

Minutes from the Darien Parks and Recreation Committee

May 4, 2020

The virtual meeting was called to order at 7:40 p.m. with 10 of 13 members in attendance. The following Parks and Recreation Committee members in attendance were: Patti Bumgardner; Diane Conologue; Cheryl Russell; Adele Conniff; Sue-Ellen Mitchell; Sandy Savage; Jennifer Moller; Bill Van Loan; Kara Bohnsack; and Sheila Sherwood. Those absent: Emily McDermott; Andy Millar; Shannon Silsby.

The first order of business was to approve the minutes from the Parks and Recreation Committee meeting of January 21, 2020. A motion to approve was made by P. Bumgardner and was seconded by S. Savage. The vote was unanimous.

The meeting was called to review the Parks and Recreation Budget that was adopted by the Board of Selectmen.

Chairman Conniff opened the budget discussion noting that the Operating Budget is \$1,928,318 and that the Capital Budget was segmented into two parts, recurring and nonrecurring items. Those items in the recurring budget were equipment replacement for \$60,000 and tree replacement for \$5,000.

The Capital Budget nonrecurring items included:

Valve replacement at Town Hall \$11,000

Cherry Lawn Basketball Court \$15,000

Concession Equipment for Weed Beach \$30,000

Repaint Tennis Courts at Weed Beach \$36,000

Update Playground Equipment \$15,000

Stand on Blower \$11,000

The Chairman reported that the traffic study (\$8,000) and the demo of the Cherry Lawn basketball court (\$10,000) was removed from the Department's budget request.

At the Board of Selectmen meeting on April 21, 2020 three major capital projects were recommended for deferral or possible bonding; fire apparatus reserve \$500,000; new gym upgrade at Town Hall \$75,000; new sidewalks \$75,000; and equipment from Public Works Budget \$30,000.

As representatives of the Park and Recreation Committee C. Russell and Chairman Conniff participated in a joint online call last weekend with their “buddy team” from Finance and Budget and the Board of Finance. C. Russell reported that F&B had a lot of questions on the Parks and Recreation Capital Budget items regarding specific details on the Weed Beach concession stand equipment and the stand on blower. There was discussion that the stand on blower could be deferred since it was originally recommended for this year’s budget because of the work on the Weed Beach and Meadow and Trail pathway which was put on hold by the DAF in the winter. Chairman Conniff noted that it was also supposed to be used for the Highland Farm pathway.

Discussion and comments followed with some members concerned about the return on investment of the concession equipment. A member said that they would like to see more due diligence on what we would have made financially based on a \$30,000 investment in kitchen equipment for Weed Beach Concession. It was also mentioned that the new concession equipment may not be taken care of if the food vendor is not the owner.*(Subsequent to meeting, committee member voiced this comment to the Chairman as member experienced technical difficulties with virtual meeting). The Chairman said that the food vendor is in the last year of its contract and that the point of owning the equipment is that it will be more attractive for other vendors to bid on the contract. A member commented that we should be able to get a better result from a service and food product perspective which a bidding process can create. It was noted by one committee member that perhaps Park and Recreation doesn’t have a broader understanding of what people would like to eat at the beach. Another committee member suggested using Survey Monkey to see what beachgoers would like on a concession stand menu. Conversation ensued regarding the sensitivity to the budget and to possible deferrals due to the Coronavirus but concluded that Park and Recreation would vote to support the budget that was presented by the Board of Selectman.

A motion was made by P. Bumgardner to support the Parks and Recreation Capital Budget per the BOS and was seconded by S. Savage. The vote passed unanimously. C. Russell made a motion to support the current Operating Budget and S. Mitchell seconded it. The motion passed unanimously.

The Chairman then gave her report. The Parks and Recreation Commission met on April 15, 2020 and April 22, 2020. During the meetings there was discussion regarding Frates permit to tie up boats by the boat ramp at Pear Tree Beach. This

permit was due to expire on April 30, 2020. The Commission extended Frates permit until October 31, 2020 allowing the boat to be tied up on the Pear Tree Beach side of the boat ramp. Any violation of this permit may result in the permit being cancelled. At the Commission meeting discussion ensued regarding the history of how Frates permit was initiated. The Commission expects to review this policy in the fall.

Other topics were dogs off leash. There continues to be issues with dogs off leash at Woodland Park with a recent dog bite of a resident.

Spring revenues will be down by \$45,000-\$55,000 due to Coronavirus.

Weed Beach Festival and the Bicentennial Birthday Bash in June are cancelled.

Vice Chairman Conologue reported that beaches may reopen on May 7, 2020 as long as there is social distancing and no more than five people to a group. The Memorial Day Parade has been cancelled but there may be a small Color Guard Parade going down Hecker Ave. to the cemetery. The Fourth of July Fireworks are cancelled. A committee member asked about donations to the Bicentennial celebration and what the process is for monies collected since the event has been cancelled.

Highland Farm construction has begun.

Pear Tree Beach Building Committee will have its last meeting on May 6, 2020 at 7:00 p.m.

The meeting was adjourned at 8:56 p.m.

Respectfully submitted by Sue-Ellen Mitchell