEETING MINUTES**

**\*\* MR. IOLI MOVED TO ACCEPT THE MEETING MINUTES OF OCTOBER 6 WITH THE FOLLOWING CORRECTIONS:**

- 1. PAGE 1, PARAGRAPH 4: COMMITTEE MEMBER DOERING'S TITLE WILL BE CHANGED TO MS.**
- 2. PAGE ONE, OTHER ATTENDANCE: CHERYL RUSSELL WILL BE NOTED AS VICE CHAIR.**
- 3. PAGE 1, PARAGRAPH 5: 'THAT ARE BETTER SUITED FOR A DIFFERENT TOWN PARK OR LOCATION'.**
- 4. PAGE 2, PARAGRAPH 2: MEETING WILL BE PLURALIZED AS MEETINGS.**
- 5. PAGE 2, PARAGRAPH 4: ADD THE FOLLOWING SENTENCE: 'THIS IS IN LINE WITH THE INFORMAL WEED BEACH EXTENSION SURVEY CONDUCTED ON LABOR DAY WEEKEND WITH 46 RESPONDENTS. THE SURVEY SHOWED (IN THE FOLLOWING ORDER) A STRONG SUPPORT FOR A POOL, BIKE/WALK PATH, KAYAK STORAGE/RENTAL AND PICNIC AREA. A SKATE PARK WAS STRONGLY OPPOSED.'**
- 6. PAGE 2, PARAGRAPH 6: DARIEN NEWS REVIEW.**

**\*\* MS. BORA SECONDED THE MOTION.**

**\*\* MOTION PASSED UNANIMOUSLY.**

**DISCUSSION WITH WESTON & SAMPSON**

## **A. Introduce Weston & Sampson Team**

Two representatives of Weston & Sampson came forward and identified themselves as Dan Biggs (Senior Landscape Architect and Team Leader) and Cheri Ruane (Principal, Vice President and Practice Leader). Mr. Biggs stated that their firm is based out of Rocky Hill, and that they have worked throughout the Northeast. He stated that they specialize in surveying and mapping, master planning, landscape architecture, civil engineering, and aquatics and water features.

## **B. Review Project Goals/Objectives**

Mr. Biggs stated that the mission project is to further develop Weed Beach Park for the benefit of the community with the addition of new land, making the whole park greater than the sum of its individual parts. The objectives are as follows:

1. Develop a vision; celebrate all that is great about Weed Beach Park today while creating a cohesive addition that accommodates the Town's future needs.
2. Develop an implementation strategy for park facilities and operations with early action phases.
3. Develop a sustainable park model that addresses conservation as well as operations and maintenance.

## **C. Discuss Project Approach/Scope of Work Tasks**

Mr. Biggs stated that one of the means of developing their plan would be through public input, as it is the town's park and they want it to serve the greater town area. They intend to solicit public input through the following:

1. An online survey through SurveyMonkey.
2. On-site tours.
3. Conferring with specific user groups, as well as the larger neighborhood and community.

Mr. Biggs stated that they intend to garner and consolidate all feedback to design the best space for the town's residents.

Mr. Biggs stated that potential areas for conservation would be watersport buildings, parking access, beach areas, picnic areas, pathways networks and aqua facilities.

Mr. Biggs stated that aquatic alternatives would be taken into consideration, such as swimming pool program models, splash pad features, operations and maintenance considerations, and access points for personal watercrafts.

Mr. Biggs stated that the project tasks include:

1. Existing condition analysis (review of background materials, site condition analysis).
2. Public Outreach (Weed Beach Committee Meetings, Open Houses, Interviews).
3. Schematic Design.
4. Final Report (as well as a revised preferred alternative).

#### **D. Review Project Schedule**

Mr. Biggs displayed an approximate project schedule, including the dates of two open houses on November 10th and January 26th.

### **DISCUSSION AND INPUT FROM WEED BEACH NEIGHBORS**

Ms. Bora invited the individuals present, citizens who live close to the area, to join in an informal conversation about the project.

Paulette Douglas (8 Baywater) asked if it has already been decided that the land would be developed, or if it still theoretical. She further asked why the parcel was not given to the land trust, rather than be earmarked for development. Ms. Flynn stated that when the town purchased the property a year ago, it was designated as a park space to develop. Ms. Bora stated that development in this case could be interpreted as broadly as taking down old trees and putting in native landscaping. She stated that the ultimate intention will be to improve the property so it is usable by the community.

Carolyn Wilson (186 Nearwater) stated that, several years ago, there was a letter stating the town would be attempt to put a small building on Bay Beach. Ms. Wilson inquired about the progression of this building. Ms. Bora stated that the DJST has not been able to raise the funding thus far, despite several hearings at the commission level. Ms. Bora stated that they will consider their potential future needs in their planning of the Weed Beach area.

