



**The Park & Recreation Commission's objective for the Pear Tree Improvement Project:**

The goal of the project is to enhance the recreational facilities at the park while preserving the natural beauty of the beach. The plan creates gathering places for the community to meet and to enjoy the park year-round.

*\*Updated 11/15/2019 (#16 thru #33 added)*

*\*Updated 1/7/20 (#23)*

*\*Updated 1/31/20 (#23)*

*(This is a print out of the documentation available on the town website.)*

*\*\*Please note that these answers clear up a lot of misleading information\**

We strongly encourage all community input to the proposed improvements to Pear Tree Beach. Your voice is very important to this project. Please read this FAQ as it provides important project information.

*For input, please email [pgery@darienct.gov](mailto:pgery@darienct.gov)*

## FAQ

### 1. What, exactly, is currently being proposed for Pear Tree Point Beach?

The property, buildings and facilities at Pear Tree Point Beach are worn and in dire need of repair or replacement. The last major improvement at Pear Tree Point Beach was in 1978, *over 40 years ago*.

*For photos showing the current state of the park and its structures: [CLICK HERE](#)*

*For a photo of the facility that was there in the 50's, 60's until it burned in the 70's: [CLICK HERE](#)*

The current proposal is to undertake one comprehensive project that will address all of the problems with Pear Tree Point Beach. The Proposal includes:

- Replacing the existing 41-year-old structure with a new, ADA-compliant, multipurpose facility that will house a food concession, rest rooms, and a covered flexible community space,
- New decks (one at ground level near the gazebo and an elevated deck overlooking the beach),
- Expanding the width of the south beach by 5 feet and the west or "back" beach by 18 feet,
- Renovation of the parking lot to replace the cracked and broken asphalt and to correct the grading and pitch issues (which will improve run-off following storms and high-tide events),
- An update of the picnic area,
- Planting of low grasses/vegetation at edge of beach & parking lot to enhance sustainability of beach,
- Planting of additional trees at selected locations on west and south beaches (locations tbd),
- Rebuilding the boat ramp to correct the pitch issues.

*For plans and renderings: [CLICK HERE](#)*

### 2. Why not renovate the existing building?

The proposed plan calls for renovation of the existing bathhouse and replacement of the existing concession building. Most of Pear Tree Point Beach is in Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) flood zone VE15. FEMA limits the amount of money that can be spent renovating an existing, non-compliant building in zone VE15 to 50% of the appraised value.

The '50% rule' does not apply to new construction within a VE15 zone built in compliance with FEMA regulations.

The total appraised value of the combined existing bathhouse and concession structure is \$193,400 which limits us to a renovation budget of \$96,720. Our preliminary plan estimates this to be the cost of renovating the bathhouse alone.

Replacing the existing concession building with a new elevated building enables the town to make more impactful, long-lasting and fully FEMA compliant improvements, unconstrained by the 50% rule.

### **3. Why a two-story building? Won't it be an eyesore that blocks views?**

As explained above, the new raised structure provides a true multi-purpose facility that complies with today's building codes and is FEMA and ADA compliant. Several residents have asked questions about the impact of a two-story building in place of the current one-story building.

The new building will be superior to the existing structure in every respect, and the physical dimensions are strikingly similar. Compared to the existing buildings, the proposed building has a sloped roof which is 1.6 feet taller at the lowest part (facing the parking lot) and approx. 7.5 ft taller at the highest point (facing west towards the water).

The current proposed plan positions the new elevated structure roughly within the footprint of the existing concession structure. This plan also retains the existing bathhouse, while reducing its size and height, and upgrading all interior fixtures.

*For visual comparisons of the size of the current structure and the new building (the shaded area being the current structure): [CLICK HERE](#)*

### **4. Why a new building (with an elevator) in an area susceptible to flooding?**

The entire Pear Tree Point Beach property is in a flood zone, and has been considered by FEMA to be in flood zone since the inception of flood regulations in Darien. Elevators are allowed in flood zones, with the provision that the elevator not be at the ground floor while the elevator is at rest. Elevators are especially important at Town-owned public facilities such as the one proposed. Recently, both the Noroton Yacht Club and Tokeneke Club buildings included elevators in their plans.

Many properties in Darien are within the flood zone (Noroton Bay is an example of an area in which nearly all properties are in the flood zone). One common misconception is that development and construction is not allowed in the flood zone. Actually, that is untrue. Construction is allowed if at the proper elevation (at least one foot above the base flood elevation), and with certain certifications from a professional engineer.

