



**Town of Westport
Parks & Recreation**
WESTPORT PARKS AND RECREATION COMMISSION
Longshore Club Park, 260 South Compo Road
Westport, CT 06880

September 16, 2013

The Westport Parks and Recreation Commission held a meeting in Town Hall, room #201/201A at 7:30 p.m. Those in attendance were Andy Moss, Chairman; George Franciscovich; Steve Axthelm Parks and Stuart Rogan Recreation Commission Members; Stuart McCarthy, Director of Parks and Recreation; Rick Giunta, Administrative Manager and five(5) members of the general public.

1. Approval of Minutes

Upon motion by Mr. Franciscovich, seconded by Mr. Rogan the minutes of the Parks and Recreation Commission meeting of June 17, 2013 were unanimously approved.

Upon motion by Mr. Franciscovich, seconded by Mr. Axthelm the minutes of the Parks and Recreation Commission meeting of August 19, 2013 were unanimously approved.

2. Update from Friends of Westport Parks and Recreation.

No new updates.

3. Review of Parks and Recreation Department F.Y. 2012-13 budget and revenues.

Mr. McCarthy – Revenue side of the budget - The most significant issue in both dollars or percentages is greens fees. That's fairly self explanatory given the issues we had last summer, both with the reduction in play and with the discounted greens fees that were put in place during the fall season.

The second significant item is the non-resident parking. When the Commission increased the fees we projected a 10% drop in the number of visits based on a higher fee. The drop was more like 30% so we have seen a substantial fall off in revenue as a result of that fee increase. There are various approaches that the Commission may want to discuss in addressing that or you could do nothing. The other option is that we do sell 300 non-resident season passes those are \$425 per year. So you may want to change the fee or change the number of passes sold or both. There is a waiting list for those passes.

The other area of concern is the handpass revenue. We may need to make some decisions on how we structure the handpass what it's used for and what the various price points are for that.

The other big item that is really not a great concern the instruction revenue was down \$139,000 from projection but the expenses were down by a similar amount. So again, that is a function of what the demands for the programs is.

On the expenditures end with the significant savings in the program area, the golf expenditures suggest that a \$61,000 overage but that includes a \$32,000 tractor that we purchased out of cycle.

Mr. Franciscovich - I had read an article from the New York Times that New York City is facing the exact same issue. According to the article they doubled their tennis fees (tennis permits) for the season the purchase of those for the season was half. They had a similar thing with the parks membership at the recreation centers, the same thing happened. So it is not just unique to Westport.

Mr. McCarthy - I would urge the Commission as I have through the years at budget time to recognize that this is public recreation, this is not private recreation and in that scenario where a large number of people decided not to participate in activity because they couldn't afford it, those may be largely just the people that you want to be involved in activities.

Mr. Axthelm - Do you think it is the cost of the programs or do people just have other things to do?

Mr. McCarthy - I think there is a tremendous amount of competition from private vendors in the market place so that people do have a lot to choose from in the market place. I think we have done a very good job of keeping program fees at a very reasonable level.

Mr. Moss - We will be making decisions on price points and policies probably in December. So before that time it would be good to get educated.

Mr. McCarthy - Likely those discussions will take place in the November and December timeframe. At this point this is to make sure that everyone understands where we are today, and I think we will get more direction in November from the new administration.

4. Discussion related to tree removals at Longshore Club Park.

Mr. McCarthy - This is an informational item for the Commission we are ready to take the last of the "original" trees on the entrance road to the park. My experience is that once the tags go up on those trees that someone will decide that it's the first time they have ever noticed those trees.

There might be as many as 17 or maybe as few as 13 trees that we would plan to take down this fall. They are part of the original trees in the park. They are over mature and are in declining condition. They provide two issues for us. One is a safety issue these trees are in declining condition will continue to drop dead wood. They are a potential liability in a storm.

The second is that they are not attractive at this point. While they have the height they are sticking 30ft above the rest of the row of well shaped trees. From a visual standpoint they add nothing to the park other than the trunks of the trees line the road. The good news is the department saw this coming about 20 years ago. We planted an alternate row of trees down both sides of the entrance road and that row of trees has done very well. Those trees are just reaching their full maturity. The crowns of the trees are mature at this point; the trunks of the trees are enough to provide the same visual affects driving into the park as the original trees did. The new trees will benefit from the removal of the old trees. The old trees are creating shade, taking nutrients from the soil that could be better used. As these trees go into decline

they start using more and more nutrients from the soil because they are trying to fight off the aging process.

Ms. Pam Klomberg (Chairman Westport Tree Board) I would like to offer that when these trees come down that we repurpose these trees. I do have the resources, I have people that are interested but I need to get the word out. I can spear it but I need help.

Mr. Axthelm - I think people in town will have a very emotional time with this. I don't disagree with the findings and I also applaud Stuart with the forethought in preparing for the future. But seeing 15 trees go will be a lot.

