

Over the past several months we have heard hundreds of opinions on the redevelopment of the Weed Beach extension. After dozens of stakeholder meetings, a public survey, a number of Open Houses and a public hearing, after hundreds of emails and phone calls, and a town wide petition with almost 600 signatures, its pretty clear that this is a controversial issue.

When the town purchased the Short Lane property, we had no ideas what could possibly be considered for that site. With the help of our consultants we looked at different options, but most importantly, we listened to the public. What is abundantly clear is that this town wants a public community pool. It has been a top objective for the almost 40 years that I have lived in Darien. The bigger question has been and continues to be – Where should it go?

Is Weed Beach a viable option for a pool? Our consultants say yes, but there are many questions that still need to be answered, including the environmental impact of the pool on the site, traffic, the general use not just on the neighbors but on the beach itself, and finally the cost of the project.

The Commission has received literally hundreds of emails on this topic. The emails have been from residents of all generations, and have been, for the most part, thoughtful and responsible. Those in favor have cited costs of joining pool clubs, and the safety issues of swimming in the Sound during low tides and after storms. They rightfully point out that a community swimming pool would bring the community together. These emails came from young parents and grandparents, from realtors and empty nesters among others.

Those opposed to the pool, many from the neighborhood but also others from the community, cited their concerns over the environmental, traffic, noise impact, and expense.

Based on conversations in town, and hearing about several other important projects being proposed, including the town public works garage and potential school expansion projects, I am hesitant at this point to move the Commission forward voting on a pool project while these other projects are in the works. But Let me be clear, this is not suggesting that we put the pool project away, far from it. Rather it allows us to include the pool as a central component of our Open Space Master Plan, which the commission will start on next month.

So, first, and with the Commission's approval, I would like to move forward tonight and vote on all the amenities in the proposed plan, except the pool. Second, as I just mentioned, we will quickly move forward and start on our Open Space/Master Plan, and use this plan as a vehicle to determine the best place for the pool, which may still be at Weed Beach in the same location.

Finally, My intention is to ask the Board of Selectmen to create an advisory committee to assist the Parks and Rec Commission with this Open Space Plan.

With that, I would like to ask the Commission if they concur with these thoughts?