

## Minutes from the Darien Parks and Recreation Committee

September 14, 2020

The virtual meeting was called to order at 5:41 p.m. with 10 of 13 members in attendance. The following Parks and Recreation Committee members in attendance were: Kara Bohnsack; Patti Bumgardner; Diane Conologue; Cheryl Russell; Adele Conniff; Sue-Ellen Mitchell; Sandy Savage; Bill Van Loan; Sheila Sherwood; and Shannon Silsby. Those absent: Andy Millar; Emily McDermott and Jennifer Moller. Also in attendance was Kate Buch, Town Administrator.

The first order of business was to approve the minutes from the Parks and Recreation Committee meeting of May 4, 2020. A motion to approve and seconded was made. The vote was unanimous.

The meeting was called to review, discuss and vote on the application for STEAP Grant funding that will be on the upcoming RTM meeting's agenda. The STEAP grant application is an application for \$92,000 to fund Highland Farm in order to landscape areas near the parking lot and along the walking trail, including installation of a Pollinator Pathway. The town has already paid Weston and Sampson \$8,700 from the Capitol Fund to prepare a landscape plan for Highland Farm. The State of CT requires the RTM to accept the award and within 30 days from acceptance must implement the plan.

The discussion opened with questions about the use of pesticides or chemicals used for weed control, etc. The BOS has to vote on pesticide use, but it was noted that pesticides are not planned to be used at Highland Farm. Highland Farm will be an all organic property. Trash receptacles are not provided at Highland Farm as it is a "pack it in/ pack it out" property.

Other concerns were possible state stipulations that may be tied to the grant. It was noted that upon being awarded the grant there would be a review before acceptance.

Another committee member questioned the different landscape plans that have been provided noting that one plan had more plantings than another thereby perhaps costing more. Any monies not used on the Highland Farm STEAP project would have to be returned to the State of CT. The neighbors in the Highland Farm neighborhood were contacted by Weston and Sampson to receive input on the landscape plan. The landscaping would provide screening of parking lot, create Pollinator Pathway and perhaps install trees for shade.

Following discussion a vote was called to accept the STEAP Grant. The vote was unanimous with 10 of the 13 members present.

The Chairman's report followed with an update on the Darien Parks. The P and R Committee Chair spoke with the P and R Commission Chair and was provided with the following update.

In terms of expenses, due to Covid, expenses will probably be higher due to the hiring of park monitors, signs, and more cleaning. Savings may be realized as life guards started later than usual. So far there have not been any transfers needed this year to make up any overages but that is TBD.

Tilley Pond Park. The geese situation is still being worked on. Some of the public is against having dogs to chase the geese away.

Cherry Lawn Park. The Town of Darien has received four bids for the basketball Court. The BOS allotted \$15,000 for the installation of a new basketball court and \$5,000 has been donated from the neighborhood with an additional \$5,000 as needed. Of the four bids, two bids were disqualified due to unanswered questions on the application. The two bids being considered are Davis at \$25,700 and Meehan at \$23,120. The decision will be made by the P and R Commission with a fall installation.

Pear Tree Beach Building Committee. Cheryl Russell gave the committee an update. The PTBBC last met on 5/6/20. CT DEEP application is still in the process of being completed for the raising of the parking lot.

Beaches. It was noted that it was a very busy summer with Covid. Extra security was hired to have more of a presence. The Executive Order, stating the use of beaches on weekends for Darien residents only, has been lifted. Pear Tree Beach will have a gate guard on the weekends through September. Weed Beach will have a gate guard seven days a week.\* P and R Commission will reassess when to lift the use of gate guards as the fall progresses. It was noted that the security monitors worked out well and were recommended for the 2021 summer.

Concessions. This summer was supposed to be the last year of the contract with Uncles Deli. It didn't happen and as a result there were sporadic offerings. Rory's provided some weekend food at Weed Beach which was very well received. Jennifer's Kitchen provided food for Pear Tree Beach. This was well received too, but comments were that she occasionally closed early. P and R Commission did a survey of people's food preferences which was followed by the consultant's report. Some committee members questioned why food trucks were not used and it was mentioned that the town does not permit food trucks due to smoke and noisy generators.

Committee members were reminded of the RTM Meeting on 9/21.

The meeting was adjourned at 6:35 p.m.

Respectfully submitted by Sue-Ellen Mitchell

\*Update. Email of September 16, 2020 states that both beaches will have gate guards 7 days a week through September 27, 2020. SEM