

**TOWN OF DARIEN
PARKS & RECREATION COMMISSION
MINUTES OF REGULAR MEETING
WEDNESDAY, MARCH 21, 2012**

ATTENDANCE: Chair Jane Branigan; Susan Daly; Erika Morris; Susan Graham;
Marianne Gutierrez

STAFF: Susan Swiatek, Director; Jim Coghlan, Assistant Director

OTHER: Santo Golino, Tony Farren, Darien Little League

Ms. Branigan called the meeting to order at 7:40 p.m.

APPROVE MINUTES OF FEBRUARY 15, 2012

The changes to the minutes of the regular meeting of February 15, 2012 are as follows:

On page 1, under ATTENDANCE, change “Maryanne Gutierrez” to “Marianne Gutierrez”.

**** MS. MORRIS MOVED TO APPROVE THE MINUTES OF THE REGULAR MEETING OF FEBRUARY 15, 2012 AS AMENDED.**

**** MS. DALY SECONDED.**

**** MOTION PASSED WITH FOUR (4) VOTES IN FAVOR (DALY, GRAHAM, GUTIERREZ, MORRIS) AND ONE (1) VOTE ABSTAINED (BRANIGAN).**

**DISCUSS AND TAKE ACTION ON ACCEPTANCE OF GIFT FROM DARIEN
LITTLE LEAGUE - RENOVATION OF GALLAGHER FIELD AT CHERRY
LAWN PARK**

Ms. Swiatek explained that Mr. Santo Golino and Mr. Tony Farren of the Darien Little League have worked hard to develop this plan. The field has been utilized extensively by the Little League for years, and because it sits close to the road, there are safety issues and concerns. Mr. Golino explained that the two biggest issues were the slope of the field, which had gotten increasingly worse over the last few years, and the 2nd issue was the safety concerns of children running out into the road to get a foul ball. There is no fencing and no protection. The plan is to level the entire field, from home plate to the outfield, which is approximately 200 feet. Once that is done, it will improve the drainage, as the water now currently runs north to south. He proposed adding a catch basin behind the back stop, which will help keep water away from the neighboring property. Part of the leveling involves putting up a small retaining wall. A fence dug out

TOWN OF DARIEN
PARKS & RECREATION COMMISSION
REGULAR MEETING
MARCH 21, 2012

enclosure is proposed for safety reasons, which will keep the children inside the field. They would have to leave the dugout area, enter the playing field, and then go down the right field line to go get a foul ball near the street area. A coach or grown-up would be able to see the child trying to do this, and would therefore prevent a potential safety problem. He said they are proposing a shorter fence behind the bleachers.

In addition, he said they are proposing moving home plate forward 20 feet. There would be a buffer between the field and the neighbor's property. With the field being moved inward, it would no longer be a suitable adult playing field. The entire field would be resodded and irrigated, and it was mentioned that this will be the last field in town to be irrigated. It was mentioned that the fencing requires ZBA approval. Work would begin in the fall and the field would be ready for next spring's little league season.

Ms. Branigan asked about the Bo Gallagher stone, and if the work will affect it. Mr. Golino said no, but the stone could easily be moved if necessary.

Ms. Swiatek said that any gift valued over \$10,000 has to go to the Board of Selectmen and the RTM. Mr. Golino estimated the cost to be \$225,000.

**** MS. DALY MOVED TO ACCEPT THE GIFT FROM THE DARIEN LITTLE LEAGUE AS PRESENTED, UP TO A VALUE OF \$250,000.**

**** MS. GUTIERREZ SECONDED.**

**** MOTION PASSED UNANIMOUSLY.**

Ms. Swiatek explained that she hopes to have this before the Board of Selectmen for their next meeting, and she hopes to have it on the RTM agenda in May. She will send out the meeting dates so that the Commissioners can be in attendance if possible.

DISCUSS AND TAKE ACTION ON ACCEPTANCE OF GIFT FROM SUSAN YOUNG, FRIENDS OF TILLEY PARK, RENOVATION OF FLAGSTONE PATIO, PLANTINGS, AND GENERAL IMPROVEMENTS AROUND THE STONE HUT

Ms. Branigan explained that the gift is under \$10,000, so the Commission can just accept it. She said the work would involve removing all of the flagstone, leveling the ground, and resetting the flagstone in a bed of concrete. The path and patio will be improved. Boxwood shrubs will be planted alongside the flagstone walk out to the path. The work will be done by Bob Calve and Gerald Nielsen, Jr.