Ms. Wilson asked if there is some aspect of wetlands involved in this development, and Ms. Bora answered in the affirmative. Mr. Biggs stated that they would be receiving a wetlands survey conducted several years ago, though there may have been more wetland area at the time. He stated that they would confer with the Inland Wetlands and Planning & Zoning Commissions, and use the information from those interactions to steer their development direction. Ms. Wilson asked if the area would need to be redrawn, and Mr. Biggs stated they have not made a determination yet. Ms. Wilson expressed her concerns about a rumored swimming pool, and Mr. Biggs stated that due to recent storm events and other environmental factors, this did not seem a

likely option, though they are in the early stages. He stated that one of the most important factors for this development is sustainability.

Chip Raymond asked how much of the property is currently wetlands, and Mr. Biggs stated that while he walked the site earlier in the day, he could not speak to the exact number. Mr. Biggs stated what was flagged on the last survey was a small pocket, as well as a few smaller areas towards the top of the property. Mr. Biggs stated there appeared to be more wetland area than previously flagged. Mr. Raymond stated that he heard a rumor the town was going to try and eliminate the existing wetland areas, while deeming new areas wetlands. Mr. Raymond asked if engineers or the Town determine what constitutes a wetland. Mr. Biggs stated that it would depend- if the area is an inland wetland, the discretion falls to the town. If it is a core wetland, it falls under the purview of engineers or the DEAP. Mr. Biggs stated, either way, once something is designed, permits will be pulled and procedure will be followed.

Brit Bair (180 Nearwater) asked, should something be built, how much of a buffer Nearwater Lane could expect to have from the road in, as well as landscaping expectations. Mr. Biggs stated as they are early in the project, they have not determined the specifics nor any preconceived notions, but they are very mindful of the development's impact on the residents' homes. Ms. Bair asked, if they do need to construct a buffer, how high they would legally be allowed to build. Mr. Biggs stated that they do not know the height restrictions just yet. Ms. Ruane stated that any building larger than one story would require an elevator for handicap accessibility, making that sort of construction unlikely. She stated that if anything were to be built, it would likely be more along the lines of an open air pavilion rather than a traditional structure. Ms. Bair asked if there were to be a pool with a high roof, what the restrictions on height would be. Mr. Biggs stated that he cannot speak to the town's building height restrictions at present, as they are still in the early stages, but that it would be part of the conversation with planning and zoning.

Judy Kilmartin (137 Hollow Tree Ridge) stated that there are some restrictions with a previously built beach house, and concluded that there would definitely be similar restrictions on any sort of development. Mr. Biggs stated that any information about setbacks, square footage, and landscaping would be determined by the Planning and Zoning Commission.

Mike Bair (180 Nearwater) stated that this development will likely have lots of special interest groups vying for attention, and that while they are deeply passionate, the scope is not very broad. Mr. Bair asked how they intend to balance the decision making process when the garnered information may only represent a small portion of public interest. Mr. Biggs stated that they have multiple plans to balance this, including reaching out broadly to groups within the town, utilizing a survey, and conferring with Ms. Gery if it seems as if they are not reaching the whole of the

population. Ms. Ruane stated that they are also considering the town space as a whole, and as interests come up they will be considering both what is in demand and what best fits the space. As an example, she noted that if the town wanted something that required a large, enclosed building, a coastal resource area may not be the best place for it. Mr. Biggs further stated that the survey will inquire about any park throughout the town, as well as the Weed Beach parcel specifically. Ms. Gery stated that they have a fairly large, extensive database of citizens from beach sticker purchases alone, and are confident in their ability to reach a significant portion of the population.

Phil Ames asked if the project has any of the budget allocated to it currently. Ms. Bora stated that beyond the retainer for Weston & Sampson, no budget is currently allocated to the project. She stated once the project comes together, they will move forward and cost it out. Mr. Ames asked, theoretically, should they determine the community wants something that costs \$7 million, would they get it. Mr. Bair asked if a special group could raise funds and relieve the town of that fiscal burden. Ms. Flynn stated that this would be something to be determined down the line.

Ms. Wilson asked for confirmation that Short Lane will be closed to the public as a result of the development, and Ms. Bora answered in the affirmative.

Peter Barry asked if the town has expressed any interest in increasing the pump station and storage. Ms. Bora stated they have no information on this, and cannot speak to it at the moment. Ms. Gery stated that there has been no indication of this happening from Public Works.

Ms. Bair asked how many acres comprise the parcel, and Mr. Biggs estimated roughly six, with around 30-35 acres for the full park.

