

**TOWN OF DARIEN
PARKS & RECREATION COMMISSION
MINUTES OF REGULAR MEETING
APRIL 21, 2010**

ATTENDANCE: Jane Branigan, Chairman; Charles Goodyear; Andy Hunter;
Marianne Gutierrez; Vin Burke; Susan Daly; Bob Marchesi;

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

OTHER: Public Participation: Cheryl Russell, Dorothy Shergalis, Mike Hart

CALL TO ORDER

Ms. Branigan called the meeting to order at 7:35 p.m. and stated that the Commissioners as listed above were in attendance.

APPROVE MINUTES OF REGULAR MEETING FEBRUARY 24, 2010

Ms. Daly stated that the following corrections were needed: Page 1: remove the word “Branigan” after Acting Chairman; Page 3, paragraph 5 add “and informing Darien Police at the end of the last sentence.

**** MS. DALY MOTIONED TO APPROVE MINUTES OF FEBRUARY 24,
2010 AS AMENDED WITH CORRECTIONS NOTED.**

**** MR. MARCHESI SECONDED.**

**** THE MOTION PASSED UNANIMOUSLY.**

Ms. Branigan requested to suspend the rules to table item 2 on the agenda until the guests arrived, and all were in agreement.

STATUS OF WEED BEACH PROJECT

Ms. Branigan stated that at the Board of Selectmen’s meeting it was evident that the Town needs to give the Commission a timeframe for completion of the project, as the Town is having difficulty with choosing priorities of projects over the Police Station, Senior Residence, and the Beach Renovation. Ms. Daly stated that First Selectman Campbell initially seemed positive with statements of support, but then his tone changed and he seemed to have lost his support in view of other funding issues.

Ms. Swiatek stated that bonding which included this project was to have been done based on last year's approval, but the amount has now been dropped. Mr. Goodyear stated that there needs to be a push made to the Board of Selectmen and Ms. Branigan replied that she would contact them after the meeting with the Papajon Company (Contractor) next week to get an update on the construction and engineering. Ms. Swiatek stated that she needs to meet with Denise as the engineering needs more work, drawings need to be sent out for bid and the RFP is now a difficult process because of the delays. She added that there was speculation that the project will be a phase in and this presents issues with added costs and complications with things like power installation where digging, covering, re-surfacing would be done then have to be re-done to complete other areas. She stated that the big issue is the question of the Town's commitment to the project and this hinders future fundraising efforts, as groups have already donated, but the funds have not been used, as proposed in the plan.

Mr. Burke asked how confident he was that the \$3.5 million is sufficient to complete the project, and Ms. Swiatek responded that the preliminary bids are two years old and they need to go back to bid, along with the prevailing wage element of the project which represents another cost issue.

Mr. Goodyear presented an outline of background and summary action points for "The Case for Competing the Weed Beach Renovation Project." Ms. Daly suggested that the phrase "privately raised ¼ million dollars" be added to point three after 2009. Ms. Swiatek suggested that at the end of point four the words "and can be completed by ___ date" be added, as the project cannot wait until July as it is too late.

Ms. Gutierrez added that the last point was key and should be emphasized that the funds need to be released so that work can begin after this summer's beach season. She added that there were comments of adding a Town pool to the list of projects, and this was just not part of the approved plan; and other projects should not even be mentioned for consideration until those approved have been completed.

Mr. Burke thanked Mr. Goodyear for the overview and stated that it was a very good summary to get everyone focused on what needs to be done to get the project moving. He added that the local chatter is that no one wants to commit, but it should be noted that attendance at the beach lately is quite large, there is greater usage due to the economy where people are staying local rather than going on vacations. He stated that the down side is that the Board of Finance has made decisions on this and other projects, but no vote has been done on releasing the funds. He added that there should be pressure from the 18-49 demographic group to get something moving to provide recreational support, as the beach renovation may not be the top priority of other demographic groups.

