



**TOWN OF DARIEN
PARKS AND RECREATION COMMISSION
REGULAR MEETING
JANUARY 17, 2024
7:30 PM, TOWN HALL - ROOM 119 & VIRTUAL VIA ZOOM**

ATTENDANCE: Lorene Bora, Chair, Susan Daly, Mary Louise Morgan, Jim Farrell,
Cathy Mulrow-Peattie, Janet Cling
ABSENT: Chris Taylor, Kara Bohnsack, Amy Doering
STAFF: Pam Gery, Director of Parks and Recreation
Jim Coghlan, Assistant Director of Parks and Recreation
AUDIENCE: Susan Marks (speaking as resident), Tricia Conley, Elaine Scott
RTM Parks and Recreation Committee Members:
Kim Kiner

Ms. Bora called the meeting to order at 7:38 PM.

Ms. Bora began by explaining that Ms. Gery would be leaving Darien Parks and Recreation to take a position in Guilford, CT. She thanked Ms. Gery on behalf of the Commission for her dedicated service to the community and presented a gift. Ms. Bora read aloud a letter from the Chairman of the RTM Parks and Recreation Committee, Adele Conniff, thanking Ms. Gery on behalf of the RTM Parks and Recreation Committee.

APPROVAL OF THE COMMISSION MINUTES FROM DECEMBER 13, 2023

**** MS. MULROW-PEATIE MOVED TO APPROVE THE MINUTES FROM
DECEMBER 13, 2023 AS PRESENTED
** MS. MORGAN SECONDED
** THE MOTION PASSED UNANIMOUS**

PUBLIC COMMENT

Susan Marks, 39 Fairfield Avenue

Ms. Marks echoed concerns from previous Parks and Recreation Commission meetings regarding traffic and congestion at Cherry Lawn Park. She asked the Commission to

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consider these concerns prior to approving any new proposals – specifically the upcoming walking path proposal, which may increase traffic and congestion within the park.

**DISCUSS AND VOTE ON NEW CHERRY LAWN PARK WALKING PATH –
PRESENTATION BY CHRIS FILMER**

Ms. Bora introduced Chris Filmer, resident and naturalist in town who has dedicated many hours to the parks and land trust work.

Mr. Filmer displayed a slideshow, explaining that a large number of invasive trees have been removed from Cherry Lawn Park, opening up a vast area of potential for a nature trail. The proposed trail would begin from the existing lawn and wind its way south through the woods towards the pond to the existing Arched Stone Bridge, and then to a small island ringed with plants and shrubs native to wetlands.

Mr. Filmer answered various questions from the Commission regarding the nature trail presentation. Ms. Daly noted that an Eagle Scout has already offered support to Mr. Filmer for the trail work and heavy lifting.

Ms. Bora questioned if this is remediation work or something new, given that there are already some existing trails, many of which are used by the Darien Nature Center. Ms. Daly stated that she would consider it an enhancement and cleaning up of the space.

Ms. Gery clarified that the Cherry Lawn Park traffic study item in the budget has not yet been approved.

The Commission agreed that prior to voting on the matter, the proposal information will be passed along to the Invasives Remediation Working Group. Research will also need to be done to determine if this proposal will require Environmental Protection Commission approvals. The matter will be revisited at a future meeting.

CHERRY LAWN PARK GARDENERS

Ms. Bora introduced Tricia Conley, Secretary of existing Cherry Lawn Gardens Committee and Elaine Scott, Treasurer, to provide some background information to the Commission regarding existing operations of the Cherry Lawn Community Gardens. Ms. Bora explained that all of the Parks and Recreation working groups and committees are typically chaired by a member of the Parks and Recreation Commission and that Ms. Morgan would be appointed later in the meeting as Chair of the Cherry Lawn Park Gardens Committee.

A) Presentation on the gardens:

Ms. Conley read aloud a statement from Dorothy Shergalis, President of existing

Cherry Lawn Community Gardens Committee, providing a brief background of the committee and operations including current fees and contracts.

There are approximately sixty garden plots, some of which are split between gardeners. The waitlist is extensive with approximately 20-30 residents on the wait list. About 10 residents have forfeited their plots since 2020 allowing few to come off of the waitlist.

Ms. Conley and Ms. Scott answered various questions from the Commission. Ms. Conley clarified that Ms. Shergalis will contact gardeners if their plots are not being maintained according to standards.

There are various volunteers to maintain aspects of the gardens including the shed and hoses.

B) Review and discuss updated rules:

There was discussion regarding the existing rules document.

Ms. Morgan explained that last year, a gardener hired a contractor to pour six inches of pebbles within the garden plot and install high raised beds. She expressed concern over this matter, stating that it may cause issues for the next gardener to use that plot and that it may create an unwanted precedent. She emphasized that some set of standards must be put in place regarding raised beds. Ms. Bora confirmed that the Parks Supervisor did not observe any issues with the raised beds.

Ms. Morgan explained that out of the 60 plots, 58 plots have raised beds that are 18 inches or lower and 2 plots have raised beds higher than 18 inches.

The Commission agreed that the gardeners would submit one check for \$30 to the Parks and Recreation Department. Supplies for the garden can be purchased and submitted to the office for reimbursement, or requested through the office and/or Parks Supervisor to purchase. Ms. Conley agreed to close out the existing Cherry Lawn Community Garden bank account containing \$765.35 and have a bank check issued in that amount to the Town of Darien for deposit into the appropriate account.

