

RTM PARK & RECREATION COMMITTEE MEETING MINUTES

DRAFT

MEETING DATE: January 10, 2011

ATTENDEES: Chair Cheryl Russell, Robert Cardone, Adele Conniff, James Howe, Tony Imbimbo, Andy Millar, Peter Nelson, John McLean, Cecelia Mundt, Gary Swenson

AGENDA ITEM 1: Discuss and VOTE to increase the bonds and notes by \$1,300,000 from \$2,000,000 to a total of \$3,300,000 for improvements to Weed Beach.

Members discussed a resolution to increase the bond and note authorization for the Weed Beach Project from \$2 million to \$3.3 million.

Mr. Nelson raised the question of “What does a no vote mean?” For instance, does it mean that the project does not go forward or that the funding for the project is reduced? The chairman explained that the project had been approved by the Board of Selectmen, the Board of Finance and the RTM, and that a “no” vote would mean that the PRC would spend the \$2 million that already had been approved to execute some portion of its master plan.

Questions were raised about whether the town could afford the financing of the bonds given budget difficulties expressed by the Board of Finance at the recent State of the Town meeting. Mr. Imbimbo asked about the incremental cost of financing an additional \$1.3 million in bonds. That information was not available. Mr. Swenson suggested that the additional \$1.3 million in bonds would be pooled together with bonds for other projects such as the new police building.

Members expressed an interest in hearing from the Board of Selectmen as to why it believes we can afford this increase now, given the state of the economy. Ms. Russell said that she would ask the First Selectman to respond to this question at an RTM meeting.

Various members indicated that the cost of borrowing is low right now and that it would make sense to take advantage of those low borrowing costs, that the beach gets lots of use by town residents, that a quality beach favorably affects property values, and that the project provides a “lot of bang for the buck.” It was pointed out that the Board of Finance voted 7-0 in favor of the resolution.

A motion was made and seconded to approve the resolution to increase the bond and note authorization for the Weed Beach Project from \$2 million to \$3.3 million.

The vote was 9 in favor, 0 opposed, 1 abstain.

Voting in favor were Russell, Cardone, Conniff, Howe, Imbimbo, Nelson, McLean, Mundt, and Swenson. Voting to abstain was Mr. Millar.

Mr. Millar expressed two concerns. One was about the timing of the increased bonding, given the economy. He was also concerned by the fact that he did not see many of his constituents using Weed Beach and expressed doubt about the public's support of the spending.

AGENDA ITEM 2: Chairman's report

Ms. Russell reported on the Park and Recreation Commission budget. Specifically, the PRC operating budget was set to increase by 1.2 % for 2011-12, although Ms. Russell emphasized that this budget was very preliminary. Additionally, she outlined some capital projects the PRC was planning to address. These include sand for town beaches and surfacing of tennis courts. Also, \$30,000 was included for a dog park.

More information about the budget would be coming at the next PRC meeting and the next RTM P&R Committee meeting.

Ms. Russell said that PRC had made no decision on a dog park, and then there was a discussion about the activities of the Darien Dog Owners Group (DDOG).

Cecelia Mundt updated the RTM P&R Committee members on the activities of DDOG, including the group's meetings with various town members to craft rules regulating off-leash opportunities in Darien parks. These activities, Ms. Mundt said, have included:

- Discussions with key constituents in Darien, including Friends of Selleck's Woods, Darien Land Trust, Darien Nature Center, and Friends of Woodland Park.
- A meeting with the Darien Police Department including Chief Duane Lovello, who confirmed DPD's ability to enforce park rules and who expressed support for a compromise on park rules that would allow off-leash opportunities.
- A meeting with an attorney on the wording of the proposed leash ordinance. The attorney pointed out how Section C of the ordinance could lead to potential lawsuits and could have other unintended negative consequences.
- Discussions with PRC member Susan Graham, who was appointed to advise and share information between DDOG and the PRC.
- DDOG has provided PRC with a draft proposal for rules regulating off-leash opportunities in Darien parks.

It wasn't clear at this time whether DDOG would be on the PRC agenda at the next PRC meeting.

Members briefly discussed the proposed leash ordinance, then a motion was made to adjourn.