

New Haven Board of Park Commissioners

Meeting No. 1351
March 17, 2010

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

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

- I. Minutes of Meeting 1349 & 1350:** Commissioner Tucker motioned to approve the Minutes of Meeting 1349, seconded by Vice President Bush and it passed unanimously.

Minutes of Meeting 1350: Commissioner Tucker had correction on page three; Kurt Johnson was the person's name, not Chris Johnson. Commissioner Torres motioned to approve the Minutes of Meeting 1350 with correction, seconded by Commissioner Castro and they passed unanimously.

- II. Treasurer's Reports:** Commissioner Castro motioned to approve the Treasures' Report of December 2009, seconded by Commissioner Tucker and it passed unanimously. Commissioner Tucker motioned to approve the Treasures' Report of January 2010, Seconded by Commissioner Miller and it passed unanimously.

Commissioner Tucker asked about the West River tide gates. Director Levine stated that in the late 1990's a master plan was done for West River Memorial Park. At that time it was determined that it would benefit the park by adding tide gates and controlling the flow of water from the Sound. Commission Tucker asked why they ever put the tide gates in place. Director Levine thought they must have had a flooding issue from Long Island Sound.

- III. Director's Report:** 1) Director Levine stated that the Mayor has been pushing for a youth initiative and some changes in the delivery of youth services throughout the city. One of the things we are going to be involved in is packaging our programs in a different way and reaching out to more teens and families. Unrelated to the youth initiative, we will also be running more senior programs in the future. This will broaden our recreation programs to reach out beyond the traditional 5 to 13 year old programs. We want to reach more 14 to 21 year olds and family activities as well. In the hopes of reaching out to at-risk youth, families and seniors. 2) We are in the middle of putting together our summer program brochure. The registration process will begin as soon as it is printed. 4) We're gearing up to hire our summer part-time staff in the maintenance and recreation division. Maintenance will get about 30 seasonal employees and recreation about 200. Recreation part-timers help run the beaches, pools, summer camps and splash pads all over the city. Hiring this many people in a short period of time is always an issue. We had at one point been looking at a deficit of 460 K and at this point we are around 6K

deficit and we are working it down 0 5) Beginning around April 26 we will have seven new full-time Caretakers on the clock. This is the result of the Civil Service process and testing. Then about six months later we'll be looking to promote people into Foremen positions. The department should really have about 8 Maintenance Foremen; currently we have two Assistant Superintendents and 3 Foremen at this time. This will get us better oversight across the city. This year we have been working with 54 employees department wide. When Director Levine first took the position of Director there were 106 employees in the department. During the really bad times in early 1990's we were in the 80's in terms of employees. Being at 54 is too low. We'll be at 61 after the 7 new caretakers are on board.

6) Regarding the Lighthouse liquor issue; no ordinance was passed through the vote at Board of Aldermen. The issue was tabled pending additional information. The BOA had many of the same concerns and questions as the Park Commission. Former Commissioner DePino and Jeff Hoffmann made a presentation to the BOA. Commissioner O'Sullivan-Best stated that the concerns were centered on the fact that the Committee was not to hearing how much drinking is going on at various other park locations. That was more of the issue than the drinking at Lighthouse. Director Levine stated that he had spoken to Lt. Hoffmann about the issue city-wide. Commissioner Walton put it best when he stated at a past meeting that it's a matter of enforcement. At Criscuolo where there is no drinking permitted, there is no enforcement of the no drinking in the park and there is always drinking. There is a disparity in people's minds about enforcement. Commissioner Torres always believed there was no drinking in parks at all. Director Levine stated that he issues a permit for a beer garden for the opening day of the Spanish league softball and a police officer is present. Several years ago there was a national rugby tournament in East Shore Park that was allowed to have a beer garden. Other than that they are few and far between. The Director has the authority to issue a permit for alcohol to be present and almost always requires a police officer to be present.

