

Park and Recreation Commission

Minutes

(meeting taped)

Monthly meeting: Monday, February 12, 2007 in the New City Hall.

Meeting was called to order at 7:10 p.m.

By roll call, members present: John Walsh, David Mikos, Al Felice, Beverly Moran, Nick Serednitsky, James Benanto and Andrew Cota.

Parks and Recreation Director Dennis O'Connell was present. Athletic Director Joseph Orazetti was excused.

ADDITIONS OR DELETIONS TO THE AGENDA:

Without objection, the agenda was accepted as written.

APPROVAL OF MINUTES:

A motion was made by Beverly Moran and second by David Mikos. Move to accept the minutes of January 8, 2007, as written. Motion carried unanimously.

PUBLIC PORTION:

No public came forward at this time.

CORRESPONDENCES:

A communication was read from Courtney Clay of 351 N. Main St., Ansonia.

"Dear Mr. Walsh:

I am writing to express my extreme disappointment with your short-sighted decision to ban dogs from the Derby Greenway. Being a dog owner for all my life and a resident of Ansonia for the last 4 years, I fear that your decision isolates Valley citizens instead of bringing them together and promoting the Valley as a great place to live and raise a family.

Last year when the Derby Greenway opened, I was excited for this area seeing that physical attempts were being made by our government to make the Valley more attractive to families and encouraging appreciation of the rivers and landscapes. I started walking my dog there on a regular basis in the warm and cold and was energized by so many other residents there with and without dogs. It was a breath of fresh air blowing into the "All American Valley".

It couldn't have come at a better time as Ansonia, Shelton and Derby had struggled for decades economically and industrially. Now, new businesses were being attracted to the Valley and families also had a reason to move here and spend their weekends and time-off here.

But now, just as increased cash flow has gained momentum in these challenged industrial towns, you put up a barrier that makes these towns less welcoming and attractive to new and current residents. As a responsible dog-owner, I am also frustrated by dogs that are not on their leashes in public areas or feces that is left on the trails, but I have to say that those situations have been extremely rare when I have walked on the Derby Greenway.

Again, I think your decision to ban dogs instead of finding ways to fine or limit irresponsible dog owners is a show of laziness instead of a commitment to making this project welcoming to all of the Valley. I would say 40 – 50 % of walkers have had dogs with them at some point and if you know anything about dog-owners, you know they will search out locations to exercise and spend time with their dogs during their time off.

Personally, I would drive to other towns in order to spend a long walk with my dog, but unfortunately, that will not benefit the town of Derby if this ban is effect. If I chose to go shopping or get

something to eat after my long walk out, that is business that Derby will lose to another town because Derby has forced me to go somewhere else.

I request that you reconsider your ban and find alternate ways to accommodate ALL residents of the valley, whether they be dog walkers or not. I would be more than willing to be a residential "monitor" and report dogs' owners that are breaking the rules. I have in fact scolded dog owners on trails where their dogs are not leashed as it risks my rights as a dog owner and I think you find that responsible dog owners will make the most effective monitors in order to protect these rights.

Thank you for your time and consideration."

Chairman Walsh indicated that the ban is for six months from December 1st through May 31st, and then the Board of Alderman will revisit this decision. The purpose of the ban was to relieve users of feces and the threat of being bitten by a dog. Parks & Recreation wants all people to enjoy the facilities and if dogs are a hindrance the Commission must consider the majority. He will respond to Ms. Clay. He noted that the enhancements phase should be completed by Memorial Day. This will include benches, trash receptacles, signage, bike racks and the brick plaza.

Members noted that they have received possible feedback regarding the ban. The trail is much cleaner. The greater concern is the fear and liability of a dog biting someone walking on the trail. As the trail is narrow by design, it does not appear well suited for dogs even on leashes as they can extend across the width of the trail. They felt that there are many other facilities more suited to dog walking such as Witek Park or Osbornedale Park.

NEW or OTHER BUSINESS:

A.) Discussion with Program Directors: Without objection, the meeting went out of order.

Ken Marcucio was present this evening, representing the Little League. He presented the 2008 budget (on file). He indicated that last year went very well. The new fencing has worked well and there is a little more to finish, the outfield and backstop are not completed. He noted that the dugout fencing may not extend far enough towards the outfield to sufficiently protect the players and this will be reviewed. The fields looked very good last season. The tournament went very well and they were pleased with the conditions. The tournament was for younger players as the field is not regulation size for the older players. He indicated that the league has a very good group of volunteers and coaches that enhance the program. He noted that the tag-day has been rejuvenated and this is proving to be a good fundraiser. The concession stand proceeds are kept separate and the funds are used for special projects, last year was the batting cage.

Registration is being held this week. Last year there were approximately 180 participants. He noted that the fees are comparable with Ansonia, Seymour and Shelton charge more. The minor league teams will continue their play against Ansonia teams as this is working very well. Opening day is April 14th.

Mr. Mikos noted throughout the Valley and at sporting events in general, there has been escalating outbursts from the parents. He asked if the coaches are encouraged to be proactive towards this behavior. Mr. Marcucio noted that parents do receive information at the time of registration regarding appropriate behavior. Members questioned whether this subject could be presented to the parents during orientation or opening day prior to allowing the child to play. It was felt that this may be difficult as not all parents are in attendance and you would not want to punish the player. Members asked that the League report back to the Commission to ascertain if there is a problem that needs to be addressed and asked that the policy that the Little League has regarding parental behavior be forwarded to the Commission so that the language can be reviewed and possibly be utilized by other city run leagues.