The elevation of the site is comparable to Noroton Bay and other Darien waterfront areas, and the new building is being constructed to comply with current building codes and FEMA regulations.

This means that the building, for example, will be constructed of materials designed to weather coastal conditions, and will have purpose-designed electrical and mechanical systems. In other words, it will be built to the same (or higher) standards as a coastal home.

The architect is in the process of identifying an elevator designed for use in coastal settings. The proposed elevator will be housed in a weather-tight structure and remains in the raised position when not being accessed from the ground.

An additional key objective of the project is to implement solutions to reduce flooding of the parking lot during full/new moon high tide and flood events. This will include installation of an in-line check-valve in the storm drain at the edge parking lot and west beach to prevent water backing up into the parking lot at extreme high tide.

**5. Why an elevator?**

Earlier designs considered ramps to provide access to the new upper level in addition to stairs. Feedback suggested that ramps would have a noticeable effect on sightlines and views to the harbor. Instead, the most recent approach proposes the incorporation of an elevator to provide handicap access. Stair access is proposed to provide access to the second level of the building.

**6. Does the plan call for long ramps to navigate from the beach to the upper level of the proposed structure?**

As indicated above, along with stairs, ramps were considered in earlier design proposals, but were thought to have a noticeable effect on sightlines/views out to the harbor. The most recent approach proposes the incorporation of an elevator to achieve ADA accessibility along with stairs.

**7. What is the purpose and impact of the "flexible community program space?"**

The "flexible community program space" is a ~600 sq. ft. space on the upper level that will be enclosed and have windowed walls that open. A rendering of this space is here: [CLICK HERE](#)

The purpose of this space is to provide a comfortable, covered, "rain or shine" way for residents to enjoy the beach. There will be ample seating for families and seniors, allowing residents and their guests to informally meet for lunch or snacks during the summer season. In season, all beachgoers will have access to the community space during the park's hours of operation.

In the off-season, we plan to allow a limited number of events to be held in the community space, with the reservation fees going to offset the overall operating expenses. This ability to reserve the community program space will be **strictly limited to Darien residents and organizations** and a Darien Parks and Recreation staff member will be on duty during all use of the room.

**8. How long has this plan been under consideration?**

This project was planned to commence after completion of the Weed Beach renovations in 2009 and due to budgetary and other reasons, it was placed on hold. In 2017, the Parks and Recreation Commission undertook the development of a master plan for our town's parks and beaches. Based upon input from town residents and the result of random sampling carried out by an independent consultant, the renovation of Pear Tree Point Park became a priority. The project plan you see today is the result of two years of study and analysis.

**9. Will Pear Tree Beach have berms that will block the view of the beach/water from your car?**

Berms are not recommended as part of the proposal. Beachgoers will continue to be able to enjoy the views of the beach from their cars as they currently do.

**10. How much will all of this cost?**

Cost estimates for the new building's construction and renovation will be presented at the Building Committee meeting at 6 pm on October 9 at Darien Town Hall. Estimates for the repair of the boat ramp, parking lot renovation, landscaping and other site elements are being prepared, with a date for publication still to be finalized.

**11. Have FEMA and DEEP approved building the proposed structure in a VE15 zone?**

We are working with FEMA and DEEP to ensure that all requirements are met. The approval process is continuing, and to date, no aspect of the plan has been flagged as a “show-stopper” by either regulatory body.

**12. Is the beach at Pear Tree at risk of eroding away?**

Based upon information provided by DEEP, there is no indication that the beach is eroding. Instead, there is evidence that sand appears to be accumulating between the breakwaters/jetties.

**13. Are any town zoning variances required?** Yes - the current plan calls for 2 variances. The first is to allow for construction of portions of the new building within the required setbacks. The new building is proposed to be constructed roughly within the footprint of the existing non-compliant structures. The second is to allow for the size of parking stalls at the beach to remain the existing size as opposed to the slightly wider size required under current town regulations (8.5-inch-wide parking spaces in lieu of 9 feet wide – a difference of 6 inches). The Building Committee will be applying to ZBA for consideration on these items.

**14. Isn't the beach to be experienced with 'toes in the sand'?**

True, being on the sand is a great way to experience the beach. But generally speaking, being on the sand means being in the sun, and for more and more people, prolonged exposure to sun poses health risks particularly in the form of skin cancer. The proposed flexible community program space, with large doors allowing it to be transformed into an open-air space, will provide a wonderful alternative for beachgoers to enjoy the beach, protected from the effects of the sun. The space will also allow those with special needs a more accessible place to enjoy the facility.