Director Levine stated that the State is increasing fees at the state parks and that he has just sent a request to the CAO to increase the fees for non-residents to Lighthouse Point Park. This would mean going from \$10 to \$20 for a day parking pass and \$50 to \$100 for a season pass and from \$75 to \$150 for a bus to enter the park. These are all non-resident fee increases. It will be no issue for residents or city public and parochial schools.

The thought is we will get inundated by non-residents after the State fees increase. Magalia stated that she thought it was the non-residents who were causing the problems at the park. Director Levine stated that we don't know who's a resident and who's not once they are in the park. Pres. Belowsky asked if there were police down there in the summer on a daily basis. Dir. stated that last year on the weekends we would have a cop there all day. And it's very expensive and now was thinking of going from 1-5 or something similar. We need to have more regular patrols of the park not extra duty.

Director Levine stated that Charlie Brown the park manager did not believe we had substantive problems at the park. Mr. Brown is at the park every day especially on

weekends when it's busiest and he said there were incidents that he recalled, but not many.

What we are all concerned about is the irresponsible drinker. The St. Patrick's Day Parade had roped off areas for drinking. Director Levine stated that when he first became Director he spoke to the police about the drinking in Edgewood Park. There was a post and beam fence around the park and people would get out of their cars, sit on the fence and drink. We replaced it with a post and cable fence that nobody really wants to sit on. The police officer at the time said that a lot of people in the city don't have access to a backyard so the park is treated like a backyard in suburbia where people can sit and drink on their deck. Commissioner Miller asked why the Parks Dept. has to pay for the police to do their job. Why are we paying extra duty?

Director Levine stated that three years ago we began to get a lot of grief from non-residents who had to pay the fee. So we had an officer park by the front gate to stop the intimidation at the gate. The employees felt threatened. We did have the park security that was disbanded during budget cuts. They were very ineffective and basically locked gates.

7) Commissioner Castro asked if the kids that live in the neighborhood where park programs are held get summer positions. Director Levine stated that Bill Dixon try's to assign the camp counselors to parks near their homes if at all possible. Youth at work assigned kids to our department as well. Director Levine stated that we don't hire kids by Ward. They apply for a regular city summer job, they come and get interviewed and then Bill and the Rec Supervisors select the best candidates. Please send the kids you are aware of here to fill out an application. We hire 200 + kids each summer but we get 500-700 applications. Last year we hired a lot more adults for our summer program and it worked out very well.

8) President Belowsky stated that he and Director Levine met with the President of a new community bank called Start Bank. The bank will have locations on Grand and Whalley Avenues. They wanted to see if we would utilize the new bank for some of our accounts. We thought it would be fine to transfer the checking accounts to this new local bank which is FDIC insured. Commissioner Tucker said that the bank is still in the process of forming due to regulations. **“Commissioner Tucker motioned to transfer some of the Park Commission checking accounts to Start Bank as long as the banking fees are in line with what we are currently paying, Seconded by Commissioner Castro and it passed unanimously.** We will be moving three or four accounts to the bank when they are established.

IV. **Annual Election of Officers:** Commissioner Tucker read the Slate of Officers as President, David Belowsky; Vice President, Clifford Bush; Treasurer; C. Michael Tucker and Secretary, Kevin Walton. **President Belowsky stated that there were no new nominations and asked for approval of the slate of officer, Seconded by Commissioner Miller and it passed unanimously.**

- V. **Other Business:** Commissioner Tucker stated that he is trying to get Halsey to amend the account for ease of

President Belowsky asked if we could have the meeting at a park location next month. Director Levine stated that a good site would be the Soldiers' and Sailors' Monument

President Belowsky asked about Bill Dixon's health. Director Levine stated that he is still experiencing health issues but has been at work every day.

Commissioner Castro asked how the Department was doing with the low staff. Director Levine stated that it is difficult but we are doing okay. We have been using part-timers more than in the past. He stated earlier that we have seven new Caretakers coming on shortly.

President Belowsky asked if the golf course was open. Director Levine stated that it should have opened last weekend, should be open today.

Meeting Adjourned: 6:30 p.m.

Next Park Commission Meeting: April 21, 2010