

## New Haven Board of Park Commissioners

Meeting No. 1350  
February 17, 2010

Department of Parks, Recreation & Trees  
720 Edgewood Avenue  
New Haven, CT 06515

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**Present:** President Belowsky, Commissioners Castro, Miller & O’Sullivan-Best  
**Absent:** Vice President Bush, Commissioners Torres, Tucker & Walton  
**Staff:** Robert D. Levine, Director of Parks, Recreation & Trees

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**I. Minutes of Meeting 1349:** Tabled, no quorum.

**II. Treasurer’s Report:** Tabled, no quorum.

**V. Common Ground High School:** Melissa Spear, Executive Director of Common Ground High School (New Haven Ecology Project), 358 Springside Avenue, New Haven. Ms. Spear assumed the position of Executive Director in November and wanted to meet the Commission and introduce herself. Ms. Spear also noted that at the November Board Meeting the Park Commission voted to renew the lease for Common Ground for 15 years. She stated that the original lease capped the number of children they could have attending the school at 150. They are working on a ten year strategic plan for the school and would like to have some flexibility to increase the number of students attending the school to 200. She has initiated a master planning process. She would like to invite someone from the Commission to be part of the master planning committee. They are currently evaluating proposals from prospective planners. Whatever proposals and plans they come up with, will be presented to the full Park Board to get the authorization to proceed.

President Belowsky asked how many students currently attend Common Ground. Ms. Spear replied that they have 150 at this time. It does fluctuate by 5 or 10 students. Director Levine stated that he spoke with President Belowsky regarding the lease. The lease will be on a term of 10 years instead of 15 due to the turnover of Commissioners every few years.

Ms. Spear did notice, and appreciated, that there was graduated yearly lease increases, giving them time to adjust. Ms. Spear will be going through the budgeting process and she believes \$20,000 per year is a very reasonable fee for the property. If they see that there would be significant financial difficulty, she will come before the Board. They have a budget year of July 1 to June 30. Director Levine stated that the draft copy of the lease has forwarded to Corporation Counsel. If the Commission acts on the change in the number of students he will adjust the wording in the lease. The Commission thanked Ms. Spear for attending.

**VII. Other Business:** Newly appointed Commissioner Maureen O’Sullivan-Best introduced herself to the Board. Director Levine stated that Maureen will be replacing Commissioner DePino on the Board.

**III. Director’s Report:** Director Levine presented to the Commission. **1) The Lighthouse Point Park Liquor** issue that had come before the Commission and is now in the hands of the Board of Aldermen. It has not been assigned to a Committee yet but when it is; Park Commission Board members may want to attend to voice their opinions. It had been voted by the Park Commission to 4 to 3 to forward the matter to the Board of Aldermen. Commissioner O’Sullivan-Best stated that she believes it has been assigned to be presented to the Legislative

Committee on Monday, March 8. Director Levine stated that we have not been informed of that yet. The Commission does not have to attend but may if they want to testify. 2)

**Common Ground Lease:** Director Levine stated that he and President Belowsky had spoken about the lease after the Board had voted. He then heard back from City Hall that leases of this nature should be more in the range of 10 years versus the 15 years the Commission approved. There were no other concerns about the lease. Additionally, Common Ground is asking the Commission to increase the number of students allowed to attend the high school from 150 to 200. Director Levine wanted to get a sense of where the Commission stood on that matter. President Belowsky was not concerned about the number increasing. Commissioner O’Sullivan-Best stated that an increase of that size is significant. She also wondered if it would prevent other Charter Schools from adding additional students and where Common Ground would put the students at the site. What Ms. Spear is asking the Commission is for their permission to expand up to 200 students prior to them getting approval from the State. The motion should include wording that emphasizes the State needs to authorize the school for the number of students allowed. Director Levine will request a letter from Ms. Spear for a letter stating the request. 3) **Annual Alling Memorial Golf Course Report.** Director Levine stated that this report comes from the golf course management company. The report states that this year the golf course netted about \$270k before debt service and equipment purchases. The debt service is about \$120K per year and the remaining \$150k could be used for building maintenance and improvements and any other infrastructure needs they might have. Any improvements would need to be approved by the Golf Course Advisory Board. For the information of our new Commissioner, the golf course is operated on an enterprise fund. All money generated at the golf course is used to operate, maintain and improve the course. No money can be taken from the course for any purpose other than the course. This year was a record year in terms of revenues once again. We also broke the revenue record last year. In spite of the economic downturn, the course is doing very well. The course is competitive in terms of greens fees with area courses. President Belowsky noticed that the rounds residents played on weekdays went up this year. Most likely due to the higher costs at private clubs and other area municipal course. We also went up on non-resident weekday 9-holes. Commissioner O’Sullivan-Best stated that the parking lot for the course is in her Ward. She would prefer that they address more issues with the wetlands and the drainage areas. What is happening is a lot of what is going on at the golf course spills out into the actual residential neighborhood. Commissioner O’Sullivan-Best was also concerned with people sledding on the course. Commissioner Miller stated that there are three issues; run off, sledding and flooding. Director Levine stated that it’s not the management firm’s responsibility. President Belowsky stated that some drainage issues were resolved during the recent Capital renovation; and, approvals were obtained from the East Haven Inlands/Wetlands Commission.

