

**TOWN OF DARIEN
PARKS & RECREATION COMMISSION
MINUTES OF REGULAR MEETING
MAY 19, 2010**

ATTENDANCE: Jane Branigan, Chairman; Susan Graham; Susan Daly;
Bob Marchesi; Marianne Gutierrez (8:15 pm);
Vin Burke (7:45 pm)

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

OTHER: Deb Parnon, Chairman, Weed Beach Building Committee

CALL TO ORDER

Ms. Branigan called the meeting to order at 7:35 p.m. and stated that there was not yet a quorum, but two more Commissioners were expected, and the meeting would be an informational session only until other Commissioners arrived.

Ms. Branigan stated that she would suspend the rules to move item two on the agenda to next so that a discussion would be held on the Weed Beach Project.

STATUS OF WEED BEACH PROJECT

Ms. Deb Parnon, Chairman Weed Beach Building Committee, stated that at the Board of Selectmen's meeting it was evident that the Town needs to give the Commission a timeframe for completion of the project, as the Town is has not released the funds that were previously approved, and is continuing to have difficulty with choosing priorities of projects.

Ms. Parnon stated that there needs to be a push made to the Board of Selectmen and Ms. Branigan replied that she would contact them after the meeting with the update on the construction and engineering.

Ms. Swiatek stated that she needs to finalize the engineering plans that need to be modified and drawings need to be sent out for bid and the RFP is now a difficult process because of the delays.

Mr. Burke arrived to the meeting at 7:45 p.m.

Ms. Parnon stated that they voted to change the delivery system from CM to GC as the town would do the bidding and hire a Clerk of the Works to overview and manage the tasks of the project. Ms. Swiatek stated that with a valued engineering process, the bids need to be as detailed as possible, and as mentioned last month, that there was speculation that the project will be a phase in and this presents issues with added costs and complications with things like power installation where digging, covering, re-surfacing would be done then have to be re-done to complete other areas.

She stated that the big issue is the question of the Town's commitment to the project and they need to be "shovel ready" to start once the town gives the go ahead. Ms. Parnon added that due to the economy, a good time for bidding is now, and may only last another 4-5 months, so time to make this project the most efficient is critical.

Mr. Burke asked if the \$3.5 million is sufficient to complete the project, and Ms. Swiatek responded that as discussed last month, the preliminary bids are two years old and they need to go back to bid, along with the prevailing wage element of the project which represents another cost issue. Ms. Branigan added that \$3.6 million was approved and she is hoping to get the approval for release of the funds at the next BOS meeting.

Ms. Parnon stated that a strategic plan is necessary to clearly state the next steps and establish tasks for a "last push" to make this work. Ms. Daly added that it was key and should be emphasized that the funds need to be released so that work can begin after this summer's beach season. She added that they have already received a large number of signatures on the petition, and asked if each member could take a page that is pre-numbered to make it easier to tally the total.

Ms. Parnon said that the petition was good, but it was only one piece of what is needed, and Ms. Daly suggested that a poster be done to highlight the project and petition pages can be put at the Little Gym and the Darien Toy Box. She added that an e-blast to parents can be done through the school PTOs along with a placement in The Patch. .

Mr. Branigan thanked Ms. Parnon for the overview and stated that it was a very good summary to get everyone focused on what needs to be done to get the project moving. Mr. Burke added that the local chatter is that no one wants to commit, but it should be noted that attendance at the beach lately is quite large, there is greater usage due to the economy where people are staying local rather than going on vacations. He stated that the down side is that the Board of Finance has made decisions on this and other projects, but no vote has been done on releasing the funds.

Ms. Daly suggested that having a spokesperson would be a good tactic, and Ms. Branigan agreed to be the point person to endorse the project or to answer questions from the press.

Ms. Gutierrez arrived to the meeting at 8:15 p.m.