Ms. Swiatek explained that the stone patio installed in 1995 has been damaged by salt and was chipping. She said the stone hut needs some work. It was mentioned that the area is lit, as a concern was raised that the boxwood shrubs could be a tripping hazard.

**** MS. MORRIS MOVED TO ACCEPT THE GIFT FROM SUSAN YOUNG, FRIENDS OF TILLEY PARK, TO REMOVE AND REPLACE THE FLAGSTONE PATIO AND OTHER SITE WORK, INCLUDING PLANTINGS, WITH A VALUE UP TO \$9,000.**

**** MS. GRAHAM SECONDED.**

**** MOTION PASSED UNANIMOUSLY.**

UPDATE ON WEED BEACH MASTER PLAN PROJECT

Ms. Swiatek reported that the project is still on schedule for a scheduled completion date in the 2nd or 3rd week in May. She cautioned that this is a legal term which means “ready to be used for its intended purpose with a temporary CO (Certificate of Occupancy)”. The final CO won’t be in place for some time. She provided an explanation of the details of the final touches needed.

She said work is moving forward on the fitness trail at Weed Beach. Equipment has been ordered. She said the ADA compliance was not complete but it is in the process of being addressed.

She and Ms. Daly offered some preliminary plans for the grand opening and ribbon cutting, to take place on Saturday, June 2nd from 10-2, with a concert at night, and a rain date of Sunday, June 3rd.

DISCUSS BUDGET PROPOSAL FISCAL 2013

Ms. Swiatek said the budget proposal got through the Board of Selectmen. It will now go to the Board of Finance. Some members reviewed it but she has not received any negative feedback. The formal presentation is scheduled for Tuesday, March 27 at 7:30 p.m. in Room 119B.

REPORTS

a) Director

Ms. Swiatek said crews have been doing a great job trying to get facilities open and ready earlier than they normally have to. She said that several residents have been out on Town Hall field and Cherry Lawn Park. All the lifeguard chairs for both beaches have been rebuilt and painted. The stone bridge at Cherry Lawn Pond has been opened. She said project bids are out for refuse services, cleaning services, and security services. She spoke of the deteriorating concrete floor at the gazebo at Pear Tree Point. A local mason has been retained to do the work. The railing has been

extended. The tennis courts at Cherry Lawn Park have specifications for re-construction of the one single court. There is money in the existing reserve fund for this. This will be a summer project.

b) Assistant Director

Mr. Coghlan said registration began March 7 and brought in about \$100,000. On-line registration continues to be a viable way for residents to register for programs. The newest class offering is a fishing class that is offered free by the DEEP. There currently is a wait list of 85 residents for this class.

c) Chairman

Ms. Branigan thanked Ms. Daly for doing a great job as Acting Chairman for the February meeting. She said that the DDOG Rules and Regulations will be reviewed at the April meeting.

d) Sub-Committee

Ms. Morris read the following DDOG Update into the record:

“Mary Flynn is unable to be here today due to a family commitment. As requested in our February 2012 meeting, Mary Flynn and I have begun a review with regards to the Commission's off-leash regulations to reflect the success and failures back to the Commission. In the last month, I personally have been going to Cherry Lawn 4-5 mornings/week and Tilley Pond 2-3 mornings/week to observe its effectiveness and to gather the opinions of users of the parks. In addition, Mary and I have met with various relevant groups in town. Here is a summary of the feedback we received from the groups with whom we met.

1. **Darien Land Trust (as it relates to Selleck's Woods/Dunlap Woods)**

Erika met with Chris Filmer, President of the DLT and President of the Friends of Selleck's Woods. Chris said that in Selleck's Woods/Dunlap Woods, off-leash activity had decreased substantially with a particular positive development from the elimination of people bringing large groups of dogs to run off-leash. He estimated on-leash activity to be approximately 75% and was pleased with this result.

2. **Friends of Tilley Pond**

Erika Morris met with Talley MacDonald. Talley said that there have been no problems that she is aware of with the newly implemented off-leash hours. She pointed out that there is limited off-leash activity at Tilley Pond, which she suspects is due to the size of the park and the high volume of pedestrian traffic.

3. **Friends of Woodland Park**

Mary Flynn met with Dot Kelly and Meg Orner. Dot and Meg said that off-leash dogs have been 75% successful, with a few areas still a problem. They believe Woodland Park might need one more sign off of a side street where 5-6 dog owners still have their dogs off-leash. Oak Hill, on the yellow trail, continues to be a problem. Meg might be calling Sue Swiatek about this.

4. **Darien Police**

Mary Flynn spoke with Linda Santarella of the Darien Police Commission. Linda said that from what she had found out, no tickets have been given and the police think the regulations are fine.

