

TOWN OF DARIEN: RTM PARKS AND RECREATION COMMITTEE
REGULAR MEETING: WEDNESDAY, JANUARY 3RD, 2024
7:30 PM, VIRTUAL ZOOM MEETING
[YOUTUBE LINK TO THE MEETING](#)

ATTENDANCE: Adele Conniff, Chair, Diane Conologue, Bill Van Loan, Mary Nevin Gauthier, Kari Cardone, Susan Marks, Sandy Savage, Andy Millar, Sarah Baldwin, Cheryl Russell, Alyssa Mahoney, Kim Kiner

ABSENT: Tony Larino, David York, Patti Bumgardner, Penny Wilson, Sue-Ellen Mitchell

Adele called the meeting to order at 7:30 PM, and began with a quorum of 10 but 2 members joined shortly after.

P&R Commission Proposed 2024-2025 Operating Budget, Capital Improvements & Six Year Capital Plan: Overview by Pam Gery, P&R Department Director.

- Feel free to email Pam with any questions or follow up from the budget discussion if needed after the meeting.
- Began with overview of all the proposed revenue, historical actuals and revised FY 23/24 and proposed FY 24/25 which is 7/1/24-6/30/25.
- Reviewed rationale behind decreases and increases in revenue for FY 24/25: Some examples were Arts Center not renting Town Hall as often, incredibly rainy fall leading to numerous cancellations. Some numbers will change slightly due to Pam's departure. The coordinator role was removed.
- Transfer from New Rev Fund: No historical data on that, because it was never put in the budget as a net figure. Decision was made to bring back net revenue instead of going to the RTM for approval of what they might need, they have a line item for net revenue. The \$20K increase will be removed due to no new coordinator position.
- Operating Budget is categorized by Admin, Beach and Court, Rec Facilities, Maintenance Expenses, Organized Rec Expenses, Grounds\Fields and Building Expenses.
- To make a review of the budget easier, Pam highlighted the 4 Drivers increasing the operating budget. Full time salary was increased by \$60,000 increase but will no longer be a part of it due to rec coordinator position being removed. Any other increase will be strictly cost of living. \$40,000 is the software Activenet. introduced an annual flat fee. In the past, the system required a percentage fee that was previously paid for every CC, Cash and Check transaction that would cost the town 2-3% with a processing fee which was \$130,000. The processing fee will not go away but the percentage fee is now being turned into an annual flat fee that saves us \$10,000. Not typically in the budget but is now due to it being an annual fee. There is an increase of \$27,000 in beautification funding(Bring in plantings, trees and flowers into our parks) for a total of \$45,000. Last year \$15K

for invasives removal up to \$45K, our budget is lower than neighboring towns. Park Monitor salary moved to seasonal account.

- All other items increased or decreased slightly due to historical data, little rain and using irrigation, cost of living, etc
- Capital Improvement Plan: Broken up by Park, in the overview you can see some projects in the past, what was appropriated for FY 24(What they're working on today) and funds being requesting for FY25. Highlighted areas per park are what is being requested for FY 25.
 - Cherry Lawn: Repave Nature Center Driveway, in desperate need and has been requested the past few years but has been pushed back, Fix foundation in overflow parking due to rock foundation crumbling, traffic study, repair cracks in basketball court, playground amenities.
 - Baker Park-fix fence(especially since that's the next playground we do),
 - Holohan Field, replace backstop(RTM committee suggestion)
 - Weed Beach, security cameras(lamppost camera is the recommendation), paddle court repairs(second year of six year plan), replace gatehouse as the current one is in disrepair, replace the tennis wall and court, meadow & trail project-January 9th P&Z approval for the project with the goal of adding in the paper for Jan 25, bid opening on Feb. 29th and that would give the lowest bid and with the goal of finished by August 2024. If the bid comes in under 1 million, the town can use the Darien Foundation grant of \$350,000 for the project. \$650K would be required from town funding.
 - Pear Tree: Probable cost estimate came in at 6.6 Million. It is proposed for raising the parking lot, dredging and installing a new boat ramp. Question of if we can do the boat ramp portion as a stand alone project. Proposal came in higher than expected so it's currently on hold. 5 year permit, question of extension came up. Tree funding is included in overall beautification and tree maintenance fund and can be applied to Pear Tree.
 - Small capital fund continues at 5K a year
 - Equipment Replacements: Additional AED kits, Hook Truck and Stand on Blower
 - Thank you to Pam and we're all really going to miss her!!

Working Groups & Committee Updates

A member had a clarification question about budget timing. Since the commission voted in November with the election cycle we didn't get to provide feedback prior to the budget being voted on. Committee agreed that moving forward whether it's the old or new committee, a November meeting is essential.

Budget committee volunteers are needed, especially important with Pam's departure. More hands there are, the better the process goes. Really helps to have someone present and listening as it is working through the entire process and we can assist with questions.

No other working groups had met since our last commission meeting.

Great Island Advisory Committee Update by Adele: Necessary maintenance on the island. Initial things are done (patching of roof of stable, fence around pool area, fall cleanup, snow removal has been contracted out). Driveway approvals are in progress. Going to the architecture review board for their feedback on how the entrance looks, there is an A plan and B plan. Since May \$230,000 spent on maintenance and taken in \$380,000 in revenue. Priority now is the need to hire a master plan consultant, RFQ needs to be put together now to evaluate the applicants. Pedestrian access being explored and Parks & Rec rules are being used as a template with input from the coastal advisory committee. New url for the website and hope to add historical photos. Next meeting is in mid January.

Chairman's Report

- Pam already updated us on Weed Beach Meadow & Trail and Construction Bid at Pear Tree
- Bathroom renovation underway at Pear Tree, expect to finish the painting and floor in the spring. Trench project is complete and looks great.
- Tennis court received some extra funding from ARPA(\$33,000) P&Z required extra dollars spent because it's in a flood plain and there was a protocol that had to be followed.
- Playground: Cherry Lawn equipment ordered, next is Baker Playground.
- 500 gallon water tank will go out to bid in January, 3 trailers will be ordered by public works and the brush cutter has been received and is being used to remove invasives.
- Whirl at McGuane Park that was taped off due to it not working properly. It cannot be adjusted so a new one has been ordered
- Parks & Rec Commission Highlights: Finalized Parks & Rec rules and regulations. Reviewed annual parks assessment, 5 RTM Parks & Rec members participated in this process along with 9 committee members. Top Priorities were: complete existing projects, maintenance, invasive management, pickleball demand, congestion at cherry lawn and beautification of the parks. Fee schedule review which will be voted on in Jan, pickleball group is organized and meeting Jan. 10 at 3pm in Room 119

Other Business

Request for Adele to re-send the committee meeting schedule

Adjourn

Meeting ended at 8:30