After much discussion, it was agreed that the following next steps would be taken:

- Mr. Goodyear would update the outline and prepare a more formal proposal and e-mail revised document to the Commissioners comments or additions.
- Mr. Goodyear would prepare letters to the editor to get articles in the newspaper to alert the public that there is a need for a petition to the Board of Selectmen to get the release of funds to get the project going.
- Mr. Goodyear will create a petition for signatures by Darien residents.
- Mr. Hunter and Ms. Daly will canvas the beach area to get signatures on the petition.
- Ms. Swiatek will get the item put on the Board of Selectman meeting agenda for May 4.

REQUEST TO PLACE HONEY BEE HIVE IN CHERRY LAWN GARDENS.

Ms. Branigan asked the residents in attendance to introduce themselves and Dorothy Shergalis, stated that she represented the Community Gardeners and that Sonia Smith could not be here tonight. Ms. Shergalis distributed a fact sheet about honey bees and stated that Mr. Mike Hart of 21 Edgerton Street has bee hives on his property and was also here to answer questions.

Mr. Burke asked what the advantages were of having the bee hives beyond the pollination and if the gardeners were in favor.

Ms. Shergalis stated the fact sheet highlights all the benefits of the beehives, and that bee hives have been added to other parks in the area with no complaints. Ms. Swiatek asked what the specific location was, and that she had a concern with being so close to the playground, especially in view of resident calls and complaints to remove bee nests in the park. Mr. Shergalis responded that there was a perfect location along the northeast corner, a 12' x 16' plot that faces east near the end of the baseball field. She added that other spots that are away from the playground are too shaded, as the bees need to face east and there has to be sun.

Ms. Swiatek asked who would maintain the hives, and Ms. Shergalis responded that the Community Gardeners would, and that she, in particular would be in charge of the project and needs approval tonight as she has materials to order for the installation and maintenance.

Mr. Marchesi stated that he has concerns with people that have severe allergies and that it would be a liability to the Town

Mr. Burke stated that there is already a bee center at the nature center, and people that are allergic should carry an Epi-pen or response medications, and that hives in general keep bees away from the people, and stated that are many more environmental benefits.

Mr. Hart explained that the bees exit the hive at a trajectory level that goes directly up far above the height of a person, and they are on a mission that takes them miles away.

Ms. Branigan asked if there was anyone from the public here to comment on the bee hives. Ms. Cheryl Russell stated that she had concerns over the bee hives in view of small children that have a fear of bees and that this would hinder their desire to come to the park.

Ms. Branigan asked the Commissioners for their comments and questions.

Ms. Daly stated that there is a bigger purpose beyond pollination, but that there was a tremendous benefit to the environment where people are using pesticides and that this natural pollination would help create more plants and natural improvement to the ecology.

Mr. Goodyear stated that he was in agreement with Ms. Daly. Mr. Taylor stated that he also was in agreement and would be in favor of the bee hives. Mr. Marchesi stated that he was against the bee hives that it was too close to the playground and represents an increased chance of a bee sting to residents, primarily children. Ms. Gutierrez stated that she was in favor of the bee hives.

- ** **MS. DALY MOTIONED TO APPROVE THE INSTALLATION OF BEE HIVES AT CHERY LAWN GARDENS, TO BE MAINTAINED AS A RESPONSIBILITY OF THE DARIEN COMMUNITY GARDENERS.**
- ** **MS. GUTIERREZ SECONDED.**
- ** **THE MOTION PASSED WITH SIX VOTES IN FAVOR AND ONE OPPOSED (MR. MARCHESI).**

LIGHT AND ULTRA-LIGHT BOAT LAUNCH RAMP AT WEED BEACH

Ms. Swiatek said she has talked with the engineer regarding the boat ramp. She said they are working on how to make the turn-around improvement and the parking lot lines in the playground area. She added that she will keep this on the agenda until there is a resolution, adding that the location has been placed where the Harbor Master has recommended.

BUDGET REQUEST FY 2011 STATUS

Ms. Swiatek distributed copies of the budget to the Commissioners. She said the Board of Selectmen has approved the budget, with some reductions made in the Professional Services area, which the most significant cut was to the beach clean-up.