After a lengthy discussion on what was necessary to develop a strategic plan or push for the politicians, it was agreed that the following next steps would be taken:

- Mr. Goodyear would be asked to prepare another letter to the editor to get articles in the newspaper to alert the public that there is a need for a petition to the Board of Selectmen to get the release of funds to get the project going.
- Ms. Graham would create a poster or presentation board on the key elements including a visual overview of the project.
- Ms. Daly will continue to get signatures on the petition, and will canvas the beach area and local events, end of school picnics, etc. to put pressure on the politicians to make them aware of what they need to know on the project
- Ms. Swiatek will get the item put on the Board of Selectman meeting agenda for the June meeting.

APPROVE MINUTES OF REGULAR MEETING APRIL 21, 2010

Ms. Daly stated that the following corrections were needed:
Pages 4 and 6: Change Mr. Taylor to Mr. Hunter.

- ** **MS. DALY MOTIONED TO APPROVE MINUTES OF APRIL 21, 2010 AS AMENDED WITH CORRECTIONS NOTED.**
- ** **MR. MARCHESI SECONDED.**
- ** **THE MOTION PASSED UNANIMOUSLY.**

BUDGET REQUEST FY 2011 STATUS

Ms. Swiatek distributed copies of the budget to the Commissioners. She said the Board of Selectmen have approved the budget, with some reductions made in the Professional Services area, which a loss of Saturday overtime for pick up.

Ms. Gutierrez added that she would like to see handing out of garbage bags at the entrance similar to how it is done in upstate New York. Ms. Swiatek added that it would get expensive and state parks are trying to enforce the “take home what you bring in” approach by eliminating garbage cans, or placing the cans in specific locations to encourage people to take away their own trash. Ms. Daly suggested that Darien should do what Rowayton does by hanging extra garbage bags on the outside of the trash barrels.

REPORTS

a) Director’s Report.

Ms. Swiatek said that work continues to be done at the Senior Center, clean-up work has been done on the parks and fields, but the clean-up from last month's storm took precedence. She added that the fields all now look great, and mentioned that the new LED lights at Tilley Pond look great, and she suggested that the Commissioners drive by the park at night so they can see them.

Ms. Swiatek added that included in the report is a project status summary on the playground fence, STEAP grant, equipment service, garage door repairs and reconfiguring parking lot lines.

Ms. Swiatek said she has talked with the engineer regarding the light boat launch ramp. She added that she recommends new signage as a resolution, adding that the location has been placed where the Harbor Master has recommended.

Mr. Burke stated that this is really needed that kayak users cannot find the ramp, and it is a shame that the location was moved. Ms. Swiatek clarified that the location as a sandy launch area has been the same for years, but that with the addition of a second part of the playground, the signs needed to be more directionally clear.

b) Assistant Director

Mr. Coghlan presented his report, as included in the handout, and said registration for the Spring/Summer programs so far are comparable to last year. He provided a bar chart comparison showing a steady increase over the last ten years. He stated, as mentioned that they have half of the lifeguards from last year returning this year, and positions are in place for the season, and training sessions will take place this weekend.

Mr. Coghlan added that his report included a summary of the tennis court revenue for block reservations, showing it is down due to the YWCA cancelling their reservation due to low enrollment.

CHAIRPERSON'S REPORT

Ms. Branigan stated that there was no formal report, but that she had visited the Community Gardeners and was very fascinated with the new bee hives at the nature center. She added that despite what was presented last month, the bees do not exit the hive at a trajectory level that goes directly up far above; they just swarm around the hive. She added that everything seems fine so far, and added that the Commission would be the recipients of the first honey harvest—which may be only 1 small jar.

OTHER BUSINESS (TWO-THIRDS VOTE)

There was no Other Business to report.

PUBLIC COMMENTS

There were no public comments.

Ms. Branigan stated that the next meeting was a regular meeting scheduled for June 16, at 7:30 p.m. at the Darien Town Hall, room 119.

**** MS. GUTIERREZ MOTIONED TO ADJOURN.
** MS. DALY SECONDED.
** THE MOTION PASSED UNANIMOUSLY.**

The meeting was adjourned at 9:25 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Marilyn Knox
Telesco Secretarial Services