

New Haven Board of Park Commissioners

Meeting No. 1343
March 18, 2009

Department of Parks, Recreation & Trees
1st Floor Board Room
720 Edgewood Avenue
New Haven, CT 06515

Present: President Belowsky, Vice President Bush, Commissioners DePino, Miller, Torres & Tucker
Absent: Commissioners Castro & Walton
Staff: Robert D. Levine, Director of Parks, Recreation & Trees

- I. Minutes of Meeting 1341 & 1342:** Commissioner Miller moved to accept the minutes of Meeting 1341, seconded by Commissioner DePino and it passed unanimously. Commissioner Bush motioned to accept the minutes of Meeting 1342, seconded by Commissioner Tucker and it passed unanimously.
- II. Treasurer's Reports:** Commissioner DePino moved to accept the Treasurer's Report from Meeting 1341, seconded by V.P. Bush and it passed unanimously. Commissioner Miller moved to accept the Treasurer's Report from Meeting 1342, seconded by V.P. Bush and it passed unanimously.
- VI. Annual Election of Officers:** Vice President Bush and President Belowsky suggested retaining the current slate of officers: David Belowsky, President; Clifton Bush, Vice President; Michael Tucker, Treasurer; Kevin Walton, Secretary. The Commission discussed the role of Secretary. The current Secretary was not present so there was hesitation to elect him if he didn't want to be the Secretary. President Belowsky, due to past conversations with Kevin, believes he would like to be the Secretary. **Commissioner DePino moved to elect the current Board to another term as Officers of the Board of Park Commissioners, seconded by Commissioner Torres and it passed unanimously.**
- VI. CitySeed—2009 Farmer's Markets:** CitySeed could not be present. Director Levine stated that he believed they would be asking for permission to hold the Farmers' Markets in City Parks as well as some type of permanent signage. CitySeed Markets run in four locations throughout the city. CitySeed would like to report to the Commission on the state of the markets. **Matter Tabled.**
- V. Halsey Associates—Trust Fund Overview:** Jim Zoldy and Ken Julian of Halsey Associates addressed the Commission. The presentation documents included how the Park Commission's funds performed over certain, multiple time periods and a current portfolio valuation. Additionally, the investment activities from the fourth quarter of 2008 and on a year to date basis of 2009. Mr. Zoldy explained the documents and what each area referred to in the portfolio. What has been taking place over the past 12 plus months is highly unusual. We have never experienced this during our careers. Fear has become so pervasive that it sparked certain behaviors. One thing that has happened is people started fleeing securities that had any form of risk associated with them. Common Stocks and corporate obligations (preferred stocks issued by corporations) were sold off and the money put into US Treasury Market which is deemed to be completely safe. We ended up with a twelve month period where the traditional relationship between risk and return was turned on its head. People invested in the safest investments got the best return. This has never happened before for more than a short period of time. It is apparent by the 12 month numbers that this environment has adversely affected the portfolio. Preferred stocks were very disappointing and did not give us the stability that we desired. We are seeing positive early signs that the

economy is starting to stabilize a bit. Obviously the banks need to work through a lot of the bad loans they've made over the past decade. Our feeling is that it will be a really rough year for the economy. We'll probably see an improving year for the credit market and possibly at the end of the year, the stock market will be on more sound footing. Commissioner Tucker asked for documentation of the fees we are charged. Mr. Zoldy stated that they do produce a unitization report that lists fees and expenses. Our key schedule is 3/4% on 1st million and 1/2% on assets above that. Additionally, you receive a charitable discount of 20% off of that. Halsey thanked the Commission for their time.

VI. Other Business: Natalie Judd a resident of Yale Ave. addressed the Commission. Ms. Judd wanted to express her concern regarding a proposed community garden in Edgewood Park in the area of Yale Ave. This item was not on the agenda. However, Director Levine would address the issue under his report.

