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Representative Town Meeting, Town of Darien
Parks and Recreation Committee
MINUTES, October 6, 2014

The meeting was called to order at 7:30PM by Chairman Cheryl Russell who presided.

Eight members were present: Chairman Russell, Vice-Chair Adele Conniff, Diane Conologue, Nancy Coyle Downs, Dana Fead, Anne Finn, Phyllis Hawkins, and Bill Van Loan

Absent were: Joseph Cherico, Werner Domittner, and Secretary Carol Matton

Also in attendance was: Mary Flynn who serves as the Chairman of the Parks and Recreation Commission.

There was a discussion on the various potential uses of the recently purchased Short Lane property that abuts Weed Beach. The committee members' ideas included: a nature trail, volley ball court, and kayak launch. The consensus was "less is more." The committee agreed that the recreational development of the property should be "low-key," "user friendly," and "nature-oriented."

Chairman Russell then addressed the committee's recent vote not to accept the Board of Finance's budget. Those present discussed that fact that Parks and Recreation brings into the town's budget \$456,000. in revenue yet had its budgetary requests cut from \$395,000. down to \$65,000. Chairman Russell repeated her words from the RTM meeting on the town's budget: "Parks and Rec can no longer survive on less than 1% of the town's budget."

Many members expressed frustration that after two major storms - Irene and Sandy - our two town beaches have not received new sand - for 9 years at Pear Tree Beach and for 6 years at Weed Beach. There was also discussion about the poor care of trees at Pear Tree, the closing of toilet facilities after Labor Day, and the delayed garbage removal after a recent road race. A discussion ensued that included comments that there has been a disconnect with the Board of Finance, and that we need to attend their meeting to show them that we on Parks and Recreation are serious about our financial needs which benefit everybody in Darien.

There was agreement that there is a need for a new gate house at Pear Tree Beach (an item requested but voted down by the Board of Finance), new sand for the beaches, and open toilet facilities at Pear Tree Beach through mid-October.

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Chairman Russell then talked about the recent changes in the Department of Parks and Recreation. Sue Swiatek retired recently and Jim Conklin is serving as the interim director. Mrs. Russell commended the retired director for the “fantastic job” she did.

Finally, there was a discussion about a request made to Parks and Recreation to allow leashed dog-walking at Weed Beach during the off-season. The request was made by a resident of Noroton Bay. It was pointed out that Westport and Greenwich allow dogs on their beaches after Columbus Day. There was no vote or consensus of opinion - just the agreement for more discussion of the pertinent facts.

There being no further business, the meeting adjourned at 9:30PM.

Respectfully submitted,

Phyllis Hawkins