REPORTS

a) Director's Report.

Ms. Swiatek said that work continues to be done at the Senior Center, clean-up work has been done on the parks and fields, but the clean-up from last month's storm took precedence. She added that the fields all now look great, and mentioned that the new LED lights at Tilley Pond look great, and she suggested that the Commissioners drive by the park at night so they can see them. She said that they should expect to see a reduction in electricity usage by using the new LED lights, and as listed on her report, reimbursement from CL&P grant money was received to install the LED retrofit kits. Revised bids for the final installation of remaining lights at Tilley Pond have been requested from the two low bidders.

Ms. Daly asked when the water at the beach will be turned on, and Ms. Swiatek responded that it was just turned on this week, but that Pear Tree Point was not yet opened as there is no staff until Memorial Day.

Mr. Burke stated that there are more complaints about dog usage at Pear Tree Beach and there should be more appropriate signage that dogs are not allowed.

Ms. Russell added that she was there tonight especially to register a complaint about residents that continue to bring dogs to the beach, even hiding them from view from the gate guards. Ms. Swiatek responded that it is an enforcement issue, and she will ask the guards to check, but that it continues to be a point of frustration, as residents simply do not abide by the rules.

Mr. Goodyear stated that violators should be ticketed the same as if not using seat belts or using cell phones, and that the warning approach just does not work like a ticket. Ms. Russell said she would be sending a letter to the editor and there should be more newspaper articles on the issue next week.

It was agreed to put a larger, more prominent sign at the entrance, near the stop sign.

b) Assistant Director

Mr. Coghlan presented his report, as included in the handout, and said registration for the Spring/Summer programs began last month and the numbers so far are comparable to last year. He said that they have half of the lifeguards from last year returning this year, and that interviews are ongoing, adding that a Waterfront Coordinator has been hired, replacing Francesca Principe. He said the registration numbers for the soccer programs are very good.

Mr. Coghlan added that his report included a summary of the paddle court revenue and expenses, and that he plans to lose a slightly lower amount than in past years. He stated that on the agenda was a discussion of fees for the tennis court fee policy and explained that the requests have tripled over last year.

Discussion of and take action on the Tennis Court fee policy:

Mr. Coghlan gave an overview of past practices of advertising a notice posted to the community of requests to reserve court time on a blocking basis for the three back courts. He added that the USTA Junior League has practices and matches on Sundays, and has increased their requests for court time for ages 10-15, with an increase in time requested over the hours in 2009 to 60 hours.

Mr. Taylor asked how much represented in charges, and Mr. Coghlan responded \$5 per court, per hour on the weekdays and \$6 for weekends, or a total of approximately \$72 per week.

After much discussion, it was decided that the USTA league could remain on the block schedule at no charge up to the number of hours as requested this past year.

**** MR. GOODYEAR MOTIONED TO APPROVE THE CONTINUATION OF THE TENNIS COURT FEE PRACTICE, WITH ADDITIONAL COURT TIME BLOCKS REQUESTED OVER 2009 BE CHARGED AT THE GOING RATES.**

**** MR. MARCHESI SECONDED.**

**** THE MOTION PASSED UNANIMOUSLY.**

c) Chairman

Ms. Branigan stated that there was no formal Chairman's report, other than that provided during the discussion of Weed Beach Renovation.

OTHER BUSINESS (TWO-THIRDS VOTE)

There was no Other Business to report.

PUBLIC COMMENTS.

Public comments were included in the discussion of the bee hives at Cherry Lawn gardens and as part of the Director's report, discussion regarding dog usage at the beaches.

Ms. Branigan stated that the next meeting was a regular meeting scheduled for May 19, at 7:30 p.m. at the Darien Town Hall, room 119.

**** MS. GUTIERREZ MOTIONED TO ADJOURN.**
**** MS. DALY SECONDED.**
**** THE MOTION PASSED UNANIMOUSLY.**

The meeting was adjourned at 9:25 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Marilyn Knox
Telesco Secretarial Services