III. Director's Report: Director Levine addressed the Commission. **1) Edgewood Park Community Garden Request**—We have received requests from several residents regarding a community garden in Edgewood Park. This is something we would bring to the Commission when some appropriate areas were selected. We have received conflicting opinions from area residents regarding a location for the garden. We will hold a community hearing and involve the Alderperson. This is not the type of project that would be decided alone by the Department. The community will need to be involved. The location of the garden is of great concern to some residents. Janis Underwood had written to us requesting permission to establish a community garden in Edgewood Park. Director Levine has asked Doreen Oboyski and Christy Hass to work to find suitable locations. After that we will hold a neighborhood meeting with stakeholders and Alderpersons. Natalie Judd addressed the Commission. She stated that she had been told and had heard at a Friends of Edgewood Park meeting that the garden was basically a done deal. This prompted her to contact the Department and stop by the meeting tonight. Ms. Judd was relieved to hear there is a process being followed. Director Levine stated that a garden being placed directly across from Ms. Judd's house is not likely. Ms. Judd is actually a past community gardener and in favor of community gardens. Director Levine stated that this process will take some time to work through. **2) Fairmont Park Community Garden**—Director Levine passed out a letter from Sylvia Dorsey requesting permission to continue the community garden in Fairmont Park this year. The garden was established last year and is supported by the neighborhood. Director Levine recommended granting permission for another year. The letter also requests one picnic table, one grill, and three park benches be installed and cemented into the ground. The Director stated that the department would not be installing these amenities at Fairmont Park. We will place one picnic table at the park. Grilling is only allowed in certain parks in the city. Fairmont Park is located off Clifton St. between Quinnipiac and Russell Street about ½ mile from the golf course. **3) Soccer Field Use Issues**—Director Levine passed out the official press release from the City regarding soccer field use. The New Haven Soccer League has outgrown the Boulevard Fields and has been offered other sites within the park system. This has resulted in the soccer league protesting the change in venue. The main issue seems to be that they want to be in one place for all their games to be played in one day. We have offered them several other locations which actually result in more field time. Director Levine stated that we don't have a facility large enough to accommodate 700 plus people all day long. We have 109 parking spaces and 700 people trying to park and exit onto a State Road that is very dangerous. The City will be forming a Soccer Player's Committee to hear field requests and make recommendations for field assignments. When issuing field permits our first priority has always been New Haven Board of Education programs, followed by New Haven youth programs then adult programs. At some point I will ask for two volunteer Commissioners to sit on this advisory board. That Board would come to the Park Commission for their final approval. We'd have the first meeting in late October or early November after the soccer season is over then we'd have a recommendation by February or early March for that spring. Director Levine and the Commission discussed the New Haven Soccer Leagues protests and a

public hearing scheduled at the Board of Aldermen to address the issue. The discussion continued to include the Ecuadorian Soccer League which will be utilizing the Blvd. fields this season. The group is 25% children's soccer, 10-15% women's and the rest men's teams. They have been very cooperative and are pledging to use the fields properly, leave after their games, keep vendors away and refrain from selling alcohol and drinking. **4) 501c3**—Director Levine stated that staff had tossed around the idea that we establish a 501c3 for the Department. This would allow donations to be made as tax deductible donations which is currently not the case. The Park Commission cannot become a 501c3, but the Board could break off a group of 3 or 4 people that could become a 501c3. This would allow us to directly apply for certain grants that we currently aren't eligible to accept. The Department or the Friends Groups would do the work on the grants under the umbrella of the 501c3. Director Levine would like to place on next months the Agenda for discussion. **4) Lay-off Impact**—Director Levine stated that the Department suffered four lay-offs in the last round of lay-offs. This lay-off brings the Department to a staff of 54. Three Recreation Supervisors and one clerical position were lost. We are working to sustain the same number of summer camps as we ran last year which is 15. We will be using existing union employees supervising non-union seasonal staff as has been done in the past. We may try to expand the number of camps by three or so to support underserved neighborhoods. This will involve the Rangers becoming involved in the organization of camps instead of program providers at the camps. The regular after-school and evening programs have been suspended for two-weeks while we organize the transition with the Board of Education and part-time staff. We should be back up in running in all the schools we served by next week. Commissioner Tucker asked how the lay-offs were selected. The Director stated that it is always done by seniority within a job classification. There are two unions in the Parks Department, Local 3144 which is the management union and Local 71 which is the maintenance unit. Local 71 met their target concessions with the city and were untouched by this lay-off. However, four of their members were laid-off in the last round of cut-backs. **5) West Rock Nature Center Proposal**—Director Levine stated that we were putting together a proposal for the West Rock Nature Center. We've gotten together with Regina Winters; a "green" local architect who has agreed to work with us very inexpensively to come up with a proposed off-the-grid nature center building that would service West Rock Park. Currently there is a Nature Center, a building where we keep the snakes & turtles (which is an old "pole" building on cedar posts) and a small house. The idea is to create an off-the-grid, energy self-sufficient building. This building would serve all the purposes of the three existing building as well as house a larger meeting room/dining hall type area. The structure could also serve as an environmental learning center. This is in the very early stages. I may be coming to you next month asking if you were willing to spend \$3,500 +/- to have the architect and her green team work to put together information to obtain a grant from the Kresky Foundation. Director Levine will hopefully have the proposal by the next meeting where the architect or possibly Illisa Kelman our grants person would attend. The existing structures at West Rock Nature Center are terribly inefficient and need tons of work.

- VII. Other Business:** President Belowsky expressed his concern about the cost of the jackets given out as employee gifts at the holiday party. He believes we should spend less due to the nature of the economic environment as well as the decline in our portfolio. Although we do have a large amount of money in the Donation Account. Director Levine stated that every year over the past seven or eight years the Commission has provided funds to reward each employee at the holiday gathering. He believed the cost has been around \$35-\$40 per employee. He will look into future costs.

Meeting adjourned: **6:30 p.m.**

Next Meeting: **May 20, 2009**