



**TOWN OF DARIEN
PARKS AND RECREATION COMMISSION
REGULAR MEETING
FEBRUARY 15, 2023
7:30 PM, ROOM 119 OF THE DARIEN TOWN HALL**

ATTENDANCE: Lorene Bora, Chair, Susan Daly, Janet Cling, Mary Louise Morgan, and Cathy Mulrow-Peattie
ABSENT: Chris Taylor, Amy Doering and Kara Bohnsack
STAFF: Pam Gery, Director of Parks and Recreation
AUDIENCE: RTM Parks and Recreation Committee Members:
Patti Bumgardner
Kim Kiner
Adele Conniff

Ms. Bora called the meeting to order at 7:30 PM.

APPROVAL OF THE COMMISSION MINUTES FROM JANUARY 18, 2023

**** MS. MORGAN MOVED TO APPROVE THE MINUTES FROM JANUARY 18, 2023 WITH AMENDMENTS
** MS. MULROW-PEATTIE SECONDED
** THE MOTION PASSED – UNANIMOUS**

PUBLIC COMMENT

No public comment.

**DISCUSS AND VOTE ON LITTLE LEAGUE DONATION OF \$15K FOR FIELD
EVALUATION AT MCGUANE PARK**

Ms. Gery introduced the new Darien Little League President, John Butler. Mr. Butler provided some background, explaining that the fields proposed for evaluation are the

three athletic fields at McGuane Park including two baseball fields and one softball field. He explained that the fields have been well maintained but not rescanned or fundamentally improved upon over the last 20 years. The softball field has drainage issues resulting in erosion. There are lip issues. The base paths are sinking. The baseball outfields are 8-12 inches below the infields. Mr. Butler requested Tom Irwin Advisors to take a look at the fields to determine if it merits spending time and money on improving the condition of the fields. Darien Little League would like to donate \$15,000 to hire this company to perform a deep dive evaluation – the results of which would identify the specific issues and provide conclusions and recommendations to improve the fields, ideally with the goal of having the fields in pristine shape.

Ms. Bumgardner asked how many players are registered in DLL. Mr. Butler replied that there are currently 640 players registered for house baseball in the spring, an additional 100 registered for travel baseball and another 250 for softball – roughly over 1000 total players for the spring season. Mr. Butler highlighted that Darien has the largest Little League program in the state and one of the largest in the country.

Ms. Mulrow-Peattie asked if the \$15,000 would cover the complete cost of the evaluation. Mr. Butler replied, yes.

Mr. Butler explained that once the evaluation is complete, proposed improvement work would begin on or around November 1, 2023. There was brief discussion as to where the additional funding for improvements would come from. Ms. Bora confirmed that the FY24 proposed budget has already been submitted and Parks and Recreation would be unable to fund the improvements in FY24. Mr. Butler stated that Darien Little League would fundraise and make an additional donation to cover the cost of improvements if funding is not obtained from the Town. He clarified that there is no risk as Darien Little League has the funding currently but would likely fundraise to offset the cost.

**** MS. DALY MOVED TO ACCEPT THE DONATION FROM DARIEN LITTLE LEAGUE IN THE AMOUNT OF \$15,000 TO EVALUATE THE ATHLETIC FIELDS AT MCGUANE PARK**

**** MS. MORGAN SECONDED**

**** THE MOTION PASSED – UNANIMOUS**

DISCUSS AND TAKE ACTION ON BEAUTIFICATION FUNDS

Ms. Bora reminded the commission that at the last meeting, it was agreed upon that Pear Tree Point Beach would benefit the most from the Beautification funds. Dan Biggs of Weston and Sampson was contacted to provide an estimate for a landscape plan to be implemented. Ms. Bora stated that Mr. Biggs' proposal came in at \$14,850, which would only cover the cost of creating the plan and the supervision of the construction phase. It does not include any materials or plantings.

There was discussion regarding adding grasses at Pear Tree Point Beach as a barrier between the picnic area and the road. Ms. Daly agreed to contact Karen Hughan to get her thoughts on plant selections for Pear Tree Point Beach.

UPDATE ON CHERRY LAWN PARK GAZEBO PROJECT

Ms. Gery stated that there was one bid on the restoration project which came in at \$17,500. The contractor's references have been verified and the supplies have been ordered for arrival on Friday. Ms. Gery has a request for a quote on the memorial plaque. There was discussion as to when the donation from the Dordleman Family would be accepted by the RTM and whether or not to postpone the work. Ms. Gery confirmed that she would prefer to postpone the work until the donation has been formally accepted by the RTM.

UPDATE ON PICKLEBALL RESERVATION SYSTEM

Ms. Gery stated that the office has been very busy working on the pickleball reservation system. She confirmed that the current software can provide the tools necessary to implement the reservation system. She highlighted that Cassie Schull has created a calendar breaking down the pickleball schedule into lessons, open play and reservations. Ms. Gery stated that once the system has been implemented, it will be reviewed at the end of the year and then determined if improvements are necessary to continue offering reservations. Ms. Gery highlighted that if every reservation were booked, it could potentially bring in \$60,000 in revenue.

