

**TOWN OF DARIEN
PARKS & RECREATION COMMISSION
MINUTES OF REGULAR MEETING
WEDNESDAY, NOVEMBER 17, 2010**

ATTENDANCE: Charles Goodyear, Acting Chairman; Susan Daly; Bob Marchesi; Marianne Gutierrez; Susan Graham (7:38 p.m.)

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

OTHER: Patricia Bumgardner, DDOG;
Cecelia Mundt, Parks & Rec RTM Member; Julie Frank;
Jack Davis, RTM Member

CALL TO ORDER

Mr. Goodyear began the meeting at 7:35 p.m. and noted there was no quorum. He said he would have the DDOG group make their presentation first.

PRESENTATION FROM DDOG GROUP, PATRICIA BUMGARDNER

Ms. Bumgardner distributed copies of the Report to the Commission from DDOG – Darien Dog Owners Group. She said that she was not there to propose any specific suggestions or solutions; she said that she and the group of 10 or 12 residents were there to create a dialog. DDOG is a newly formed group that is committed to nurturing a positive environment between dogs, people and public safety. Some highlights from the report are that 33% of Darien households own a dog. Of the 6,592 Darien households, one in three of the households have dogs. There are approximately 2,195 dogs in Darien, with 1,695 being registered and approximately 500 additional dogs not registered. An advisory committee has been formed, and representatives from District 1, II, III, IV, V and VI are on the committee. Additional members on the committee include Town Gov't & Structure, Public Health & Safety, Darien Land Trust, Cherry Lawn Dog Group, Woodland Dog Group, Selleck's Woods Dog Group, and the Beach Committee. Future members to be assigned to the committee include the Parks & Rec Commission, Police Department, Animal Control, Board of Education, Friends of Selleck's Woods, and Friends of Woodland Park. 250 signatures were signed on an off-leash recreation areas petition last May. Ms. Swiatek suggested that Ms. Bumgardner reach out to local sports groups, who use the same parks and recreational areas, for their support of DDOG.

Ms. Graham arrived at 7:38 p.m. Mr. Goodyear mentioned that they now have a quorum.

Ms. Bumgardner continued discussing information from the report, mentioning the benefits of exercise for dogs, both large and small, and saying that it is hard to socialize with a dog on a leash. She said that Spencer's Run is a dog park in New Canaan that was built for \$100,000 in 2006. It is manned with volunteers, but there are two salaried employees, in addition to an Animal Control Officer. She said that Stonybrook Park is not a solution for a dog park, as there are many safety issues there. It is too close to I-95, there is not enough parking, there is no fencing, the area has a steep vertical terrain and it is prone to flooding. She then read the Parks

& Recreation Commission's mission piece. She said that between 1998 and 2000, there were 91 dog bites reported. After the leash law was passed, between 2003-2007, the dog bites decreased by 19%.

Ms. Bumgardner suggested that people go to the website, www.dariendog.com for more information.

Mr. Goodyear mentioned the public meeting in October, and said that people recognize the importance of being able to exercise their dog(s) without a leash, and how much harder it is to exercise their dog(s) with a leash. He said that the safety of the residents and park visitors cannot be compromised. Ms. Swiatek asked if the press has picked up on the website survey, saying that it could be a valuable tool to get the word out. It was suggested that a link be put on the Parks & Recreation website to the DDOG website and survey.

More discussion took place between the Commission members and audience members. It was suggested that a term sheet be created for discussion and negotiation purposes. Ms. Julie Frank said that everyone should be proud of the community. Mr. Jack Davis, an RTM member, said the Committee did a great job. He said that discussions should be facilitated within the Parks & Rec Commission, and in order to reach a better solution, it should be expedited quickly. Ms. Swiatek said the Parks & Rec Commission only has authority over the parks, not the school grounds or on public property outside of the parks.

Ms. Gutierrez left at 8:20 p.m.

DDOG would like to provide the Parks & Rec Commission with monthly reports of their findings at the next five meetings of the Park & Rec Commission, beginning with the November 2010 meeting. It is DDOG's goal to find a fair and equitable compromise between the public and the Darien Parks & Rec Commission by the March 2011 RTM meeting.