**15. What approvals are required before building can commence?**

The process for securing final approval to proceed with construction is lengthy and rigorous, requiring detailed presentations to approvals from multiple towns, State and/or Federal agencies with jurisdiction over the project. These include the town's Zoning Board of Approvals, Architectural Review Board, Planning and Zoning Commission, Board of Selectmen, Board of Finance and Representative Town Meeting. Along with, The State of CT Department of Energy and Environmental Protection.

**16. Why are we building rental flexible space at PTPB when we have an underutilized rental space at Weed Beach?**

The schedule for proposed space at Pear Tree complements the Weed Beach space.

The Weed Beach Paddle Hut is only available for non-paddle events in the *paddle tennis* off season (April – September) and is reserved almost every weekend during that period.

The Pear Tree Community Space is intended to be available to reserve for small gatherings and programs during the *beach's* off-season (October -- March), when usage of the beach is low and during the same period when the Weed Beach Paddle Hut is otherwise unavailable.

**17. Does the rental space at Weed Beach generate enough net income for the town to justify building this?**

Last fiscal year, we received \$11,500 from Weed Beach Paddle Hut reservations during the off-season April to September. This revenue paid for all the utilities, cleaning and staffing expenditures and then left the town with a net profit of \$3,000.

**18. Is PTPB concession stand profitable?**

Currently it is not profitable and without significant attention to the premises, we do not see a path to profitability.

The Weed Beach concession (which is newer, cleaner, and generally more welcoming), by contrast, is profitable. We feel a new facility at Pear Tree Beach will be profitable.

Finally, we see these concessions as an important amenity and convenience to beachgoers and as such, though we have no intention of running these concessions at a loss, it is not our intent to run these concessions with the goal of maximizing profit.

**19. PTPB only offers prepared food, ice cream and drinks - why set up a full kitchen in a flood zone, when all is needed, is an elevated refrigerator and freezer?**

As part of the Improvement initiative, we intend to upgrade the concession to provide for a variety of options, ranging from hamburgers to salads and other healthy options.

**20. The mechanical components of an elevator will be subjected to water and sand and in need of constant repair. What expenses are associated with this? Isn't it worth keeping the building on one level?**

As the work of the Building Committee proceeds, the specific type and details of the proposed elevator along with associated costs, including maintenance cost and protocol will be made available in the next phase of the design process – 'Design Development'.

**21. Isn't it worth keeping the building on one level?**

We explored that option but Pear Tree Point Beach is in Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) zone "VE15" and FEMA limits the amount of money that can be spent "renovating" an existing, non-compliant zone VE15 building to 50% of the appraised value.

The proposed raised structure will be fully FEMA compliant and designed to withstand a "100 year" storm. It will additionally provide significant benefit to the community in terms of usable space, comfort and benefits of enjoying the beauty of the beach in ways not possible given the limitations of the current structures.

**22. How much will it cost the town to heat this new proposed structure and bathrooms year round as well as continuous snow & ice removal?**

Using the actual costs associated with the Weed Beach Paddle Hut, we estimate that the cost of heating the facility at PTB will be approximately \$4,000 per year. The cost of snow and ice removal would be part of our current labor expense, as that is part of our staffs' existing responsibilities.

**23. Builders have informed residents that both existing buildings can be renovated for less than 50% of the assessed value, yet the Building Committee is not open to exploring this option. Why?**

At our December 18<sup>th</sup> Pear Tree Building Committee meeting, Neil Hauck presented three renovate estimates:

1. Bathroom renovation approx. \$80,000 (does not include mechanical or concession equipment)
2. Concession, First Aid, Lifeguard & Police storage renovation approx. \$85,000 (does not include mechanical or concession equipment)
3. Exterior renovations approx. \$73,000 (does not include mechanical or concession equipment)

Please visit this link for full details on December 18<sup>th</sup> meeting - <http://bit.ly/2s6y062>

Please visit this link for a renovation schedule - [renovation schedule](#)

*Please note: The decision to renovate comes from the Parks & Recreation Commission and not the Pear Tree Building Committee.*

**24. The gazebo is a cherished icon in Darien. Why do we need ramps around it? The view of the beach will be obstructed?**

We agree that the gazebo is a cherished icon, but a large number of seniors and physically challenged residents cannot access it. The ramp and decking around the gazebo will enable handicap accessibility and enhance residents' enjoyment of the gazebo, with more space and waterfront tables to experience the views. Our goal in proposing the decks is to enhance the community's ability to enjoy the gazebo as well as to provide additional space to more greatly enjoy the views.