Mr. O'Connell suggested that the T-Ball be moved to Bradley School now that the fields have opened up with the transfer of soccer to Witek Park. He indicated that a second diamond could be added. This would lessen the use on Uleski Field and would provide safer areas of play. Mr. Marcucio noted that

there would be an impact on the concession stand proceeds and possible difficulties with parents going between two fields. It was questioned if the picnic grove could be used for T-Ball. He would discuss these suggestions with the other directors. It was noted that Uleski Field had some surface condition improvements made last year but the field is in need of more serious renovation. To properly correct the conditions, substantial topsoil and an irrigation system would have to be installed.

Members questioned about background checks and Mr. Marcucio stated that the National Little League provides this service and all coaches, volunteers and board members are checked yearly.

DIRECTOR REPORTS:

Parks & Recreation Director's Report: Mr. O'Connell noted the baseball registration is scheduled for this week. Babe Ruth will be registering the last week in February. Girls' softball and soccer are also scheduling their registrations.

Speaking with the City Engineer, it does not appear that the lighting system at the softball field can be fixed. Replacing the lighting could be very costly and possibly the field will have to go without lights. Members noted that the light pole that fell a few months ago is still on the field. Mr. O'Connell will contact the Public Works again to arrange for the removal.

Mr. O'Connell indicated that he has been approached by a second Men's Soccer team to use Witek Park. He has requested a roster of members. This would be a Sunday morning team like the first and so they would alternate use of the field meaning that a team would be playing each Sunday morning. Chairman Walsh noted that the Board of Alderman still has oversight of Witek Park and he encouraged Mr. O'Connell to speak with them.

Mr. O'Connell noted that he has been speaking with Board of Alderman President Kenneth Hughes regarding the Witek Park budget. They are considering a capital line item for the park similar to the annual allotment for Ryan Field. It was questioned whether a private contractor will continue to perform the maintenance duties as dictated by the wetlands approval. Mr. O'Connell was uncertain but noted that Public Works would be needed either way being that a private contractor can not provide the flexibility needed to satisfy the scheduling demands.

Mr. O'Connell indicated that he will be working on the Belt line project and he will gather the necessary information for the signage and markings.

Budget wise, the equipment maintenance line item and field supplies line item are dwindling. The capital projects are in limbo. Members encouraged Mr. O'Connell to review the state bid list to see if it provided any of the services but he noted that even if the project could forego the bidding process by utilizing the list, there is still the issue of drafting specifications for the project and overseeing the construction, things beyond his department's expertise.

High School Athletic Director's Report: Mr. Orazetti was excused.

NEW or OTHER BUSINESS:

B.) Update on Review Committee: Mr. Walsh distributed the Fact Finding Committee's report (on file). He felt the members worked very hard in compiling the data and the recommendations speak to the ongoing concerns expressed by the Parks & Recreation Commission for many years.

The mission of the committee is to make suggestions to improve the operations and efficiency of the departments within the scope of Parks & Recreation as well as the feasibility of looking into combining or reorganizing these task to maximize the efficiency of city resources. They reviewed the tasks of the Parks & Recreation, Education Athletics, Public Works and outside contractors and the facilities that

would fall under this jurisdiction. They looked at the current available personnel and the level of maintenance that is needed and how they are currently being addressed. Their recommendations are:

1. Personnel

- a. Assign City Hall Project Manager responsibilities. There is a provision in the charter for this assumption of duties. The position would oversee the day to day operations and follow through and adhere to regular maintenance schedules. The position could also benefit other capital city projects oversight.
- b. Assign Public Works employee (add to the existing staff) devoted primarily to Parks & Recreation to oversee maintenance, repairs and organize the necessary recreational duties.
- c. Contract with a Certified Chemical Applicator and a Turf Maintenance Manager.
- d. Charter the Director of Public Works or a designated Supervisor for Parks & Recreation to be an ex-officio member of Parks & Recreation who would attend meetings and provide monthly updates.
- e. Investigate the possibility of hiring a Building Maintenance Manager on a full-time or part-time basis to help discern needed repairs, keeping the Mayor and project manager informed.

2. Maintenance

- a. Jurisdiction of Parks & Recreation should be reviewed yearly by the Mayor and the Board of Alderman to correct any deficiencies in the plan and enact new plans, as needed.
- b. Yearly inspections and maintenance plans for all city owned property.
- c. Any project involving any city property must receive prior approval and a long-term maintenance plan is required. Annual funding for maintenance and repairs must be created and generated through the budget.
- d. Possible use of the Onopiak property to house workshop, storage areas for plumbing and electrical, provided it can be done so according to stipulations in Mr. Onopiak's will.

3. Communication

- a. Inter-departmental communication between Parks & Recreation and the Schools via the Athletic Director.
- b. Inter-departmental sharing of contractors, maintenance contacts Master List. To be on the list, the contractors should be available within a designated time frame and demonstrate all necessary relevant skills.

C.) 2007-2008 Budget: Mr. O'Connell will be meeting with the program directors and he invited David Mikos, Andy Cota, Beverly Moran and Chairman Walsh to attend to review the proposed budget request.

D.) Other business: Mr. O'Connell indicated that Ansonia has selected a new football league to replace their Pop Warner program. There has been mention that Derby and Seymour Pop Warner programs may accept players from Ansonia and Ansonia has raised concern for this recruitment as they are trying to develop their new league. Mr. O'Connell noted that the local programs are finding it more difficult to register sufficient numbers of players within the community and they do reach out to adjoining towns. This practice was discussed last year and registration fees are higher for out of town players which, in it self, is self defeating. Members suggested that the Pop Warner program be invited to the next meeting to discuss this matter further.

Mr. O'Connell noted that the Yoga program at the Derby Public Library is anticipated to start in mid-March.

Motion was made by David Mikos and second by Beverly Moran Move to adjourn the meeting at 9:00 p.m. Motion carried unanimously.

Respectfully prepared,
Karen Kemmesies, secretary