5. **DDOG representative**

Mary and I met with DDOG representatives. DDOG believes the weekday hours at Cherry Lawn are working well and are very much appreciated. Dog owners have said that they would like to see hours permitted at Cherry Lawn during the summer and the weekends. The feedback on the area that runs along Brookside is that it is nice but that there are serious concerns for dog walkers due to a lack of fence. Dog owners agree that compliance and respect for the fields has not been an issue at Cherry Lawn. DDOG is in favor of a slight modification to regulations at Cherry Lawn to keep the existing weekday hours and add hours until 8:30 a.m. year round. This addition to the existing regulation reflects the interests of those who work weekdays, would allow hours in the summer and would not interfere with the use of the fields or Nature Center.

DDOG collected weekend usage data at Cherry Lawn between October 1, 2011 and March 17, 2012. DDOG monitored Cherry Lawn between 7 a.m. - 9 a.m. on Saturdays for 42 of the 50 weekend days. Throughout those weekends, children were recorded in the parks only on the first 4 Saturdays in October, when children were witnessed at Cherry Lawn after 8:45 a.m. Between October 29 and March 17, no children were recorded in the parks on weekends before 9 a.m.

DDOG also monitored Cherry Lawn for children in the morning hours last summer. For the first three weeks, from June 2 – July 15 and again for the four weeks from July 21 – August 15, no children were present in the park before 8:30 a.m.

6. **Review of Child Activity Start Times at Cherry Lawn**

Erika reviewed the hours for organized children activities at Cherry Lawn.

The hours of summer camp at Darien Nature Center

(Source: Darien Nature Center website (www.Dariennaturecenter.org))

Between June 25 – August 3, 8:45 a.m. to 1:00 p.m.

The soccer schedule is as follows (source: DSA website www.dariensoccer.org)

In the spring, Saturday 8:30 a.m.; Sunday 12:00 noon

In the autumn, Saturday 9:00 a.m.; Sunday 12:00 noon

The baseball/softball season is a 7 week season from September 10 to October 22

(source: Darien Youth Baseball & Softball website www.dybs.org)

Fall season: Saturday, 8:30a.m. earliest start

7. **Conclusion**

Based on the feedback we have gathered throughout town from the various groups just discussed, the Dog Committee believes that the current off-leash hours appear to be largely appropriate in terms of balancing citizen's interests, safety concerns and enforceability.

The only source of concern is Cherry Lawn, with its lack of hours for commuters throughout the calendar year and the lack of off-leash hours during summer months. The Dog Committee proposes that the Parks & Rec Commission consider a single change to the existing regulations to take into account constructive criticism and observations about Cherry Lawn.

We believe off-leash hours at Cherry Lawn as stipulated in the current regulations (dawn-10:30 a.m., Monday - Friday, September 1 - May 31) should remain in place. We believe that on top of the existing off-leash hours at Cherry Lawn, hours should be added such that dogs may be walked off-leash on all remaining days of the year between dawn and 8:30 a.m. This would allow dogs to be walked off-leash 365 days a year before 8:30 a.m. at Cherry Lawn (i.e. this would add hours on weekends and during summer months). We recognize that a critical component of this is an awareness of when children are in the park, which is why we reviewed the hours of organized childhood activities and a review of the DDOG site visit data.

Ironically, the terms of this proposal are identical to one put forward by Jane, Andy and Bob last fall, so it appears we were very much on the right track between the two proposals last autumn.

We believe that there should still be a period this summer to see how the current regulations are working, even if we could alter the regulations. This is a year to see how the current regulations work, and we have only seen them through 3 seasons. We are aware that even if the Commission passed expanded hours, they wouldn't take effect until next October so this summer means dogs on leash regardless of any discussions, and that must be respected by all.

It is our suggestion that whatever changes in hours are adopted at Cherry Lawn also be reflected at Tilley Pond.”

ANY OTHER BUSINESS (TWO THIRDS VOTE REQUIRED)

Ms. Swiatek said that the Weed Beach Warming Hut Rental Policy has been sent to Town Counsel for review. A point was made about the Darien Not-for-Profit groups and their placement on the rental list.

PUBLIC COMMENT

There was no public comment.

ADJOURN MEETING

- ** MS. DALY MOVED TO ADJOURN.**
- ** MS. MORRIS SECONDED.**
- ** MOTION PASSED UNANIMOUSLY.**

The meeting adjourned at 9:00 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Carolyn Marr
Telesco Secretarial Services

**NEXT MEETING: Regular Meeting April 11, 2012 7:30 p.m.
Darien Town Hall, Room 119**