

**TOWN OF DARIEN  
PARKS & RECREATION COMMISSION  
MINUTES OF REGULAR MEETING  
WEDNESDAY, MARCH 16, 2011**

**ATTENDANCE:** Jane Branigan; Susan Daly; Bob Marchesi;  
Mary Flynn; Marianne Gutierrez;  
Susan Graham (7:37 p.m.)

**STAFF:** Susan Swiatek, Director; Jim Coghlan, Assistant Director

**OTHER:** Ashley Aymonier, DDOG; Karen Armour, RTM Moderator; Erica Morris, DDOG; Julie Frank, DDOG; Susan Cameron; Anne Finn; Meg Orner, FWP; Pam Zangrillo; Cecelia Mundt, DDOG; Danny Frank, DDOG; Cheryl Russell, RTM; Tracy Wendt; Amy Zabetakis;

**CALL TO ORDER**

Ms. Branigan called the meeting to order at 7:35 p.m.

**APPROVE MINUTES OF PUBLIC HEARING; REGULAR MEETING OF  
FEBRUARY 16, 2011**

The correction(s) to the public hearing/regular meeting of February 16, 2011 are as follows:

Ms. Graham arrived at 7:37 p.m.

On page 2, 1<sup>st</sup> paragraph, add “Volunteer Fireman and also Seniors get one park permit free per family”.

On page 2, 1<sup>st</sup> paragraph, last sentence, change “schedule” to “projection”.

On page 2, under UPDATE ON WEED BEACH MASTER PLAN PROJECT, a. APPOINT KENT EPPLEY TO THE BUILDING COMMITTEE, 2<sup>nd</sup> sentence, change “high expectations” to “strong qualifications”.

On page 5, 3<sup>rd</sup> paragraph, change “Flehatie” to “Plehaty”.

**\*\* MS. DALY MOVED TO APPROVE THE MINUTES OF THE PUBLIC HEARING/REGULAR MEETING OF FEBRUARY 16, 2011.**

**\*\* MS. FLYNN SECONDED.**

**\*\* MOTION PASSED WITH FIVE (5) VOTES IN FAVOR (DALY, MARCHESI, FLYNN, GUTIERREZ, GRAHAM) AND ONE (1) VOTE ABSTAINED (BRANIGAN).**

**DISCUSS AND TAKE ACTION ON DEPARTMENT PROGRAM SCHOLARSHIP POLICY**

Mr. Coghlan explained that approximately \$2,500 in scholarships has been granted to youth residents who apply and are approved by Social Services. There is no money in the budget for the scholarships; the Town relies on the instructors. The Town has granted almost all of the requests. The Town recently received a request from an adult resident, and this was discussed among the Commission. There had been one previous time when an adult requested a scholarship, but it was not granted. It was agreed that Mr. Coghlan will provide a written policy recommendation after a discussion with the Social Services Department.

### **UPDATE ON WEED BEACH MASTER PLAN PROJECT**

Ms. Swiatek said the Weed Beach Master Plan Project was presented to the Building Committee last week. The contract has been sent to Town Counsel. An architect meeting recently took place. Information on revisions has been received and more clarification was requested.

Ms. Swiatek said the YMCA trail work is starting up, with a meeting and a site visit held recently. "Healthbeat" is the name of the product manufactured by Landscape Structures. M.E. O'Brien is the company rep who will assist with the trail development, and also assisted in the playground design at Weed Beach. A meeting will be held in the next few weeks.

Ms. Daly spoke on the Commemorative Committee, saying that it is a 501C3 for fundraising. Different rules apply for bonding vs. private funding.

### **BUDGET FY 2012 REQUEST STATUS**

Ms. Swiatek said the budget will go before the Board of Finance at their meeting on Tuesday, March 22, 2011 at 7:30 p.m.

### **REPORTS**

#### a) Director

Ms. Swiatek reported that after a very busy winter, the crews are out getting the ballparks ready. Most beaches have been cleared of snow. Coverage for the building attendant at the Senior Center is becoming a strain, and she has had conversations with Mr. Kilduff about a backup person. It will be too much of a burden to assign one of her personnel during the summer months. She said Eagle Scout Alexander von Stuelpnagel is starting his project at Baker Park, which involves trail clearing and development, and a sign kiosk at the trail head.

#### b) Assistant Director

Mr. Coghlan said the Spring/Summer brochure was mailed out on Friday, February 25, 2011 and registration, as well as beach permit sales, began on March 2, 2011. The first day of registration had 88% of program registrations and 65% of beach permits done on-line. After eight days of registration, 80% of program registrations were processed and 49% of beach permits were processed. Lifeguard interviewing will take place next week.

