

Darien RTM Parks & Recreation Committee Minutes January 21, 2020

The RTM Parks & Recreation Committee meeting was called to order by Chairman Adele Conniff at 7:35pm.

Eight members were present: Kara Bohnsack, Patti Bumgardner, Adele Conniff, Elizabeth McDermott, Jenn Moller, Sandy Savage, Shelia Sherwood, Shannon Silsby.

Absent: Diane Conologue, Andy Millar, Sue-Ellen Mitchell, Cheryl Russell, Bill Van Loan.

Approved the minutes from the 10/21/19 meeting - Unanimous

Approved the minutes from the 10/29/19 meeting - Unanimous

Guest Speaker - Pam Gery, Director of Darien's Park & Recreation Department

Ms. Gery took the committee through her Darien Park & Recreation proposed budget for fiscal June 2020/July 2021. Since there were several new people on the committee, Ms. Gery explained her budget process. She presented the budget to the Parks & Recreation Commission (PRC) at their December 18, 2019 meeting. The PRC discussed each item, made additions and deletions and formally voted to accept the budget. Ms. Gery presented the budget to Kate Busch, Town Administrator on January 10, 2020 and it became her budget. Ms. Busch is reviewing the Parks & Recreation budget, making changes and will present it to the Board of Selectman in the next two weeks. The Board of Selectman will review each line item, make changes and formally vote to accept it as part of the Board of Selectman's budget the second week of February. The Board of Finance will then review the budget in March through April, make any changes and formally vote to accept it on April 14th. The RTM will vote on the proposed town budget at the May 11, 2020 RTM budget meeting.

Ms. Gery went through details of the budget and answered questions from our committee. She noted the steady revenue from the beach permits has increased every year since she has been in her job and there has only been one increase in the price of the beach permits from \$40 to \$45 in five years. The PRC voted not to increase the sticker price this year. The gate fee for daily entrance is \$28 and is mostly non-residents. Under building rent for town hall, it is paid by the Darien Arts Center and is tallied as revenue. Ms. Gery explained the program revenue fees and how they paid their instructors for programs out of a contra account. However, going forward with this budget, there are now changes with the accounting of it because Ms. Busch wanted to see more specifics of how the program fees are reflected in this budget. Patti Bumgardner asked where the community events spending is reflected. Kara Bohnsack asked how do you evaluate programming vs community events on revenue and break even costs. Jenn Moller asked about program fees and the marketing costs.

Parks & Recreation Revenue (proposed) for FY 2020-2021

\$338,000 Beach Parking Permits
\$ 4,200 Boat Permits
\$ 60,000 Paddle Court Revenues
\$ 12,000 Building Rent/Paddle Hut
\$ 25,000 Park Facility Permits
\$650,000 Parks & Rec Program Fees
\$ 25,000 Rent/Town Hall
\$ 1,600 Tennis Court Revenue

Highlights of the Parks & Recreation Expenses (Increases and Decreases)

Seasonal and Temporary Salaries/Permanent Part Time Positions

The state changed the rules for permanent part time employees. They can work for the year under 19.75 hours per week and get some benefits. Paddle hut attendants work Oct-March and were working too many hours so they had to have 4 attendants. Seasonal park attendants are considered college students and work from May-August up to 40 hours per week. Ms. Gery said they had 2-3 good college kids this year. The park maintenance full time crew is very strong and they are all union employees. We just hired another full-time employee (FTE) this past year so we didn't need a third seasonal employee last year. We have an overtime salary line for community events.

Printing Costs \$1,317 increase

They had to print more beach stickers because they ran out. The brochure is also included in the printing cost. Jenn Moller asked if there was an opt-in/opt-out option for the program brochure and if Ms. Gery ever considered doing it all online to reduce costs. Ms. Gery explained the brochure is mailed to every household in Darien is considered a crucial element in marketing their programs.

Tree Maintenance \$2,000 increase

The Darien Public Works (DPW) and the Darien Parks & Recreation maintenance crew work together on tree maintenance in the town's parks and beaches. This line item is for tree maintenance. For the tree replacement program, Ms. Gery is also putting in \$5,000 each year in the capital budget request so if the town has to take any trees down in parks (versus maintain them) there will be money to replace them.

