

**TOWN OF DARIEN
PARKS AND RECREATION COMMITTEE
REGULAR MEETING
OCTOBER 21, 2009**

ATTENDANCE: Jane Branigan, Chair; Susan Daly, Vin Burke, Bob Marchesi,
Marianne Gutierrez; Susan Graham

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

CALL TO ORDER

Ms. Branigan called the meeting to order at 7:35 p.m.

APPROVE MINUTES OF REGULAR MEETING OF SEPTEMBER 16, 2009.

**** MS. DALEY MOVED THE MINUTES.**

**** MR. MARCHESI SECONDED.**

Mr. Burke said that there had been a lengthy discussion about the boat ramp at Weed Beach. He then said that he had written out a statement about the discussion and that he would read it into the record.

Ms. Swiatek pointed out that the minutes are a condensation of the subject discussed during the meeting. Mr. Burke said that he felt the minutes were substantially incomplete because they did not include the points mentioned in the discussion about the boat ramp. Ms. Swiatek said that in the past, the commission had gone to great length to have things put in the minutes that were near verbatim and this had set a precedent. However minutes were never intended to be a verbatim record. Mr. Burke said that he found the minutes wanting, Ms. Branigan suggested that the prepared statement could be read into the record when the Commission discussed the item later on the agenda.

**** THE MOTION TO APPROVE THE MINUTES PASSED WITH THREE (DALY, BURKE, AND MARCHESI) IN FAVOR AND ONE ABSTENTION (BRANIGAN).**

STATUS REPORT ON WEED BEACH MASTER PLAN

The Weed Beach group did not meet. Ms. Swiatek said that she was still waiting for information on the fence around the playground. Mr. Burke asked several questions about the location of the fence and what the material would be. Ms. Daly updated the Commission members about the brick walk, and the benches that were installed. She also informed everyone about the plaque that will be installed with the names of the major

donors on the grassy area near the parking area. She said that the plaque will be bronze and anchored to the ground.

DISCUSS THE USE AND STATUS OF THE LIGHT AND ULTRA LIGHT BOAT LAUNCH RAMP AT WEED BEACH.

Ms. Swiatek said that discussions were still underway about the location of the ramp and the Committee was still reaching out to those who would be using the ramp. Ms. Branigan said that originally the ramp was supposed to be used for boats under six feet. Ms. Swiatek explained that jet skis were included in the regulations because the Harbor Master had said that they did not want jet skis launching from Pear Tree. Any paving of the ramp into the water would require DEP approval.

Mr. Burke said that he would like to read a statement titled “The small boat ramp at Weed Beach” into the minutes.

“I’d like to reiterate what I have been saying since our first discussion of the Weed Beach Master Plan regarding the small boat ramp at the beach...now located between the playground and the swing set.

First, It (sic) should be noted that I made formal requests to the Weed Beach Building Committee at every meeting I attended and on numerous occasions in discussions with committee members to make sure the small boat ramp was NOT EXCLUDED FROM PLANS DRAWN (sic) UP by the Weed Beach Building Committee and Stearns and Wheeler who were assigned to develop site plans for the project. Chairman of the Weed Beach Building Committee Peter Hovell agreed it was an integral part of the master plan. And so it is and it was included in every drawing and rendering presented to this board.

Now because of the placement of the playground and swing set on either side of the ramp it has become an issue. I want it known to this Board that I concur with the Darien Harbor Master that this is the best location for the ramp that has been in place as the Harbor Master puts it “for as long as anyone can remember.” In point of fact, Harbor Master Price said that he is absolutely opposed to relocating the ramp. It should be noted that the Harbor Master is the sole controlling agent of the Darien Harbors from the high tide water line outwards into the Darien Harbor and is appointed by the Governor and reports to the State of CT not to the Town.

The ramp services as a launch area for small boats under 16 feet including kayaks and other small craft.

Additionally, it should be noted that the playground area is a welcomed addition to the beach, the swing set is clearly out of place in its present location and presents a significant safety hazard. It should also be noted that that boat ramp area needs to be paved to allow vehicular access when dropping off small boats and kayaks.

Mr. Burke went on to say that there was parking abutting both the playground area and swing set area. He added that regarding the location of the ramp; there was a possibility of moving the ramp further down the beach. He noted that there is a large rock formation on one side. Mr. Burke said that the swing set and the playground were wonderful additions to beach. Now it would be important to fix the problem with the ramp. He then asked if it could be in the area where the Junior Sailing area was, or possibly fence the area off so that children could not wander into the path of vehicles that were backing up.

Mr. Burke said that one of the reasons that the ramp has not been used extensively is because many people don't know that the ramp is there, according to Harbor Master Price. There are many kayaks that now use the beaches. He also said that there was a possibility of moving the swings. Ms. Daly said that the children do run back and forth. Ms. Branigan asked if the children were wandering around that area before the playground and swing set were in place. She was told that the children did run across that area, but they did it more now that the playground was there.

Mr. Burke said that most of the ramp use occurs either early or late in the day. He also reminded everyone that the Darien must provide access to the moorings nearby. Ms. Swiatek said that she had spoken with the Planning Department about the swings. Planning and Zoning would not allow the swings to be moved to the beach side because it moves the set from 17 foot elevation to a 12 foot elevation in a flood zone. Mr. Burke said that this was idle obfuscation.

The discussion then moved to whether or not there would be gates by the ramp. Ms. Swiatek suggested that the Harbor Master be invited to the next meeting to discuss this issue. She also said that she would like to go visit the site at low tide and see where the location of the rocks. Mr. Burke said that people are always looking for places to launch their kayaks and that the waiting list at the Boat Club is very long.

