

**TOWN OF DARIEN
PARKS AND RECREATION COMMISSION
REGULAR MEETING
MAY 18, 2016**

ATTENDANCE: Mary Flynn, Chair; Amy Doering, Mary Louise Morgan, Erika Morris, Dennis Conetta, Marc Ioli, Susan Daly, Lorena Bora

STAFF: Pamela Gery, Parks and Recreation Director

AUDIENCE: Adele Conniff, Chair RTM Parks and Recreation Committee, Diane Conologue, Vice Chair RTM Parks & Recreation Committee

CALL TO ORDER

Ms. Flynn called the meeting to order at 7:29 p.m. A quorum was present.

Mrs. Flynn began the meeting by reading a statement to address the Weed Beach Proposed Concept vote.

PUBLIC COMMENT

Ms. Flynn opened the floor for Public Comment.

Several residents spoke about the proposed Weed Beach plan.

DISCUSSION AND ACTION ON WEED BEACH PROPOSED CONCEPT

After much discussion, the Commission agreed to take a vote on the various elements of the Conceptual Plan.

**** MS. BORA MOVED TO APPROVE THE WATERFRONT BOATHOUSE**

**** MS. DOERING SECONDED.**

**** THE MOTION PASSED UNANIMOUSLY**

**** MS. DOERING MOVED TO APPROVE THE OPEN SPACE PICNIC AREA**

**** MS. MORRIS SECONDED.**

**** THE MOTION PASSED UNANIMOUSLY**

**** MR. IOLI MOVED TO APPROVE THE BEACH FRONT
BOARDWALK/WALKING PATH**

**** MS. DOERING SECONDED.**

THE MOTION PASSED UNANIMOUSLY

**** MS. DALY MOVED TO APPROVE THE SPLASH PAD
** MS. DOERING SECONDED.
** THE MOTION FAILED WITH FOUR IN FAVOR (FLYNN, DALY, BORA,
DOERING) AND FOUR OPPOSED (IOLI, MORRIS, CONETTA, MORGAN)**

**** MR. IOLI MOVED TO APPROVE THE LANDSCAPING AND
RESTORATION OF CURRENT PICNIC AREA
** MR. CONETTA SECONDED.
** MOTION PASSED UNANIMOUSLY**

**** MS. BORA MOVED TO APPROVE THE REPLACEMENT OF SHADE
TREES ALONG THE BEACHFRONT
** MR. IOLI SECONDED.
** THE MOTION PASSED UNANIMOUSLY**

DONATION PROPOSAL AT TILLEY POND PARK

Pamela Gery outlined the donation proposal that Kris Barker of the Darien Gardener's Center had submitted to the Parks & Recreation Department. She stated that the donation of trees, shrubs and ground cover was approximately worth \$4,000 and Mr. Barker was looking for the Commission's approval on the project. Ms. Morris acknowledged the variety of beautiful shrubs, trees and ground cover that Mr. Barker was proposing and also noted on his proposal that all of these plantings will be maintained by Kris Barker, at no cost to the town, in order to facilitate their survival.

**** MS. MORRIS MOVED TO APPROVE THE DONATION FROM THE
GARDENER'S CENTER
** MS. DALY SECONDED.
** MOTION PASSED UNANIMOUSLY**

APPROVAL OF MARCH 16TH AND APRIL 20TH MINUTES

Ms. Flynn noted that the March 16th minutes were not submitted in the Commission packets therefore would be approved at the June Commission Meeting.

**** MS. MORRIS MOVED TO APPROVE MINUTES FROM APRIL 20 AS
AMENDED
** MS. DALY SECONDED
** MOTION PASSED UNANIMOUSLY**

REPORTS

Parks & Recreation Director and Assistant Director

Ms. Gery highlighted main events from her monthly report and the Assistant Director's report.

Parks & Recreation Chairman Report

Ms. Flynn updated the Commission on approved town budget.

The next meeting will be June 15th, 2016 at 7:30 p.m. in room 119 at Town Hall.

Statement from Commission Member Erika Morris

Park & Recreation Commission

Wednesday Map 18, 2015

Short Lane property vote

Erika Morris

We are aware that the purchase of this half-acre parcel of land should preserve as much open space as possible and I (who am on the board of the Darien Land Trust) am pleased to see the restored wetlands, forest buffer and upland buffer area in the proposed project. When it comes to environmental concerns, all planning would of course be subject to the necessary regulations. One clarification worth making is that the Short Lane property, at a cost of \$1.7 million to the town, was never contemplated for passive use. The land was acquired to add to the Weed Beach campus and provide the potential for additional beach amenities and the potential reconstruction of a sailing facility to replace the one lost in Superstorm Sandy.

The biggest demographic making the request for changes at Weed Beach is families with children living at home. Many of you have heard this statistic: between 1990 and 2010, the population of Darien increased by 5-6%. The housing count during this time didn't changing that much. But during the same period, the school age population in Darien increased by 80%. This is a changing dynamic that is a demanding a tremendous amount of different resources than it did before.

There have many concerns about the mill rate impact of this proposal. Since 2011, the mill rate in Darien has increased 34% from 11.7 to 15.8. For the record, the mill rate is Darien is still lower than all surrounding towns with the exception of Greenwich (11.271) which is lower because Greenwich has more commercial properties supplementing the residential mill rate. The mill rates for New Canaan is 15.985, Westport 18.09, Wilton 26.8302, Fairfield 24.79, Norwalk 25.371, and Stamford 25.43. Due to recent construction, including the downtown revitalization project underway by Baywater Properties, Darien's commercial base rate has been raised higher than it was ever planned to be 20-30 years ago and that takes a lot of pressure off of residents in Darien. This is critical as Darien stands likely to lose \$1.5M in state education funding. I

am cognizant that the Weed Beach project needs to take into account these cost ramifications and that it should have minimal impact on Darien's mill rate.

Some have said there has not been enough public conversation on this topic. I will point out that we have had two Open Houses and a public hearing. A survey was conducted and mailed to 69% of the 6,517 Darien households and additionally it was made available in hard copy in the Town Hall, Library, Senior Center, Youth Depot, Nature Center, Weed Beach Paddle Hut, not to mention advertised on the Town Website, Park & Recreation Website, Darien News Online, Darien Daily Voice and Darien Patch. In the end, we received back 2,100 surveys. You cannot make people participate in a public debate. When people choose to engage, they do! When Dariennite.com published an article last month about the Baywater Properties' revitalization plan, it got 5,000 hits in the next 2 days. The Park & Recreation Commission has tried very hard to gather public feedback and be available for conversations with residents.

[David Gurliacci: I took that comment from timestamp 1:30:05 into the "Overview of Downtown Darien Proposal", found here: http://yourdowntowndarien.com/#s_resources. You were right that his comment pertains to the Shake Shack news article!]

Statement from Commission Chairman Mary Flynn
PDF attached on website

ADJOURNMENT

- ** MS. BORA MOVED TO ADJOURN.**
- ** MR. IOLI SECONDED.**
- ** THE MOTION PASSED UNANIMOUSLY.**

The meeting adjourned at 8:32 p.m.
Respectfully submitted by Mary Louise Morgan