

**MINUTES
PARKS & RECREATION COMMISSION
FEBRUARY 11, 2009**

ATTENDANCE: Charles Goodyear, Acting Chairman; Vin Burke; Susan Daly; Marianne Gutierrez; Robert Marchesi; Merrie Hawley; Susan Graham, (7:40).

STAFF: Sue Swiatek, Director; James Coghlan, Assistant Director.

OTHERS: Peter Hovell, Chairman WBBC

The meeting was called to order at 7:30 p.m. by the Acting Chairman.

APPROVE MINUTES OF JANUARY MEETING OF 1/21/09

Ms. Gutierrez requested that her name be corrected in the last minutes as it was misspelled as MARY ANN and should be corrected to MARIANNE.

**** MR. MARCHESI MOVED TO APPROVE THE MINUTES AS SUBMITTED.**

**** MS. DALY SECONDED.**

**** MOTION PASSED UNANIMOUSLY.**

STATUS REPORT: WEED BEACH MASTER PLAN
PETER HOVELL, WBBC CHAIRMAN

Mr. Hovell reported that \$48M has been appropriated over the last 2-3 months for the playground prep work. He mentioned that there was a good news/bad news situation regarding The Selectmen that pointed out that they had not considered a few areas in error, including expenses of installing the fence and sand of \$13M. \$37M was released. The next part of the plan is to bring in power lines and sewer line. Town Health Director and CL&P are ready for inspections, and the new utility pole has been installed. All fees have been paid. There is one safety issue due to sailboats with a high mast, but that is being addressed.

At 7:40 p.m. Ms. Hawley arrived at the meeting.

There is an additional \$67M appropriated for the "New Trails" portion of the project, but it was not discussed at the last meeting. It is very important to have some efficiencies and some progress to show. Since there is already a site manager and supervisor on site, to do more now would be very efficient. Contractors are "hungry" and labor/material costs are down, that A.Papajohn is on site and doing a great job would be an advantage. He requested that the committee recommend RTM to discuss and approve the trails with a March timing for the project. Mr. Goodyear mentioned that as discussed last month that the trails would appeal to townspeople looking for areas of a "dacaations" area as alternative to vacations in view of the current economic crisis.

**** MS. DALY MOVED TO PURSUE THE TRAILS PROJECT.**

**** MS. HAWLEY SECONDED.**

A motion was not voted upon as Mr. Burke requested further discussion.

Mr. Burke brought up his concern relative to Beach improvements rather than spending money on trails. Due to school issues, the commission can make a case for the Trails, but it is an uphill battle in view of other town budget constraints. There was much discussion and debate from Mr. Burke urging that it was more important and appropriate that in view of current budget constraints, there be a re-focus on improving the beach, boating access, etc. rather than trails. Mr. Hovell mentioned that the RTM has already approved the project, and clarified that this is a request to release dollars, and that The Board of Selectmen cannot reverse the RTM appropriation. Mr. Hovell also indicated that that this was an ideal opportunity to show progress with the project and that beach expenditures really were irrelevant. Ms. Gutierrez asked what is the process to support the trails to begin the project. Mr. Goodyear mentioned that money has been appropriated for the project and it should just be released and assume it can be done within the budget. The trails are something people can see and use to make the area a whole place with more to offer than just a beach. The beach spending was a maintenance issue and that there was no harm in asking for pursuing the Trails. Ms. Daly stated that with the improved playground, the trails would be used more by people. Also, with the economy it provides another family recreational area for fathers as well as moms, and with handicap access plus moms with strollers would be a plus.