#### c) Chairman

There was no report.

d) Sub-Committee

There was no report.

### **PRESENTATION OF SURVEY RESULTS FROM DDOG**

Ashley Aymonier, from DDOG, presented the results of the survey recently conducted on-line from November 5, 2010 through January 31, 2011. 239 people responded, and the demographics were 11% seniors; 65% adults with children 97% park users; and 89% dog owners. The percentage of non-dog owners was 11%, roughly 24 people. The top three locations include Cherry Lawn, Woodland Park and Darien streets for residents responding to where they walk their dog, and proximity to home, off leash option, and environment safety were listed as the top three reasons these areas were used. The survey showed that the majority of dog owners exercised their dogs at the beginning and end of the day. 92% of respondents desired an off leash park solution. Non-dog owners were in favor of a dog park (12%), a park specific solution (6%), off leash hours (12%), off leash areas (47%), and always on leash (23%). The conclusions from the survey include 90% of respondents were in favor of an off leash option for the parks; the top park choices from the community for off leash recreation were Cherry Lawn and Woodland Park; and desired off leash hours coincided with the off peak park usage times of dawn to 10 a.m. and 5 p.m. to dusk.

### **DISCUSSION ON DOGS IN PARKS RULES AND REGULATIONS**

Ms. Branigan read the following prepared statement: “In beginning of this discussion of dogs on or off leash I would like to refresh everyone’s memory about the mission of the Park and Recreation Commission according to our Town Charter. Under Sec. 27 Powers and duties: “said commission shall have exclusive care, management and control of all parks owned by the town.” All other public lands and school properties come under the jurisdiction of the town, which would be the RTM. The rules and regulations regarding our parks at this time are part of this management. Our two nature preserves, Woodland Park and Sellecks Woods require dogs on leash. Only two years ago we had a public hearing in March of 2009 regarding dogs on or off-leash in Woodland Park and in April of that year we voted unanimously to maintain the current regulation of having dogs on leash at all times. It is to be noted that the State of Connecticut requires all pets to be on leash in most of their state parks and forests. Between April 15 and September 30 no pets are permitted at Sherwood Island or Squantz Pond State Park. Pets are not permitted at any time in Dinosaur State Park. In Darien we do not allow dogs at any time at Pear Tree Point Beach, except seeing eye dogs or medically necessary or to access the Darien Boat Club. The same rule applies to Weed Beach. We did pass a rule, I believe in 2007, that dogs were not allowed on the playing fields of Cherry Lawn. Those are the rules that we have in place at this time. Our remaining parks fall under the state statute. It should be noted that Darien is composed of one-third dog owners and two-thirds no dogs. I would like to remind everyone that this is a discussion among the Commission members only. Public comments will be allowed at the end of the meeting.”

Ms. Branigan then distributed a draft of Suggestions Parks & Recreation Leash Rules, which the Commission members then discussed. After much discussion, the following information was suggested, with more discussion to follow and decisions to be made regarding Selleck's Woods, Woodland Park and Cherry Lawn having designated off leash hours from dawn to 8 a.m.

**Off Leash Parks/Fields**

Selleck's Woods, off lead on designated trails, Mon-Sun, Dawn to 8 a.m.

Woodland Park, off lead on designated trails, Mon-Sun, Dawn to 8 a.m.

Stony Brook Park, may be off lead

Cherry Lawn Park, Dawn to 8 a.m.

**On Leash At All Times**

Holahan Field and Town Hall

Baker Park

McGuane Field

Tilley Pond

**Off Limits to Dogs At All Times**

Pear Tree Point Beach, not permitted except Seeing Eye Dog or medically necessary or to access the Darien Boat Club

Weed Beach, not permitted except Seeing Eye dog or medically necessary

Ms. Branigan mentioned that Chief of Police Duane Lovello had sent Ms. Swiatek an email today regarding the proposed leash regulations. He supported Woodland Park remaining an on leash area at all times. He supported Cherry Lawn Park being an on leash park. He supported Selleck's Woods remaining an on leash area at all times, but would open to a compromise solution agreed upon by Chris Filmer and the Friends of Selleck's Woods, the Parks and Recreation Commission and the DDOG group. He said the Police Department has no objection to Stony Brook Park being open to off leash dogs provided they remain under the control of the owner in accordance with state law. He further recommended that Baker Park, Tilley Pond, Town Hall, McGuane Field, and Holahan Field remain on leash area at all times. Lastly, he wrote that the Police Department recommends that the status quo remain in effect for both Weed Beach and Pear Tree Point Beach, where dogs should not be allowed at either beach whether on or off leash.