DISCUSS BUDGET PROPOSAL FOR FISCAL 2012

Ms. Swiatek distributed copies of the capital and operating budget, explaining that it is a 5 year plan and a year was added on. She said the dog park was moved to next year. She said there could be more frequent cleaning at Weed Beach in the Spring. The budget will go to the Board of Selectmen by December.

UPDATE ON WEED BEACH MASTER PLAN PROJECT

Ms. Swiatek said the project was approved at \$3.6M, with \$2M bonded. \$300,000 had already been spent on the playground. The Board of Selectmen approved releasing \$2M, but not the other \$1.6M. They were told they would only receive the \$1M, which really became a \$300,000 cut. This now has to go to the RTM for a vote, to bond an additional \$1.3M. She said the RTM will be asked to increase the bond from \$2M to \$3M, and the Parks & Rec Commission is awaiting word from them.

REPORTS

a) Director

Ms. Swiatek said the Fall season is over, and they have begun the Winter season. She said the seasonal staff hired by the Parks & Rec Commission now has been moved over to the Highway Department. She said trail clearing will hopefully begin this winter for the project, an outdoor fitness trail, at Weed Beach. She said that she met with Pat Morrissey from the YMCA today to begin discussions on funding and grants. The beach paddle court repairs are done.

b) Assistant Director

Mr. Coghlan said the paddle courts are up and running, and revenue is up vs. this time last year. Winter program numbers are up, also, and he said the issue now is to get the kids off the waiting lists.

Ms. Gutierrez came back at 8:40 p.m.

Mr. Goodyear said that Mr. Coghlan and others are doing a great job, and this is the highest winter program they've had, by about 25%, since 2005. Ms. Swiatek said the actual numbers surpassed the projections by about 40%. She also said that Mr. Coghlan is doing a great job.

c) Chairman

There was no Chairman report.

APPROVE MINUTES OF REGULAR MEETING OF OCTOBER 20, 2010

The correction(s) to the regular meeting of October 20, 2010 are as follows:

On page 2, under Public Comments, #2 and throughout, change "Cecelia Munat" to "Cecelia Mundt".

On page 2, under Public Comments, #2, add at the end "Ms. Mundt is a member of the RTM, Parks & Rec Commission".

**** MS. DALY MOVED TO APPROVE THE MINUTES OF THE REGULAR MEETING OF OCTOBER 20, 2010 AS AMENDED.**

**** MS. GRAHAM SECONDED.**

**** MOTION PASSED UNANIMOUSLY.**

OTHER BUSINESS (TWO-THIRDS VOTE)

**** MR. GOODYEAR MOVED TO ADD AN ITEM, DEER CULLING, TO THE AGENDA.**

**** MR. MARCHESI SECONDED.**

**** MOTION PASSED UNANIMOUSLY.**

Mr. Goodyear discussed the Deer Culling issue. He said that Mr. Kent Haydock sent a note to Ms. Swiatek because he was concerned that Friends of Animals was getting more publicity than they wanted. Mr. Goodyear said the question is, should the Parks & Rec Commission as requested by the deer management people, at this point in time, make any further comments to the press in support of the deer culling. He said his feeling is the 1st Selectmen, the Land Trust, and the newspapers provide editorial support for the deer culls. The Parks & Rec Commission has held public hearings in the past on the deer culls, and the public hearings have been poorly attended. He said this week the deer culling should be over, as the first day they had culled 4 deer, with 4 more to be caught shortly afterward. He suggested that they begin discussing it in the spring, which will be their 7th year.

More discussion took place regarding the DDOG presentation, and it was suggested that Ms. Graham be the Parks & Rec Commission member on the Advisory Committee. Ms. Graham suggested that each Parks & Rec Commission member take a park that they would be responsible for.

PUBLIC COMMENTS

There were no Public Comments.

**NEXT MEETING: Regular Meeting Wednesday, December 15, 7:30 p.m.
Darien Town Hall, Room 119**

**** MR. MARCHESI MOVED TO ADJOURN.**

**** MS. DALY SECONDED.**

**** MOTION PASSED UNANIMOUSLY.**

The meeting ended at 9:10 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Carolyn Marr
Telesco Secretarial Services