Mr. Goodyear mentioned that people are looking for a measurable distance they could count. Mr. Marchesi asked how many trails were planned and what was the distance and layout. Mr. Coghlan left the room and went to get a copy of the plans. Mr. Hovell also mentioned that statistics show that skiing is way up and if access to those statistics would show that the city should expect more park usage and local crowds are up. Mr. Marchesi asked how many have walked currently. Ms. Daly stated that there are quite a good number of walkers and that mostly people go for a walk principally around the beach. Mr. Hovell restated that the appropriation is already there, and that Parks & Recs. should recommend that the issue should be discussed. Also if money is being solicited from contributors to the project they would be more likely to support this master plan with many elements, rather than additional maintenance. These are well-designed trails that should be “now or later” funding from areas other than the Town’s Capital Budget. Ms. Daly mentioned that the “no dogs allowed” rule would be a positive, and requested that a mentioned the group should pursue the Trails project and also, there is a list of signatures that they could access if needed to lobby this issue to make it a priority. Mr. Coghlan returned to the room and said if needed a copy of the plans could be provided at future meeting to discuss the trails status in further detail. Mr. Hovell stated he would greatly appreciate an endorsement of the Trails by the Committee. Mr. Marchesi said he agreed with Mr. Hovell.

**** MS. DALY RESTATED THE MOTION TO PURSUE THE TRAIL PROJECT.**

**** MS. HAWLEY SECONDED.**

**** MOTION PASSED UNANIMOUSLY.**

LETTER FROM THE TGS&A COMMITTEE REQUESTING AN APPEAL OF SECTION 42-51 PARKING ON PEAR TREE POINT ROAD.

Ms. Swaitek presented a letter from the TGS&A Committee requesting an appeal of section 42-51 parking on Pear Tree Point Road. She explained that it is a clean-up action and had checked with the Police Committee issue as they have the authority with this. They had responded that they had no problems. There was much comment and discussion regarding the authority and possible redundancy of the request. Mostly the complaints were that contractors were parking along the roads to the beach, and there was some concern over people walking in to avoid the whole sticker process. The issue is a long standing one due to the plan to make the road a one-way section. People usually try not to park there unless there is a race or emergency need and are given a pass or exception basis, or when there are problems are that the gates close or get stuck.

Ms. Hawley stated it is beyond the commission's authority, and should be part of an action to have No Parking Signs maintained in response to walkers avoiding beach permit stickers. This should be a police matter. Mr. Burke disagreed and recommended there should be a one-way road year round for more access to walkers, and was not comfortable with the statement of enforcing parking codes as it appeared to be a redundant statement. Ms. Graham stated it was always understood that usually they have never allowed parking in that area unless an overflow outside of gates. People were always instructed for events to park at the churches, etc. Ms. Swaitek stated she takes no exception to repealing but recommends no parking as a memo suggestion/side item, and the item is restricted as submitted based on the no parking regulation ¼ mile to beach entrance, which would maintain status quo.

**** MR. GOODYEAR MADE A MOTION TO AGREE TO APPEAL SECT.42-51 WITH RECOMMENDATION THAT THE NO PARKING ZONE BE MAINTAINED WITHIN ¼ MILE TO BEACH ENTRANCE**

**** MS. GUTIERREZ SECONDED.**

**** MOTION PASSED – 8 VOTED IN FAVOR - 1 ABSTENTION (MR.BURKE) .**

REPORTS

DIRECTOR'S REPORT

Ms. Swiatek read her written report as presented. She commented on the capital budget as discussed last presented last month, stating that the budget as presented is only a .3% increase, after contractual wages, with most questions centered on training for Jim Flynn, which is justified by dollars saved in other areas, and gate attendants. Ms. Hawley questioned if performance measured in 2008 fiscal year represented changes as reduction in services. Ms. Swaitek stated that beach permit overflows had service impact in areas other than P&R but in other departments. Mr. Burke stated that some town fathers were concerned that if people were not there to check permits it would present problems and defeats the permit policy, and to be sure it is enforced.

Ms. Swaitek mentioned that if gate guards were cut there would be an issue of vandalism during summer and after school, and there would be a need for more police. Mr. Goodyear suggested that due to additional usage especially with the new playground, it would be a good idea to send an e-mail to selectmen to express concern over reduced gate supervision. Ms. Swaitek suggested hours would remain status quo from Memorial Day to Labor Day, and she was looking at possibly being prepared to reduce hours in April, and indicated that the effects of a revenue analysis that was done with the results studied in great detail.