Junior League Sailing Program (no increase)

Shannon Silsby asked about specifics. Ms. Gery said the town allocates \$4,500 to subsidize the program. The Parks & Recreation Department has that amount in their budget to help offset their expenses and teachers. This budget item remains the same amount as last year.

Facility Repair and Maintenance \$7,900 increase

Kara Bohnsack asked why Pear Tree Point Beach (PTPB) and Cherry Lawn have not been consistently maintained and how do you decide to maintain something or not. Ms. Gery explained that the buildings at PTPB are 43 years old and went through hurricanes and have rusted out. Since she has been on the job, it has been painted and they fixed the pump system last year. She has put together a check list of when things got done and started this last fall. She has to maintain 212 acres of parks and beaches plus her department now has to maintain Highland Farms. Jim Flynn, Darien's Park Maintenance Director puts on paper a list of his projects every two weeks and gives it to Ms. Gery and there are quarterly reports. Examples included the clogged water fountain at Weed Beach and a screen that was blown out at Weed Beach. Ms. Gery's said her goal with these check lists is to have better communication with the maintenance crew.

Potable Water (decrease of \$3,148)

Last year they invested in a smart water system for Town Hall Fields and Cherry Lawn Casey Field for irrigation.

Ms. Gery explained sometimes she can transfer within her budget, like with a supply account. If it is under \$500 she can transfer it. If it is over \$5,000 she must go to the Board of Finance to get approval.

Parks & Recreation Capital Requests (proposed) for FY 2020-2021

\$60,000 Work Equipment Reserve (P&R Vehicles) *(Ms. Gery had originally said \$55k)
\$11,000 Valve Replacement at Town Hall Fields
\$30,000 Weed Beach Concession Equipment
\$15,000 Update Playground Equipment
\$ 8,000 Cherry Lawn Traffic Study
\$10,000 Demo (rip up) the Cherry Lawn Basketball Court (and seed it with grass)
\$66,000 Repaint Weed Beach Tennis Courts
\$11,000 Stand-On Blower
\$ 5,000 Tree Replacement

Comments on the Capital Budget

Patti Bumgardner asked why we were repairing the watering valve for \$11,000 if we just purchased it last year. Ms. Gery explained something happened with construction with the Department of Public Works (DPW) and the valve broke. The DPW will reimburse Parks & Rec for it.

Jenn Moller asked why the Stand-On Blower was not in the equipment replacement line item.

Kara Bohnsack asked what are the economics around buying our own concession equipment at Weed Beach if we only charge \$3,500 to the food vendor but are requesting \$30,000 for new equipment.

Patti Bumgardner requested fixing the Cherry Lawn basketball court instead of ripping it up since it is the only basketball court in a Darien town park or beach, it is not a NIMBY or a traffic issue, but it is a safety issue as the basketball court has been in disrepair for almost a decade. She noted she met with the Director of Public Works, Ed Gentile, who estimated the basketball court could be repaired at half the price or less if the court is not moved elsewhere and just repaired. Ms. Gery had \$90,000 proposed in her original capital budget for a new high tension full size basketball court. The Parks and Recreation Commission (PRC) voted in their December meeting to completely take the basketball court out of the capital budget for this upcoming year, even though it had moved up the pipeline as a priority Darien Parks & Recreation capital project over the last several years. Instead, the Commission added in \$10,000 to rip up the court and seed it and added \$8,000 for a traffic study at Cherry Lawn. Patti asked why there is a need for a traffic study since the neighbors use to walk or ride their bikes to Cherry Lawn to play basketball. She also asked why there was a need for a traffic study with regards to questions about the Darien Nature Center since the Planning & Zoning Commission had already granted the Darien Nature Center their request in perpetuity.

Dog waste bag discussion

There was a discussion around dog waste bags. Ms. Gery was asked if she should request more money for this item since she had budgeted \$600 again this year but said she has spent \$3,000 already and the fiscal doesn't end until June. In January, Ms. Gery put up signs reminding people to bring their own dog bags to the parks. A committee member pointed out that with the recent plastic bag ban at stores, Darien citizens are adjusting to not having them to use as waste bags. It was recommended to Ms. Gery that she ask Jim Flynn and his crew if there are certain areas in town where the bags are located but are not being used, and if so, can they reallocate those dog waste bags to the spot(s) that are running out. With over a third of Darien residents having dogs and the budget request not increasing, it was recommended that we find out how many new dogs are being registered each year so we can plan for it, while still encouraging dog owners to bring their own doggie bags.