The architect has also provided an option with an indoor elevator for handicap accessibility.

**25. DEEP states that LI Sound will rise 20 inches by 2050 - why build in a clear flood zone when we might not have a beach down the road?**

Recognizing the information available on predicted sea-level rise, replacing the existing structures with new facilities in full compliance with FEMA requirements will assure that the community will continue to have the ability to enjoy the beach further into the future.

**26. The LI Sound rose higher than the west beach 8 days (twice a day) since September 28, 2019. How can you continually tell residents & other committee members that this flooding is due to a missing check valve on a storm drain?**

As we've previously indicated, the lack of a check-valve supporting the storm drains at Pear Tree Beach allows for water to flow back through the drains and into the parking lot during rising tides.

Under some circumstances, this is the sole source of water pooling in the parking lot in the area of the west beach.

Generally speaking – the primary source of water overrun in the parking lot is due to tidal conditions and is exacerbated by storms, lunar events, and periodically the combination of both.

Finally, as evidenced and photographed during numerous recent storm events, flooding of the parking lot completely abates and recedes along with the transition from high to low tide.

We are currently in the process of soliciting proposals and recommendations for installation of a check valve and once that process completes we will be in a better position to determine how best to proceed.

**27. 36 parking spaces will be lost at PTPB with the current proposed plan. What are the plans for traffic overflow, trailers for boats, handicap spaces?**

After much deliberation, the Building Committee has proposed that increasing the size of the beach to protect the shorefront with resilient landscaping while improving the quality of the experience at Pear Tree is worth foregoing some parking spaces. We would gain 18 feet of beach under the proposal.

The number of handicapped parking spaces will not change. This is important to us as the new building is intended to increase opportunities for beach access for elderly and physically challenged residents.

With regards to boat trailers, we have factored that into the plan (especially given our plans to rehabilitate the boat launch), but long-term parking of boat trailers is not permitted. If we have a space issue related to trailer parking down the road, we will address that.

The parking lot will yield a net loss of 31 spaces if we get approval from ZBA for the variance we are requesting. If we do not get approval, we will re-evaluate the proposed approach.

**28. Why would you pave the picnic area when you have been offered a wonderful gift to make Weed Beach more handicap accessible?**

We are maintaining the current picnic area with tables on the sand, as well as creating a paved plaza to allow for wheelchair accessibility with additional picnic tables. It is the goal of the Parks Recreation Commission to continue to enhance accessibility throughout all of our public parks for ALL residents, including handicapped, physically-challenged, and elderly Darienites.

**29. What are the costs for dredging for a new boat ramp and why isn't it in the projected cost for this project?**

The dredging was a request from the Darien Boat Club. We have not yet determined how much of this additional expense will be assessed against the Boat Club.

**30. What will it cost to rent this space that only holds 30-34 people?**

The payment model (e.g., roughly \$100/hour with a minimum) that we are using at the Weed Beach rental space is working very well, and we anticipate that this would work well at Pear Tree Beach as well.

**31. What hours will this be rented?**

In-season, when the food concession is open (e.g., 10 a.m. - 6 p.m.).

Out of season use (during the October to April period) will allow for no more than two small gatherings per day (by Darien residents only), each capped at 4 hours and 30 attendees) with the gates being locked by police at 10 p.m. The Parks & Recreation Department will also provide community classes (such as painting, tai chi, yoga) in the space.

As a point of reference, the Darien Boat Club operates continuously through the summer months and holds weekly social events within their facility, as well as a few large events that are permitted through the Parks & Recreation Department to use the parking lot with the gate being locked by police at 10 p.m.

**32. Will this facility be lit every night or only when there is an event?**

Lights will only be on when the facility is being reserved.

**33. Will this require additional lighting in the parking lot?**

We will need adequate lighting for safety during reserved hours. The final plan will include any additional lights required for the safety of beach/park users.

**Darien Parks & Recreation Department**

***Mission Statement***

The mission of the Darien Parks & Recreation Department is to nurture active and passive recreational activities within existing Town parklands; to maintain clean and attractive facilities and to adjust and expand both the recreational programs and parklands to meet the recreational requirements of all residents in a cost-effective manner.

The primary goal of the Department is to provide an environment which promotes and encourages the enhancement of individual lives through the social, physical, mental and emotional benefits of participation in physical activity or passive involvement within parks.