Mr. McCarthy - I can tell you that there is no one in the Parks Department that can spear head this over the next 6 weeks we don't have the manpower. In 6 weeks time we need to be ready to take these trees down.

5. Discussion relative to hours of activity at Wakeman Park.

Mr. McCarthy - In October 1999 the Town had entered into a stipulated settlement and the parties in the settlement were the Zoning Board of Appeals, Conservation Commission, Zoning Commission and the Board of Education along with neighbors of Bedford Middle School.

The stipulated settlement was an agreement that was put in place that regulated some uses on the field. The stipulation on some of the conditions was 12 years from the issuance of the Certificate of Occupancy of the school. That 12 year anniversary passed in August.

One of the items in the stipulation was that the hours of operation for the athletic fields that no formal programming could begin prior to noon on Sundays on the fields at Wakeman Park. That condition was carried over into the special permit for the Bedford Middle School by the Planning & Zoning Commission. So while the stipulation is no longer in effect the zoning conditions are still in effect. We would like to go to the Planning & Zoning Commission to change the hours of operation for Wakeman Park to 8 a.m. to Dark on Sundays consistent with every other property in the Town of Westport. Several of those properties have neighbors that are much closer to the playing fields as is in the case of Wakeman Park.

The big issue here is that there are two facilities at Wakeman Park that are really critical to the Town's inventory. The field is one of only 3 full size baseball fields in the Town of Westport and as a result scheduling is an issue particularly in the fall season. The second item that is critical in the inventory is Field B which is the only artificial turf soccer field in town so for the community soccer program it is significant. We request that you endorse the plan to go to the Planning & Zoning Commission to change the hours of this facility consistent with other Parks & Recreation facilities.

Mr. Franciscovich - I would suggest to get the users of the fields to support this.

Mr. Paul Rossi - Is there a need that you can specify to the community? Mr. McCarthy - Yes in baseball there is a demand. In soccer season there would be a desire to begin games at 10 a.m. – 11 a.m. in the morning. I don't think there would be a lot of 8 a.m. Sunday necessarily, but certainly would begin games at 11 a.m.

Mr. Paul Rossi - Is it too much to ask for a concession stand while you are going for that increase in time, should you include or do you think the facility will support the concession and then the money made from it? Mr. McCarthy - There is currently no proposal to put a concession there, in fact I don't think that anyone has made that type of proposal. I don't anticipate that it's a current need. By having the stipulated settlement lapse you can certainly go back with a proposal.

Upon motion by Mr. Axthelm, seconded by Mr. Franciscovich and passed unanimously, it was

RESOLVED: The Parks and Recreation Commission directs the Parks and Recreation Department to proceed with the necessary approvals to allow the athletic fields at Wakeman Park to be used on Sundays beginning at 8 a.m. consistent with other town athletic fields.

6. Update on Compo Beach site Improvement Plan.

Mr. McCarthy - The project has received funding from the Board of Finance and the RTM. The contract was approved by the Board of Selectmen and signed by the First Selectman and the architect. We are working to set up our kickoff meeting sometime after the 23rd of September. The first order of business would be to set an agenda of meetings and to highlight the public input portion of the project. The architect is currently working on setting up a website that would be used to both collect and disseminate information on the project. We did go ahead and authorize them to take traffic counts during the second and third week in August.

Mr. Moss asked everyone to tell people this is being done and make people aware and they should tell friends and neighbors. The key is to get comments and input from the public.

7. Old Business

Mr. McCarthy - Update on Golf Maintenance - We are continuing to work through negotiations on a contractor for the golf course. It has been a little longer than we had hoped at this point but it is really important to get it right. There are still negotiations going on with regard to the vendor and with regard to the employees.

The greens have been slice seeded twice since the beginning of August. The first green was aerated last week. The other greens are scheduled for another slice this week. We are seeing new growth in the greens as the temperatures cool down we anticipate continued growth, as well as the poa returning to the greens. We believe we are headed in the right direction the greens are disease free and should be responsive.

8. New Business

None

9. Commissioner's Reports

None

10. Administrative Update

Mr. McCarthy - Tennis Courts @ Staples HS - We are making progress. We had hoped to have the courts open Labor Day, we were two weeks off that schedule based on getting bids, etc. The school is aware of it and has adjusted schedules. We did have an issue with trees. The tree contractor who was trimming the trees, in good faith there were some dead arborvitaes in the back of the court so he took them out, but those trees were part of a stipulated settlement on that property so they had to be replaced. The only way to get to those trees was across the tennis courts so they have to be replaced before we reconstruct the tennis courts. So we are hoping by the end of the week that the trees will be in place and by next week the courts to be finished up.

Marina Shore Stabilization project - This is being run by the Public Works Department and they have submitted plans to DEEP for review and at this point that review can take a substantial amount of time. This is a project that is likely to hit construction fall 2014.

Levitt Pavilion is under construction. They plan on having a formal ground breaking. In the meantime they have begun construction and started tree demolition today.

The meeting adjourned at 8:55 p.m.

Respectfully,
Sheila Kavey
Recording Secretary