The Commission agreed that the Cherry Lawn Community Gardens Committee would report to the Commission annually.

REVIEW AND VOTE ON BRICK FUNDRAISER FOR CHERRY LAWN PLAYGROUND

Ms. Daly presented a slideshow regarding the proposed walkway design. Currently, the existing walkway does not reach the playground, so the idea is to extend the walkway from the street to meet the age 5-12 playground. The proposed design will match the

existing pathway and will not affect the existing tree roots, and will actually draw activity away from the root system by extending the patio. The proposed pathway will be ADA accessible.

Ms. Daly provided an overview of the proposed brick program fundraiser. She explained that a maximum of 450 bricks will be sold. There will be some blank bricks. Bricks will be 8" x 8" or 4" x 8." Larger bricks can have logos engraved on them. Smaller bricks would be for text only. Excess funds raised can also be used to purchase additional benches, picnic tables, or future equipment. The purchasing process would be online with minimal attention from department staff. The campaign would need to finish up by mid-March because bricks take roughly one month to be produced and delivered.

The fundraiser will be advertised through office software, social media, etc.

**** MS. MORGAN MOVED TO APPROVE THE BRICK FUNDRAISER FOR THE CHERRY LAWN PARK PLAYGROUND AS PRESENTED**

**** MS. MULROW-PEATIE SECONDED**

**** THE MOTION PASSED UNANIMOUS**

APPROVAL OF THE 2024 FEE SCHEDULE

Ms. Bora provided a brief summary of the fee schedule, noting there are no changes from last year with the exception of combining the Cherry Lawn Community Gardens fee into one single \$30 fee payable to the Town of Darien.

Mr. Farrell stated that he would like to see the daily nonresident beach pass entry fee increase. There was discussion surrounding this matter.

**** MS. MORGAN MOVED TO APPROVE THE 2024 FEE SCHEDULE AS PRESENTED**

**** MS. DALY SECONDED**

**** THE MOTION PASSED UNANIMOUS**

REVIEW AND VOTE ON 2024 COMMISSION COMMITTEES

Ms. Bora presented provided a working document listing the committees and their charges for the upcoming year. Committees remaining active include the Pickleball Committee, the Invasives Committee, the Baker Park Committee and the Cherry Lawn Community Garden Committee. Committees to be closed out include the Weed Beach Meadow and Trail Committee, Pear Tree Point Committee, and the Playground Committee.

Ms. Mulrow- Peattie suggested adding language to the document which directs the committees to report to the commission with the understanding that the reported findings are nonbinding reports and recommendations. She also suggested adding language as a

part of the charge that the Parks and Recreation Commission will notify the committee when their issue is before the commission so they are given an opportunity to attend.

The Commission agreed to postpone the vote on this matter until the next regular meeting when the language in the document is updated as suggested.

DIRECTOR'S REPORT

Ms. Gery provided an update on the Weed Beach Meadow and Trail project, explaining that the proposal was approved at the January 16, 2024 Planning and Zoning Commission meeting. She noted that there was some contention at the meeting regarding the proposal and tree removal, and it is possible that an appeal will be filed against the approval.

Ms. Gery noted that the Pear Tree bathhouse renovations are underway.

Ms. Gery added that the Cherry Lawn Park playground equipment is ordered and scheduled to be installed prior to Memorial Day.

Ms. Gery provided parting words to the Commission and thanked the group for their dedication.

CHAIRMAN'S REPORT

Ms. Bora noted that the Coastal Commission continues to work on their waterway ordinances. She added that the Great Island Advisory Committee has discussed allowing foot-traffic on the property until the roadways are widened. She briefly described the upcoming hiring process and timeline for the new Parks and Recreation Director.

NEW BUSINESS

No new business.

REGULAR MEETING ADJOURNMENT

**** MS. MULROW-PEATTIE MOVED TO ADJOURN**

**** MR. FARRELL SECONDED**

**** THE MOTION PASSED - UNANIMOUS**

The meeting adjourned at 9:48PM.

Next Regular meeting: February 28, 2024, 7:30 pm in Room 119 of the Darien Town Hall

Respectfully submitted,
Tamara Eberhardt

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**Parks and Recreation Commission
Meeting of: January 17, 2024**

Y - yes N - no A - abstain Ab - absent

Motions:

**1. Move: MULROW-PEATTIE 2nd: MORGAN
MOVED TO APPROVE THE MINUTES FROM DECEMBER 13, 2023 AS
PRESENTED**

**2. Move: MORGAN 2nd: MULROW-PEATTIE
MOVED TO APPROVE THE BRICK FUNDRAISER FOR THE CHERRY LAWN
PARK PLAYGROUND AS PRESENTED**

**3. Move: MORGAN 2nd: DALY
MOVED TO APPROVE THE 2024 FEE SCHEDULE AS PRESENTED**

**4. Move: MULROW-PEATTIE 2nd: FARRELL
MOVED TO ADJOURN**

Y	Bohnsack	Bora	Cling	Daly	Doering	Morgan	Mulrow-Peattie	Taylor	Farrell
1.	Ab	Y	Y	Y	Ab	Y	Y	Ab	Y
2.	Ab	Y	Y	Y	Ab	Y	Y	Ab	Y
3.	Ab	Y	Y	Y	Ab	Y	Y	Ab	Y
4.	Ab	Y	Y	Y	Ab	Y	Y	Ab	Y