**ANY OTHER BUSINESS (TWO-THIRDS VOTE REQUIRED)**

Ms. Swiatek said that the Weed Beach construction should begin at the end of August or beginning of September. As of now, there is one permit in place for a large scale event, the ITPMAN triathlon, to take place towards the end of September. As the park will be under construction prior to the event, the event coordinators will most likely be directed to an alternative site. She said that the Commission needs to formulate a position on park permitting. It is the position of the Commission to stay with the recommended timeline of the construction.

- \*\* MS. DALY MOVED TO SUPPORT THE DRAFT TIMELINE FOR THE WEED BEACH PROJECT AND LIMIT PARK PERMITTING DUE TO SAFETY DURING THE CONSTRUCTION PHASE. TIMELINE TO BEGIN AUGUST 15, 2011.**
- \*\* MS. GUTIERREZ SECONDED.**
- \*\* MOTION PASSED UNANIMOUSLY.**

### PUBLIC COMMENTS

The following comments are not to be considered verbatim.

Ms. Karen Armour, RTM Moderator, said there is a discrepancy between the dates of the draft ordinance and the enactment of the animal control ordinance. She said the leash law will go before the RTM at their September meeting.

Ms. Erica Morris requested the Commission to look at the seasonality of the off leash law. There is less activity with children in the parks, fields and beaches from November-March. Only dog owners use the park in the winter. She suggested that there be an off leash law all day during the wintertime (November-March), making Darien consistent with Wilton and Greenwich.

Ms. Julie Frank spoke about the Aspetuck Nature Preserve, which has 42 parks. 41 of the parks have off leash areas. The 4 acre park does not. She said that signage and stewardship would be two ways to carry out a successful off leash area.

Ms. Susan Cameron distributed copies of email correspondence written to Ms. Swiatek on Friday, Nov 19, 2010, in which she mentioned residents not having control of their dogs while they are off leash. She had encountered a situation at Woodland Park with off leash dogs that were not responding to their owners' commands. She believed that less than 5% of the dog walker population have control of their dogs unless the dogs are leashed.

Ms. Anne Finn showed pictures of her daughter who had been attacked by an unleashed dog in Cherry Lawn Park approximately 5 years ago. She said the same dog previously had attacked another child at Cherry Lawn Park. She had written a letter to the newspaper to help prevent another incident. She said that DDOG cited her incident in an insensitive, offensive and arrogant way. She also said that DDOG had left out other police reports regarding dog attacks. She felt that Cherry Lawn Park should be an on leash area at all times. She said that there are off leash dog parks in neighboring New Canaan and Rowayton.

Ms. Meg Orner, a member of the Friend of Woodland Park Board, said that Woodland Park is a nature preserve. Neighbors surrounding Woodland Park complained about dogs running into

their yards, and signs were put up throughout the park. They were ripped down shortly afterward.

Ms. Pam Zangrillo said she uses Cherry Lawn Park early in the morning and dogs are constantly around. She said she is in favor of seasonal openings when no children are there.

Ms. Cecelia Mundt said that on behalf of DDOG, she was proposing structure and rules to address the issues of off leash vs. on leash dog areas, with hours and areas to keep everyone safe.

Mr. Danny Frank said that he has visited many of the parks and fields, and he felt that some of the claims presented tonight were false. Woodland Park is empty after 5:00 p.m. and is unsafe at dark. He said that Selleck's Woods is unsafe. He said the Commission has had the issue of off leash vs. on leash areas for dogs on the table for years. He said the current rules and regulations have been proven to be completely unenforceable. He recommended the Commission get active working with a committee of dog owners to find a rational solution.

Ms. Branigan stated that the rules and regulations have been in place for years. She said the RTM wants an ordinance for the whole town.

Ms. Cheryl Russell said the 5 acre Diller property hasn't been looked into as a solution. She said it is open and safe. She mentioned that the Parks & Rec Department has had a plan, and money in the budget, for fences and trail work. She would like Diller to be considered.

Ms. Tracy Wendt asked how the rules and regulations would be enforced.

Ms. Amy Zabetakis, a member of Friends of Woodland Park, said that she would prefer Woodland Park to remain an on leash area as it is a nature preserve.

**NEXT MEETING: Regular Meeting Wednesday, April 13, 2011 7:30 p.m.  
Darien Town Hall, Room 119**

**\*\* MS. GUTIERREZ MOVED TO ADJOURN.**

**\*\* MS. FLYNN SECONDED.**

**\*\* MOTION PASSED UNANIMOUSLY.**

The meeting ended at 10:10 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Carolyn Marr  
Telesco Secretarial Services