Mr. Bair stated that there had previously been talk of basketball courts or an outdoor performance space, and he asked if this had been considered in initial studies. Mr. Biggs stated they had yet to do any studies, but that all of those options are under consideration. Mr. Biggs stated that they would consider the park as a whole when designing this development, and that it would be possible for them to use this space to move a nonconforming current feature to a more appropriate area.

Mr. Raymond asked why they plan on looking at the larger park when they are only developing a small parcel. Mr. Biggs stated that they aim to find a way to serve the greater park, rather than regarding them as isolate pieces. Ms. Ruane stated that they plan to take their cues from the landscape, and work with the nature of the site. Ms. Flynn stated that in the spring, they plan on updating that master plan, which will include a look at all of the parks.

Ms. Kilmartin inquired further about the pump station property. Ms. Flynn stated that Public Works did not seem interested in giving it over for use, though they may discuss that again in future.

Mr. Raymond asked if they would be tearing down the fence, and Mr. Biggs answered in the negative. Mr. Bair asked if there would be any removal of trees, and Mr. Biggs answered in the negative.

Ms. Gray asked when the survey would be available, and Mr. Biggs stated it would be available by the end of the week. Ms. Gray asked how it would be sent out, and Mr. Biggs stated that it would go out via SurveyMonkey, with hard copies available throughout the town. He stated that it will likely stay out until the end of December. Ms. Bair asked if the dates of the next meeting would be on the survey, and Mr. Biggs stated that they could potentially amend the survey to include the dates.

A Weed Beach resident expressed his concern over the time constraint of a February 17th design presentation. Mr. Biggs stated that, from a planning standpoint, it is not a final feature design, just a concrete planning document. Mr. Biggs stated that, at that point, the report will encompass the results from the public feedback, describe all developed concepts, recommended action and project, as well as a summary of all steps through the end of the project. He further elaborated that it will include cost and implementation, strategy, near/mid/long term goals and specifics of design concepts (materials, etc.).

Ms. Bora stated that the committee is a blend of members of the Parks & Recreation Commission, as well as non-commission community members. Mr. Raymond inquired about the neighborhood representative, and Ms. Bora stated it is Goody Gray.

Atty. Ed Schmidt stated that the Weed family, upon returning to the area for a burial in 1995, commented negatively on the state of their namesake parcel. In the years since, they have greatly appreciated the improvements made to the beach, and Atty. Schmidt reported that they are happy with the current direction of the area's development.

Ms. Bora thanked the members of the public for taking the time to come out and express their opinions. She stated that they want everyone to feel heard, and invited them to spread the word throughout their community about the survey and meetings. Ms. Ruane asked them to continue attending the meetings in order to maintain their presence, as it is important to the process. Ms. Gery stated that there will be closed boxes available for suggestions for those who would rather keep their comments anonymous. Ms. Ruane stated this would also be the case with the survey.

## PUBLIC COMMENT

No public comment was made.

## FINALIZATION AND APPROVAL OF PROJECT SURVEY

There was extensive discussion of the project survey. Some of the key points are as follows:

1. The accessibility of the survey to less tech savvy residents, culminating with the determination that hard copies should be made available at the library, town hall, municipal areas and senior/community centers. In addition, for the sake of anonymity a closed box will be established for residents to drop hard copies of the survey in.
2. The usability of the survey link, which was determined to be fixed following the beta version of the survey.
3. The ability of individuals to submit multiple surveys in order to skew results of the survey. This was determined to be unlikely, as the online surveys would require a separate IP address to do so, meaning it would be fairly simple but ultimately of low concern.
4. The ability to ask for personal details in the survey as mandatory fields.
5. Phrasing of survey questions in the latter portions of the document.

**\*\* MS. FLYNN MOVED TO APPROVE THE PROJECT SURVEY WITH THE FOLLOWING AMENDMENTS:**

- 1. CAPITALIZATION OF WEED BEACH NEEDS TO BE CONSISTENT THROUGHOUT.**
- 2. THE FOLLOWING OPTIONS WILL BE GIVEN IN THE SECTION WHERE POSSIBILITIES FOR PROGRAMS AND FACILITIES ARE GIVEN- 'NEED' 'DON'T NEED' 'NEED MORE' 'DON'T KNOW'.**
- 3. DATES FOR WEED BEACH COMMITTEE MEETINGS, OPEN HOUSES AND OTHER PERTINENT EVENTS WILL BE INCLUDED.**

**\*\* MR. CONETTA SECONDED THE MOTION.**

**\*\* MOTION PASSED UNANIMOUSLY.**

## ADJOURNMENT

**\*\* MR. CONETTA MOVED TO ADJOURN.**

**\*\* MS. DOERING SECONDED THE MOTION.**

**\*\* MOTION PASSED UNANIMOUSLY.**

The meeting adjourned at 9:05 PM.

Respectfully submitted,

Catherine Ramos  
Telesco Secretarial Services