Ms. Swaitek read the status of projects that the list was shrinking, since the playground has been completed. The old fence at Cherry Lawn has been demolished and the new fence is ready to be installed. She highlighted the projects as “outside the scope” of routine man-hours, and stated that odd projects have an impact that is not accounted for but are in addition to cutting the grass, raking leaves, and plowing snow. She intends to keep the budget status quo. Ms. Hawley asked how the beach house work was coming along. Ms. Swaitek stated that the exterior block is already cleaned up, painting would be finished shortly, and that Jim Flynn has done a great job, and has received all positive feedback. He will show a progress report at the next meeting. She also mentioned that he is doing more and has ideas on building partnerships with sports groups, etc. which the group will be thrilled with.

ASSISTANT DIRECTOR’S REPORT

Presented by James Coghlan as attached. Brochure is at the printers and should be done in a few weeks. He said there is a local artist that has agreed to do a painting “pro-bono”, to showcase her work. This is the same printer as prior years and they have done a great job. Ms. Gutierrez asked about the Youth Commission, and Ms. Swaitek stated that this is a different and separate agency, but they are listed in the brochure. Mr. Coghlan stated that the department is expecting 70% on-line registrations compared to 40% last year. Ms. Daly mentioned that the e-mail system with reminders for registration for Summer School is a great system.

CHAIRMAN’S REPORT

The Acting Chairman brought up a request for discussion with regard to the public hearing which is before the regular March meeting. Ms. Swaitek clarified that it will actually be at the start of the regular P&R meeting, that the Auditorium at Town Hall is booked, and will be posted in the newspaper as a response to the request for the Friends of Woodlawn Park to voice their concerns. This hearing will be for one hour, and there will be no action taken. There is a procedural report in writing on its way to outline the ground rules as to time limits for speakers. Mr. Goodyear mentioned as was noted on the agenda, that the meeting is subject to Roberts Rules of Order and Rules of Procedure of Parks and Recreation Commission. Any elector of the Town may speak but only Commission members may vote.

Ms. Gutierrez asked what was the expectation for discussion, should the commission determine ways to accommodate opposition, where are we on the ordinance for the leash issue, and where is the existing authority? Mr. Burke stated that RTM has the issue, and they have the power to change or adapt the ordinance on leash length, and the commission is not

taking action on this issue. Ms. Swaitek stated that there is no ordinance but only a regulation that was created in 1972, and this is a police ordinance of eight (8) feet in public space, except in a dog park, that with every other park, state law applies. Dogs must be kept under control and it is an enforcement issue with regulations that come under dog enforcement officer. She restated that it is much better to absorb public comments at a hearing, and that the Friends of Woodland Park are to be given time to be heard. There are Woodlawn Park laws, in place, and as existed since 1998 as a “designated park”. Ms. Swaitek stated this is only the beginning of a LONG process, which lasted over six months more than ten years ago. Mr. Goodyear stated that in summary, Jane Branigan has told him that she has ideas as to how this issue should be handled and how the hearing should be conducted. The group should be prepared to have a brief discussion prior to the hearing, and should receive an e-mail communicating her recommendations.

PLAYGROUND BY THE SOUND

Discussion items were covered within the Status Report of the Weed Beach Master Plan by Mr. Hovell.

ANY OTHER BUSINESS

There was no other business.

PUBLIC COMMENTS

There were no public comments.

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

**** MS. HAWLEY SECONDED.**

**** THE MOTION PASSED UNANIMOUSLY.**

The meeting was adjourned at 9:10 p.m.

NEXT MEETING: Public Hearing and Regular Meeting March 18, 2009 7:30 pm; Darien Town Hall, Auditorium

Respectfully submitted,

Marilyn Knox,
Telesco Secretarial Services