Update on the Pear Tree Point Beach Building Committee (PTPBCC)

Adele Conniff said in the December PTPBCC meeting the architects presented a renovation plan for the existing buildings and it would have to be done in three stages, three years apart per FEMA rules. The first stage would cost \$79,000 and focus on the repair and updating of the bathrooms. The second stage would cost \$83,000 and would focus on the concession stand. The third stage would cost \$72,000 and would focus on the exterior of the buildings. If the town renovates the buildings, we have to work within the 50% rule of the appraised value of the buildings. Also, 20% of the budget must go towards ADA in each stage. The Wernert Construction Company gave the estimates and it should go out to bid.

Comments on the project

Shannon Silsby commented that nine years is a long time to complete this project.

Kara Bohnsack read part of the FEMA regulations, noted what significant improvement means and offered to share the regulations with everyone on our committee. She also noted that FEMA will not penalize you to spend more money to make something ADA compliant. ADA compliance is addressed by state statutes.

Sandy Savage and Emily McDermott asked about plans for the boat ramp. They noted First Selectman Jayme Stevenson recommended to the Parks and Recreation Commission at their November 2019 meeting to make it a priority. It was noted that fixing the boat ramp involves dredging and that Weston and Sampson has put the boat ramp project in their site plan.

Nancy Stein, an audience member said it defies common sense to build a two-story building with an elevator in a flood zone.

Sandy Savage responded that she also has concerns with an elevator in a flood zone and that the Darien High School elevator has been broken for months.

Chairman's Report by Chairwoman Adele Conniff

The Diller property cross country path has been completed. There is some flooding but the DAF is addressing it. For Highland Farms, they won't start working on the property until late Spring or after

Memorial Day. The Weed Beach Meadow and Trail has been put on hold. The costs were higher than the expected. There was also an issue with the construction partner that the DAF uses so those combined issues put the project on hold. For the beach stickers, there was no rate increase by the Parks and Recreation Commission, however, the state has added a sales tax so the sticker will increase 6.35%. There will now be a \$5 charge per participant for the Darien Soccer Association and other sports leagues who use town fields. The fees will be used to help offset the cost of maintenance of the fields.

The meeting was adjourned at 9:28pm.

Respectfully submitted,
Patti Bumgardner

From Chair Adele Conniff - Following the 1/21/2020 RTM Parks & Recreation Committee Meeting there were clarifications and corrections made by e-mail on subjects discussed during the meeting.

Budget:

During our meeting the Parks & Recreation Program Revenue for 2019 was discussed. We received further information on that subject from Pam Gery via e-mail showing an increase from 2018 (\$151,769.47) to 2019 (\$182,843.00). We also received a further update from Pam Gery which stated that the numbers in the original report were "pretty accurate" and that the confusion was because of the change of the "contra account". "Going forward, we will be able to see the full financial outcome of our programming revenue."

Revenue from the daily receipts at the beaches was requested by a committee member.

Pear Tree Beach Update:

Chairman Conniff sent an e-mail on 1/23/2020 with a clarification of ADA Compliance and the 20% Rule with respect to renovation that was discussed at the 1/21/2020 P&R Committee Meeting.

"New Structures must be built to be ADA compliant.

In a renovation, you are required to spend up to 20% of your budget toward making the structure ADA compliant. If the structure is partially compliant, then you would spend whatever % you need to make it compliant (up to 20%). If the structure is already compliant, the 20% rule does not apply."

During the 1/21/2020 P&R Committee Meeting a member requested that the chairman distribute FEMA regulations to the committee. The regulations were e-mailed to the committee.

Chairman's Report:

Clarification of the dog policy at Diller Park was made via e-mail to the committee. No dogs are allowed in the park. The Commission voted in July and will revisit the issue next summer. It is believed that only one of the parking spaces at Diller is restricted to handicapped parking.