Ms. Swiatek said that she had attended a meeting on Shorelines and kayaking. The sport has exploded. Mr. Burke said that another option would be to eliminate the end of the ramp and have the users walk the watercraft down to the water. A small boat would require the owners to carry the watercraft some distance anyway.

Ms. Swiatek repeated that she would invite Harbor Master to the next meeting. Mr. Burke said that the ramp should have been more prominent in the Master Plan.

DISCUSS THE BUDGET FOR 2011.

Ms. Swiatek distributed copies of the Operating Budget to everyone. She then reviewed major points for the 2009-2010 Capital Expenditure budget. She said that the revenues were down and that the Department was still on a freeze regarding capital projects. Currently, one candidate for First Selectman is saying there will be no increases in the budgets, while the other candidate is advocating following whatever plans the Board of Finance would suggest.

Ms. Swiatek said that the Holohan field needed attention, but that she would want to push that project off to 2011-2012 budget. She said that she would rather work on Dillard Field. Weed Beach funding is still frozen, and until that is finished, all the other projects should be moved back to 2011-12 budget. The sand replacement for Pear Tree Point will remain in the current budget. Ms. Swiatek said that until the Pear Tree Point Master Plan is done, all the improvements for Pear Tree needs to be moved to 2011-12 budget.

Ms. Swiatek then reported that the tennis court resurfacing for Cherry Lawn was on hold because the seams at Weed Beach courts that were just resurfaced have been popping up. She said that the resurfacing for the back courts at Weed Beach was also on hold until a decision is made about which resurfacing material will be used. Ms. Gutierrez asked about the paddle tennis courts and the repair schedule. Ms. Swiatek and Mr. Coghlan reviewed the details of the regular maintenance and the major repairs with the Commissioners.

Ms. Swiatek said that regarding the Operating Budget, she had been told by the Town Manager that there would be a major cuts. She said that she had not decided which items to cut, but was offering some suggestions. She then said that she had called the insurance company and said that she asked them what would happen if there were no lifeguards and it was became swim at your own risk. She also said that she was exploring the gate cards, and other options on the cleaning and garbage pick up. Geese and pest control measures are being considered for elimination. She reminded everyone that there are contractual agreements that have to be honored. In November, there will be additional information and Ms. Swiatek will bring that new information to the Commission at that time. Mr. Burke asked how many vehicles the Department has. Ms. Swiatek said that there were five trucks, and these were used for plowing.

REPORTS:

a) **Director**

Ms. Swiatek said that Mr. Coghlan and Jeanie are working on the Town website. Ms. Daly said that she had used the DPW interactive area on the Town Website to report cracks in the asphalt and they were repaired promptly.

Mr. Burke said that he would be willing to help with figuring out what the department has accomplished. Then the information could be released to the newspaper as a potential feature story. He said that people have no idea of all the work that goes into preparing the various facilities for the public to use. Discussion followed.

Ms. Swiatek said the gym bleachers bids are out and will be opened on November 2nd. The new bleachers will be code compliant.

Ms. Swiatek added that the new Senior Center director is doing a wonderful job and the Department will be painting the areas this winter. Ms. Daly pointed out that Ms. Swiatek now had an additional area to manage. The discussion then moved to what the candidates had said at the recent debate about the Senior Center repairs and the future of the Senior Center.

b) Assistant Director

Mr. Coghlan gave a brief overview of the number of people registering online for the program. His report contained a bar graph showing the increase in the number of people utilizing the online registration. While the number of residents registering online has increased, the number of calls to the department remains steady because people are calling about various aspects of the programs that can't be handled online.

He also reviewed the repairs that were made to the paddle tennis court. The winter programs will start in January. The discussion then moved to a new field house that opened recently.

Ms. Swiatek said that there were some rules for how the paddle tennis time was blocked out. She said that she and Mr. Coghlan would be looking at the schedule to see if more time can be blocked out.

c) Chairman

Ms. Branigan said that she had a wonderful time in Russia. She said that St. Petersburg was great.

d) Playground by the Sound -

This issues was already discussed earlier in the meeting.

ANY OTHER BUSINESS (REQUIRING TWO THIRDS VOTE)

**** MS. DALY MOVED TO DISCUSS THE PADDLE TENNIS RULES.**

**** MR. MARCHESI SECONDED.**

**** THE MOTION PASSED UNANIMOUSLY.**

Mr. Coghlan distributed copies of the paddle tennis rules. He explained that the only advanced reservation time blocks that were currently offered were on Saturday morning. Sundays were open to call in requests. By allowing the residents to block in the afternoons, or on week-days, more revenue would be generated.

Mr. Coghlan said that the Department blocks in hour increments, but there have been requests for reservations for an hour and a half. He suggested that it would be good to have this time block available and charge the hourly rate times one and a half. This seemed agreeable to all.

Mr. Burke said that he had received a number of calls about dogs on the beach now that there are no life guards present. Ms. Swiatek said that it was posted, but that there was only one Animal Control officer for the entire town.

**** MR. BURKE MOVED TO APPROVE THE CHANGES TO THE PADDLE COURT AS AGREED UPON IN THE DISCUSSION.**

**** MS. GRAHAM SECONDED**

**** THE MOTION PASSED UNANIMOUSLY.**

PUBLIC COMMENTS

There was no one from the public present to comment.

ADJOURNMENT

**** MS. BRANIGAN MOVED TO ADJOURN.**

**** MS. DALY SECONDED.**

**** THE MOTION PASSED UNANIMOUSLY**

The meeting adjourned at 9:05 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Sharon L. Soltes
Telesco Secretarial Services