Ms. Bora mentioned that there has been discussion regarding limiting the usage of the courts to Darien residents and their guests only.

Ms. Gery confirmed that all three tennis courts at Cherry Lawn Park are temporarily lined for pickleball. Ms. Bumgardner expressed concern that it is very difficult to play tennis on courts that are also lined for pickleball. She also voiced concern over the demand for parking from the increased use of the courts for pickleball considering there are two pickleball courts lined on every one tennis court. Ms. Gery suggested adding this discussion to the April agenda.

Ms. Bora added that the Parks and Recreation Rules and Regulations will require an update to include language specific to the pickleball reservation system. She suggested also discussing potential music/noise regulations within the parks and beaches at the same time.

Ms. Bora briefly noted the recent vandalism at the tennis courts of Cherry Lawn Park.

There was discussion regarding the sloped grass area abutting the pickleball courts and how it becomes slippery. Some solutions were mentioned such as fencing off the area or adding plantings to prevent individuals from walking down the sloped area.

DIRECTOR'S REPORT

Ms. Gery highlighted the work with the Darien Foundation. She stated that she is obtaining quotes on flagpoles for Weed Beach. She is also in the process of obtaining approvals on the \$25,000 bid package for the Weed Beach improvement project.

Ms. Gery highlighted upcoming meetings of the various working groups of the Parks and Recreation Commission.

Ms. Gery also commended the park crew on their continuous work on invasive species removal. Ms. Bora echoed her gratitude stating that the work done at Weed Beach is a tremendous improvement and has completely opened up the views.

Ms. Gery added that there might be a delay in adding the sixth paddle court at Weed Beach due to the Planning and Zoning requirement to hire a civil engineer prior to its installation.

Ms. Daly questioned if the Daddy Daughter Dance would open up to nonresidents. Ms. Gery confirmed that the decision would be made closer to the event depending on enrollment numbers and gymnasium capacity.

CHAIRMAN'S REPORT

Ms. Bora stated that she and Ms. Gery met with Architect Neil Hauck on January 24th at the Pear Tree Point Beach bathhouse to discuss ideas on how to utilize the \$50,000 budgeted for improvements. Mr. Hauck designed the Weed Beach bathhouse. He is working on compiling his suggestions for improvements.

Ms. Bora provided a budget update. She and Ms. Gery attended the Selectmen's workshop and were able to have the aerator and stump grinder added back to the budget proposal. She added that the full-time position was removed.

The Coastal Commission did not meet for their regular meeting, however the Chair shared by email that the Darien shellfish beds have been reopened.

Ms. Bora shared that there was a suggestion from a resident to implement a litter pickup program at the beaches where reusable buckets and a trash receptacle are provided by the Parks and Recreation Department at the beaches to encourage pickup. Ms. Daly suggested having this resident attend a meeting to discuss specific details of the program.

Ms. Bora stated that the Police Chief confirmed that Parks and Recreation can post some sort of enforceable “no parking” or “2-hour parking” signs at the Baker Park parking lot.

NEW BUSINESS

- ** MS. DALY MADE A MOTION TO GO INTO NEW BUSINESS**
- ** MS. MULROW-PEATTIE SECONDED**
- ** THE MOTION PASSED - UNANIMOUSLY**

Ms. Bora pointed out that there is state legislation out again regarding coastal resources and there will be a public hearing on the subject. Ms. Bora stated that as a commission, it needs to be decided if testimony will be submitted opposing the legislation. Ms. Bora suggested resubmitting the previous testimony with any relevant updates. Ms. Gery sent Ms. McNally data regarding the man-hours spent at the beaches with an approximate associated cost. Ms. Daly would work on locating the original submission. Ms. McNally would be submitting testimony.

REGULAR MEETING ADJOURNMENT

- ** MS. DALY MOVED TO ADJOURN**
- ** MS. MULROW-PEATTIE SECONDED**
- ** THE MOTION PASSED - UNANIMOUSLY**

The meeting adjourned at 8:58 PM.

Next Regular meeting: March 15, 2023, 7:30 pm in Room 119 of the Darien Town Hall

Respectfully submitted,
Tamara Eberhardt

Parks and Recreation Commission

Meeting of: February 15, 2023

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

Motions:

1. Move: MORGAN 2nd: MULROW-PEATTIE
Moved to approve January 18, 2023 minutes as presented.

2. Move: DALY 2nd: MORGAN
Moved to accept the donation from Darien Little League in the amount of \$15,000 to evaluate athletic fields at McGuane Park.

3. Move: DALY 2nd: MULROW-PEATTIE
Motion to go into new business.

4. Move: DALY 2nd: MULROW-PEATTIE

Adjourn.

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