

Minutes from the Darien RTM Parks & Recreation Committee Meeting - Sept. 16, 2019

The meeting was called to order at 7:35pm by Chair Adele Conniff with the following members present: Patti Bumgardner, Diane Conologue, Suzanne Handler, Susan Lauritzen, Emily McDermott, Andy Millar, Jennifer Moller, Cheryl Russell, Sandy Savage and Bill Van Loan present. Absent were Mark Adiletta, Ken Fiveson and Sue-Ellen Mitchell. Chris Ezbiansky has resigned from the RTM.

Invited guests and members of the public included Chairman of the Pear Tree Beach Building Committee, Mike Sgroe, town residents including Janine Hackett, Vincent Shanley, Susie Fahey, Brigitte Whitney, Perry Boyle and Delice Bolotin.

Approval of the June 3, 2019 Minutes. It was motioned by Cheryl Russell, seconded by Sandy Savage. The vote was unanimous.

Acceptance of private donations up to \$75,000 to the Town of Darien for the 2020 Bicentennial Celebration. Alan Miller is the Chair of the 2020 Bicentennial Committee. The Bicentennial Opening Ceremony is Jan 10th, the Weed Beach Fest Bicentennial Bash is June 6th, the Anniversary Day Celebration is June 12th at the cemetery on Hanson Road and the Heritage Day Celebration is in Autumn 2020 at the Darien Historical Society and the Mather Center. Historical markers, a time capsule and small banners with the 2020 Bicentennial logo will be hung in town on Post Road and at Tilley Pond throughout the year. The vote to accept the donations was motioned by Patti Bumgardner, seconded by Sandy Savage. The vote was unanimous.

Update on Pear Tree Point Beach Improvement Project. Chair Conniff asked Cheryl Russell from our committee, who is also on the Pear Tree Point Beach Building Committee, to take us through the project updates. Mrs. Russell said the plans need to go through the Zoning Board of Appeals (ZBA) and Planning & Zoning (P&Z). Some key points include a proposal to expand the sand by 5 feet into the parking lot at the front beach. At present, it is 75 feet from the curb to the high-water mark. The West beach (back beach) is proposed to expand 18 feet towards the parking lot. It will reduce the parking spots by 31 spots. A variance is being requested to maintain the stall size of a parking spot at 8 ½ x 18 because P&Z has since made parking stalls larger in Darien. There also will be a variance request for the rear yard setback (near the parking lot). Landscaping will be discussed by the building committee at a later date. Weston & Sampson will be meeting with the DEEP regarding the boat ramp next week. New urinals, toilets and sinks are in the plan and free-standing showers are designed outside to rinse the sand off you. Earlier plans said lifeguard area vs storage but with the new elevated structure proposed, the lower area can only be used for storage because FEMA requires "breakaway" walls (in high tide if a tide hits 15 feet, FEMA requires that water is allowed to flow through) so the space below cannot be "habitable." The upper level proposed will be constructed independently, perhaps on pilings. The flexible community space proposed on the second floor has been reduced in size to 652 square feet which includes storage space and mechanicals. The concession stand with a window is upstairs next to the flexible space and is 199 square feet. An elevator and stairs allow access to the upper level. The flexible community space has glass garage doors on both sides that can be raised or lowered for air and the views. There is also a unisex bathroom on the upper level along with decking for tables and chairs surrounding the outside of the upper area.

Questions from our RTM P&R Committee. Bill asked if there is an estimate for the cost and will it make financial sense. He also asked if they can put more sand into the water to expand the beach vs shrinking the parking lot and asked if \$100 an hour rental fee justifies the cost of the project. Adele said we were doing this for the enjoyment of the town. Sandy asked what the Pear Tree Beach Building Committee vote was for this project (5 in favor, 2 opposed) and what were the objections of the two who voted against project design #7. Cheryl responded that she had voted no and her three main concerns were justifying the flexible space, having the concession upstairs and having an elevator in a flood zone. Sandy said her district had a meeting and they were thrilled about fixing the boat ramp but had concerns about reducing the parking lot. Emily commented that the design looked like it fit in at the beach because it looked like a lifeguard stand. Andy asked about the public's response and Cheryl responded that people were concerned about the height proposed. Patti expressed concerns about losing 31 parking spaces since she observed cars being ticketed a year ago inside the lot during the summer, closer to the boat club. She also asked if there was a square footage cost yet and what an estimate would be to put in pilings since it was expensive for the boat club when they redid their deck after a storm. Adele said as the design for the overall building has been honed down, the cost has shrunk. Mike Sgroe, Chair of the PTB Building Committee took us through FEMA rules for a VE15 zone and their goal to be fully FEMA compliant. He felt it was important to have bathrooms at the ground level and Neil Hauck Architects designed them with an environmentally friendly grass roof and 6 round skylights above the bathrooms. Mike said they will be taking out the storage area for kayaks that appears on design #7 and instead likely making it an outdoor lifeguard area for when they are on break. He said the elevator will be inside the building to keep it away from salt water. He said dunes were controversial because people liked to see the beach so instead they are looking to put in vegetation. He said the decking plans also include the existing gazebo, moving its stairs to the left, allowing for a ramp to the gazebo and making the gazebo even with the deck proposed around it so it becomes handicap accessible. Mike also said the building committee voted down a sidewalk all along the sand since cars can pull up right to the beach so it was deemed unnecessary. Mike reiterated that the building committee takes its mandate from the Parks & Rec Commission, which had asked for and voted on an elevated new structure, a flexible new community space and integration with decking.

Comments from the audience. We don't need an elevator; how much does it cost the Tokeneke Club to maintain their elevator; don't build anything to impede the view; it's a beautiful place to sit in your car and see the water and this beach is small so please keep it simple; a third of the building is over the setback; can't always say we'll just bond for it; every morning there are sounds of the machines smoothing out the sand but Pear Tree Beach doesn't need to be bigger, just make it nicer.

Chairman's Report - Chair Conniff gave updates on Parks & Rec projects. The Woodland Park physical survey showed there was no encroachment by residents on the Woodland property. The new global motion playground item was installed at Cherry Lawn. Work on the Cross Country Running Path on the Diller Property will start on Sept 22nd. It won't be ready for this fall for the cross-country team. The Weed Beach Meadow and Trail Project will have plans going before P&Z. The Darien Foundation and the Darien Athletic Foundation are underwriting it. Separately, new picnic tables and umbrellas were put at Weed Beach. Weston and Sampson will be meeting with Pam Gery regarding landscaping for the Highland Farm property.

Kate Buch is sending out RFP's for Highland Farm's parking lot and walking trails. The smoking ban is in affect at all the parks and beaches in Darien. Beach gate receipts are up. The Darien Nature Center wants to have more programs, be allowed to have an event up to 10x a year, would like to be allowed to have a program with 85 children, allowed birthday parties for 24 kids vs 14 kids, and they need to address their parking situation.

Motion to adjourn was made by Patti Bumgardner, seconded by Bill Van Loan. Chairman Conniff adjourned the meeting at 9:43pm.

Respectfully submitted,

Patti Bumgardner