Minutes of Meeting – Monday, November 19, 2018

Town Hall, Room 119

Meeting called to order at 7:30 PM by Chairman Huffard

Present: Flip Huffard, William Cavers, David Kahn, Eric Barrett, Tom Lochtefeld, Grant Tankoos, Audrey Weil, Rob Shuny and Harbor Master Tom Bell

Absent: Robert Vilter, Dave Dever

The Minutes from the meeting on October 15, 2018 were approved.

Guest Presentations

Water Quality Issues and Strategies – Holly Drinkuth of The Nature Conservancy (TNC) and Sarah Crosby of Harbor Watch led an hour-long presentation and discussion on pollution issues in Long Island Sound, especially those regarding excess nitrogen. Major points included the following:

• Vast improvements in LIS have been achieved with the investment of over $1 billion in point source pollution control facilities (waste water plants) in the Western Narrows near NYC over the last 20 years. Last year’s 50 square mile hypoxia zone in LIS shrank to 27 square miles, the best improvement yet recorded.

• Despite these gains, over-loading of nutrients is every present in our waters, especially with increased water temperatures. Eighty percent of LIS’s eelgrass is now only in the small Eastern region of LIS and Little Narragansett Bay has experienced a 43% loss of eelgrass. Rust tides (algae blooms) have been prevalent over the last several summers, and fast growing seaweeds are plaguing Stonington, CT and other LIS bays.

• The LIS Study is promoting Nitrogen Reduction programs. Efforts are underway in Pawcatuck, Mystic and Stonington to measure current levels of nitrogen and to establish target levels that would support healthy ecologies.

• TNC sees three big opportunities regarding nitrogen reduction in LIS: 1) Reducing fertilizer use for lawns; 2) raising awareness of septic system issues and available solutions; 3)
mobilizing support among 18-44 year olds (TNC’s surveys and focus groups have shown this cohort, especially seafood lovers and small craft boaters is positively influenced by environmental arguments).

- TNC’s website provides a good overview of how TNC views the pollution problems of LIS and TNC’s recommended approaches to achieve change.

Discussion ensued on nutrient reduction strategies for Darien to pursue. Chairman Hufford described Darien’s efforts to date on the issue, noting that our effectiveness is largely relegated to fertilizer reduction. Chairman Huffard cited the need for facts and evidence to back local actions on fertilizer reduction. Ms. Crosby noted that its difficult to directly measure nitrogen - its used up as soon as its introduced to a ecological system - and that measurement is indirect, through observations on Chlorophyl-a, algae blooms and seaweed growth. Ms. Crosby suggested that the Commission look at efforts undertaken by the City of Tampa Bay, Florida that greatly reduced local nitrogen levels. Most of the municipality’s efforts were public relations and awareness focused. The Commissioners discussed undertaking a demonstration grass planting/buffer zone area on a portion of the town hall field that abuts the Goodwives River. Mrs. Crosby recommended the Commission contact Carl Guillard (karl.guillard@uconn.edu) at the University of Connecticut for guidance.

**Year End Report from Darien Police Department Marine Division – Officer Derek Mulcahy**

Officer Mulcahy noted that it was a quiet season with regard to police and safety activity, perhaps the quietest season he has seen in his eight years on the job. Highlights include:

- Issues at Zeigler’s Cove were fewer than in previous years. The cove was very busy on the weekends, but over-rafting was not as prevalent. Officer Mulcahy did note that he thought the crowd was younger than in previous years. He plans to keep a careful eye on excess alcohol consumption among boaters in Zieglers next season.

- Speeding in Darien Harbor was discussed. Harbor Commissioner Tom Bell noted that he felt the situation was atrocious. Curing the season, he observed a number of speeding infractions as well as boats operating in the middle of the mooring fields (prohibited). Officer Mulcahy stated that the Daren Police issued approximately 5-10 speeding tickets this year in their monitoring of Darien Harbor and Five Mile River.

- The Marine Police regularly observed paddleboards and kayakers operating without life jackets this year, as in past years. As is their practice, they stopped such individuals and informed them of required safety equipment.

- Chairman Huffard brought up the poor visibility of the commercial oyster field buoys off Stamford. Officer Mulcahy agreed on the observation.

- The speed of the new marine boat was discussed. It enables response times to distances like Stamford Harbor in just 6-8 minutes, a two-times improvement over the prior vessel.

**Chairman’s Report**

Chairman Huffard noted 2019’s new meeting schedule.

Chairman Huffard noted that all Commissioners had signed up again for their appointed positions except for Commissioner Audrey Weil. Commissioner Weill will be stepping down from the
Commission in 2019. Chairman Huffard thanked her for significant contribution to the Commission’s water quality efforts, including the monitoring project along the Goodwives River.

Chairman Huffard noted that he himself would be stepping down as Chairman of the Commission, but that he would stay on as a regular Commissioner in 2019. The Commission thanked him for his productive four years of leadership and service to the town’s residents and coastline.

Chairman Huffard nominated Vice Chairman Cavers to fill the Chairman role. The motion was seconded and an ensuing vote unanimously confirmed Vice Chairman Cavers as the new Chairman.

Chairman Huffard asked Rob Shuny if he had met with the Board of Selectman on his nomination to be a Commissioner. He indicated that he had and that he was now awaiting the outcome of the Representative Town Meeting vote to approve his nomination.

**Harbor Master’s Report**

Harbor Master Bell indicated there were no issues to report upon, especially given the close of the boating season.

**Shellfish Report**

Commissioner Kahn noted that 65 clamming licenses were issued this 2018 season and that this was the same number as in 2017. Commissioner Kahn noted his desire to increase the amount of clammers in Darien’s beds. As part of this effort, he brought two new long-handled clamming rakes to the meeting and gave them to Commissioner Lochtefeld, Commodore of the Darien Boat Club, as a donation for the club to have on hand for use by its members. Commissioner Kahn also noted that he had succeeded in getting the town to have an on-line application for clamming licenses. An automatic renewal mechanism was suggested by some of the Commissioners. Chairman Huffard also suggested a no-license, free clamming day as a promotional tool, perhaps hosted by the local boating clubs.

**October 30, 2018 Depth Survey of Darien Harbor’s Channel**

Harbor Master Bell announced that Coastline Consulting had completed its triennial survey of the Darien Harbor channel. Harbor Master Bell reported on Coastline’s findings and stated that no substantial change in the channel depth had been found since the survey was last undertaken (2015). Some areas were observed to have filled in to some degree, but overall, Coastline Consulting advised that they saw no need to dredge the channel at this time. Harbor Master Bell noted that he had distributed the survey report to the Board of Selectmen and to Darien Parks and Rec and Planning and Zoning.

**Other Business**

None

**Adjournment**

The meeting was adjourned by Chairman Huffard at approximately 9:20 PM.