## **VI. West River Tide Gates—Save the Sound—CT Fund for the Environment:**

Mr. Chris Cryder is a habitat restoration partner with Save the Sound. Mr. Kierran Broatch, Volunteer Coordinator for Save the Sound, CT Fund for the Environment. Mr. Cryder gave an overview of the West River Tidal Flow Restoration Project and the impact it will have on the Duck Pond and Edgewood Soccer Fields. Mr. Cryder stated that the tidal project and the tide gate restoration project down at Orange Ave. have been in the planning stages for well over two decades. In the early 1990’s the Connecticut DEP saw that the tidal restorations aspects of the West River Tidal Flow Restoration Project were significant. Additionally, Yale and a consortium of scientists did a study of the project and put together a book, Restoration of an Urban Salt Marsh, An Interdisciplinary Approach. This document concluded that there are many benefits to moving forward with this project. In 1999 the City engaged Vollmer and Associates to put together a conceptual master plan for West River Memorial Park. The plan

included the restoration of tidal flow to West River Memorial Park and the West River. In 2002 Milone and McBroom, an engineering firm, was hired to do a preliminary engineering study. In 2005 the City did a tidal fluctuation and salinity study. Then, last year, Save the Sound completed the initial engineering study for the tide gate retrofit. Leading us up to this past summer, where we actually got money to move forward with the construction of the tide gates. Save the Sound and CT Fund for the Environment received a 1.5 million dollar grant through the National Oceanic & Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) and the Recovery Act to begin two projects. One is at the Eastern end of the State and about \$800k to finally begin the work on the West River Tide Gate Project.

Mr. Cryder presented an aerial view of the area, he pointed out the tide gates that are just South of Route 1 and the reflecting pool that was built back in 1919 and you can see the West River. He stated that the tide gates currently consist of twelve, 5' x 7' very large wooden tide gates that span the West River. His display included visuals of the gates at low and high tide. Essentially, the tide gates block almost all of the tidal flow into the West River. There is some leakage but not much. The filling and dredging that took place back 1920's eliminated about 130 acres of productive salt marsh in the area. The tide gates as they are can cause problems with stagnant water and degradation of the marsh environment. What is being planned to improve the system, of those twelve gates, three will be replaced with self-regulating tide gates. These would work without power, the doors are designed to float with the tide, it floats up and there are counter floats that regulate the water flow. Currently at high tide, north of the tide gates, there is only 1.3' of water. The three tide gates would allow an additional 1.5' of water allowing the benefits of the restored tidal flow, but not impacting any of the infrastructures along the river, i.e., the tennis center, soccer fields, etc. This has been studied very long and hard. The benefits of the project would include improved water quality in the West River. Currently the West River is on the Impaired Water Body list of the CT DEP. The problem is low levels of oxygen and high levels of bacteria. The new tide gates will improve both of these problems. Primary is getting oxygen back into the system and improving the quality of water allowing marine life to once again live in the river north of the tide gate. Also the bacteria caused by storm water pollutants and combined sewage overflow, will be decreased via the "tidal flushing." Another significant environmental and recreational impact will be the migration of fish, additional crabs and crustaceans and additional shore birds back in the system. The marsh grasses will also be improved. There will be more fishing opportunities and a more diverse species of fish. One of the biggest impacts will be on the canoeing. The extra foot and a half will

Mr. Cryder introduced Chris Johnson, Program Director for Connecticut Fund for the Environment (CFFE). Mr. Johnson stated that he had come before the Park Commission back in 1981 as the first hired Park Ranger for East Rock Park. Mr. Johnson stated that the Edgewood Duck Pond's ecology has been altered a bit already. The evidence can be seen in a rock along the edge of the pond where barnacles could live. As a result of the increased tidal action the pond will see an increase in depth. During the tidal cycle there will be some fluctuation in the levels of the pond. This will impact the way some people enjoy the Duck Pond. Currently, after it rains, there is freshwater pooling surrounding the pond. CFFE had a meeting at Coogan Pavilion with the Friends of Edgewood and neighbors. One of their concerns was the tide moving over the grass and making the area so mushy that access would be difficult. The message we got was the ability of regular folks to come down to the edge of the pond. One suggestion was a raised area along a portion of the pond. Ranger Harry Coyle conducts a lot of environmental education along the pond as well. Additionally, in August and September the pond becomes very stagnant, the tide gates will help keep the water moving and fresh.

In March we will be going back to meet with NOAA where we will be able to propose any additional improvements to the project. We are committed to advocating with NOAA that they work with the Commission and stakeholders to design how to preserve the uses of the pond that people enjoy. And that they provide the money to actually do the improvements. What would help us in our quest for support from NOAA would be a letter of support.

Mr. John Champion addressed the Board, he works with the CFFE. Mr. Champion stated that he has been deeply involved with NOAA. They are very happy with the whole project in terms of the ecological advantages it will bring to the West River and the area. When we raised the question of how it would impact people who use the areas for recreation. NOAA was very committed to providing “Environmental Justice.” In other words, they don’t want to take away anything from people enjoying the area.

What CFFE is proposing to NOAA in March is a design process with the community to come up with the best plan to mitigate the increased tidal fluctuation. What we need are letters of support from organizations and the community for this project. We believe they will make their decision about additional project funding in June or July.

IV. **Annual Election of Officers**: Tabled, no quorum.

Meeting adjourned: **7:00 p.m.**

Next Meeting: **March 17, 2010, 5:30 p.m.**