

**MINUTES
PARKS & RECREATION COMMISSION
JANUARY 21, 2009**

- ATTENDANCE:** Jane Branigan, Chairman; Andy Hunter; Vin Burke; Susan Daly; Mary Ann Gutierrez (7:40); Robert Marchesi; Susan Graham (7:45).
- STAFF:** Sue Swiatek, Director; James Coghlan, Assistant Director.
- OTHERS:** Peter Hovell, Chairman WBBC; Friends of Woodland Park

Mrs. Branigan called the meeting to order at 7:30 p.m.

STATUS REPORT, WEED BEACH MASTER PLAN
GUEST: PETER HOVELL, CHAIRMAN WBBC

Peter Hovell, Weed Beach Building Committee Chairman, spoke about the Weed Beach bathhouse re-design plans. He brought renderings for view and discussion. He explained that the height will be lower by about eight feet. Dormers will no longer be in the new design. He said that the new construction has a simpler look. He mentioned that the base is poured concrete block. It should have a life span of 75 to 100 years, he believes. He said that A. Papajohn has done a great job. The project is within Budget.

Mr. Hovell next talked about the playground. He did not bring charts. The project has been approved by the RTM and work will begin in the spring. A. Papajohn also is working on this project. He said that the Selectmen have reviewed and approved the safety issues, security, and sewers.

- ** THE CHAIRMAN MOVED TO CHANGE THE ORDER OF THE SCHEDULED AGENDA ITEMS.**
- ** MR. BURKE SECONDED.**
- ** MOTION PASSED UNANIMOUSLY.**

The change of agenda items order was in consideration of the large crowd present to listen and discuss the Woodland Park dog issue. The Chairman said that this item is be addressed next.

DISCUSSION ON DOGS IN WOODLAND PARK
GUESTS: FRIENDS OF WOODLAND PARK

Amy Zabetakis, Esq., a local town attorney, spoke about the need for dogs to be on a leash within Woodland Park. She is a member of the "Friends of Woodland Park". This park is a nature preserve and with dogs running within and unleashed, they are a concern to parents, their young children, and the birds and inhabitants of the nature preserve. She mentioned that dog owners do not always pick up their dog droppings. The dogs also run over to adjoining properties disturbing cook-outs and gatherings. The dog owner oftentimes has to go onto the neighboring property to retrieve the dog. She believes it is very important to have dogs on a leash within the park.

At 7:40 p.m., Ms. Gutierrez arrived at the meeting.

At 7:45 p.m., Ms. Graham arrived at the meeting.

The Chairman said that many people walk dogs on a leash and as many want their dogs to have free roam of the park.

She said that a Public Hearing should be scheduled before the March meeting to hear all sides.

It was noted that dogs are not allowed on beaches leashed or unleashed.

Julie Frank said that dogs are under control in the park, in her opinion.

Steve Burns mentioned that there are many dog walkers in the park every day. That it is a shared park.

Ms. Swiatek read parts of a letter date stamped January 20, 2009 from Betty Jewett, President of 'Friends of Woodland Park'. It was addressed to 1st Selectwoman, Evonne Klein. Ms. Jewett strongly urged that the request for unleashed dogs in the park be turned down. She stated that families with children, and seniors are particularly vulnerable when coming into contact with an unleashed dog. Dogs within the park are counterproductive to the requirements of the nature preserve.

One of the 'Friends' inquired if the Animal Control Unit has a record of dog bites. It was answered in the affirmative.

The Chairman said this discussion should now be closed and left until the Public Hearing. She stated that nothing is going to be decided this evening.

APPROVE MINUTES OF THE REGULAR MEETING OF DECEMBER 17, 2008

The following corrections were made to the Minutes as follows:

Mary Ann Gutierrez said that she was present at the December 17th meeting and her name was omitted in the Attendance.

On Page 4, the last name of Burnham is replaced with Burns.

- ** **MS. GUTIERREZ MOVED TO APPROVE THE MINUTES AS AMENDED.**
- ** **MR. HUNTER SECONDED.**
- ** **MOTION PASSED UNANIMOUSLY.**

BUDGET REQUEST 2010 UPDATE

Ms. Swiatek reported that the Parks and Recreation Budget will be presented to the Board of Selectmen at the board's February 4 meeting at 7:30 p.m. in Room 206. The operating budget is at a .5 % increase only.

Mr. Marchesi suggested that a worse-case scenario "What If" plan be will worked on.

Ms. Swiatek said that the Parks budget is an easy target.

If there is a cut of maintenance personnel by one full-time position, this will impact performance. This is one area of the Parks budget that can be impacted.

REPORTS

a) Director

Ms. Swiatek reviewed her written report as follows:

She noted that many people are staying closer to home and using the Town's facilities. Residents are using the Parks more for 'Day-cations', rather than going away for vacations. She further added that it is important to maintain the parks and recreation facilities. With job losses and pay freezes, people are choosing to partake in family events closer to home. She gave the example that as people are giving up their club memberships, the paddle courts are being used more. It was reported that the propane heaters have been replaced under all five courts. The requests for parks and facility use are rising. The use increases as the economy weakens, she pointed out.

Ms. Swiatek reported that the tennis court resurfacing at Weed Beach has been completed.

She reported that Tilley lights and posts have been ordered.

Road and walkways snow removal has gone well. The department does help the Public Works crew with the clearing of snow.

The frozen ponds have been inspected. There should be seven inches of ice thickness for ice skating

b) ASSISTANT DIRECTOR

Mr. Cogan reviewed his report as follows:

He mentioned that the number of people signing up for classes is down, and those that are signing up wait until the last minute.

The spring and summer brochure should be completed in February. There will be more classes added. He mentioned that Major League Soccer will be back.

Expected mailing date is toward the end of February.

c) CHAIRMAN

There was no report.

Ms. Branigan will work on a Public Hearing meeting date on the dog issue.

d) PLAYGROUND BY THE SOUND

Mrs. Daly mentioned the potluck supper planned for the volunteers. This was considered a very nice gesture.

There will be two water-play components added.

ANY OTHER BUSINESS
(two thirds vote required)

A letter was received from S. Lloyd Plehaty concerning the Parking Ban on Pear Tree Point Road. Discussion took place.

Ms. Swiatek said that police have more jurisdiction on this matter, and a note by way of e-mail should be sent to the police department asking for their position.

It was noted that the chain-link fence is down because of rot, and not down for parking.

PUBLIC COMMENTS

More discussion ensued on the dog issue. Cheryl Russell, P & R Committee Chair and Mrs. Branigan will follow up to set a date for the public hearing on the dog issue. The hearing should only address dogs in Woodland Park.

The police department has asked for an Ordinance. At present there are only rules and regulations. It was agreed that an Ordinance is necessary. It is up to the RTM. An Ordinance should be in place for all Parks to have dogs on a leash. Gary Swenson expressed a concern for sidewalks cleaning of dog droppings and a liability.

**** MS. DALY MOVED TO ADJOURN.**
**** MS. GRAHAM SECONDED.**
**** MOTION PASSED UNANIMOUSLY.**

The meeting was adjourned at 9:30 p.m.

NEXT MEETING: Regular Meeting, February 11, 2009, 7:30 p.m.; Darien Town Hall, Room 213** (note room change)

Respectfully submitted,

Anne Hohlweck
Telesco Secretarial Services