

New Haven Board of Park Commissioners

Meeting No. 1352
April 21, 2010

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

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

I. Minutes of Meeting 1351: Commissioner Torres motioned to approve the minutes of Meeting 1351, seconded by Commissioner Miller. Commissioner Michael Tucker recalled that Commissioner Miller had asked that Secretary Walton be asked if he wanted to continue as Secretary on the Park Board. Correction will be noted in the Minutes. The motion passed unanimously.

II. Treasurers' Reports: Commissioner Torres motioned to approve the Treasurers' report from February 2010, seconded by Commissioner Miller. Commissioner Tucker wanted to verify that the payment of \$5,000 to John Burtock was within the budget. The motion passed unanimously.

Treasurers' Report of March 2010: Commissioner Miller motioned to approve the March Treasurers' Report, seconded by Commissioner Tucker and it passed unanimously.

IV. Knights of Columbus Plaza/Temple Plaza: Michael Pinto from the City of New Haven Office of Economic Development and John Ward Special Counsel to the Office of Economic Development. Mr. Pinto presented exhibits and explanation of their attendance in front of the Commission. The exhibits were maps of Temple Plaza and Columbus Plaza located in the downtown area of New Haven. Columbus Plaza is currently designated park land so it cannot be used for any other purpose while it is designated as park land. The Temple Plaza is already fitted out technically as a park. There is a fountain and public space. We are proposing to have the Commission designate and accept Temple Plaza as an equal amount of space taking Columbus Park and selling it to the Knights of Columbus.

President Belowsky asked if they had done any comparisons on the properties in terms of the value of the land. Mr. Pinto stated he believed there was an appraisal on Columbus Park but he did not believe there was one for Temple Plaza. President Belowsky asked how the Board could make a decision without an appraisal of both properties. Mr. Ward stated that it seemed to be a comparable space based on size and type of space. Belowsky, when you drive in the city and see the Columbus Park, it really is a nice space with trees and benches. We have not had a chance to see Temple Plaza. Mr. Ward stated that Temple Plaza abuts the Liberty Building a residential apt. building and 144-142 Temple St. which is the old Malley's Powerhouse Building. Mr. Pinto stated the Temple Plaza is in much better shape maintenance wise than Columbus Park. Mr. Ward stated that the Temple Plaza came into

play when we did the development agreement with the hotel. They had requested either nice retail or nice urban space. The Temple Plaza was developed as nice urban space with grass and winding paths. The other thing is that we have an agreement with the Town Green where they maintain the space and would continue to maintain the space. Additionally, the Parks Dept. would no longer maintain the Columbus Park. President Belowsky stated that the corner lot proximity of Columbus Park is very desirable and worth much more than a space between buildings.

What would they want to do with the space? To the best of our knowledge there are no current plans for the space. They don't know what they are doing and they want the space. Commissioner Best stated that the value of the trees alone we would not be able to put a comparable amount of oxygen ingesting trees in the Temple Plaza. If there is no concrete plan and we're in the midst of trying to increase the amount of trees in the city. She could not see it moving forward at this time without the matter going to the Board of Aldermen. Mr. Ward stated that we would not need BOA approval with respect to the Columbus Park we have the authority to swap the land without their approval. Essentially what we are asking is the Park Commission to decommission Columbus Park as a park and dedicate Temple Plaza for only park purposes.

Commissioner Walton stated that he was not comfortable with the swap without knowing what the purpose of the swap. Mr. Ward stated that the purpose was to acquire the property to sell the parcel for cash from the sale of the property. Comm. Best stated that having been through the agonizing public hearings with Yale developing inner courtyard space; it is not a popular idea right now with residents of the city of New Haven. So to replace park land with courtyard space is not in the best interest of the city at this time. Mr. Pinto stated that the space is in very bad shape and has not been maintained and sees very little use of the space. President Belowsky stated that he needed more information and assessments to determine what to do on this matter. Mr. Pinto and Mr. Ward thanked the Board for their time. The matter was tabled.

- V. Common Ground School Up-Date:** Melissa Spear, Executive Director of Common Ground High School Addressed the Board. Ms. Spear's stated that this is her second time addressing the Board. She joined the school in Nov. of 2009. Ms. Spear's stated that she was aware that the school is currently behind on their rent payments and that there is a lease agreement pending with the City's Corporation Counsel. Additionally, a CDBG grant was applied for to upgrade the parking lot. The last update was from 2008 when Oliver Barton addressed the Board. She looked at some of the data from that time and wanted to report that there are approximately 4,000 visits to the site and in 2009 there were about 6,000 visits. School went from 150 students to 160 current students. Also we have a field trip program with the New Haven Public Schools which currently brings about 3,000 students to our site for science and nature based field trips per year. We have created a green jobs corp that we have received federal funding for and that keeps 40 New Haven youth in a year round and after school program. URI and Solar Youth are also involved at the school. These are youth development programs that provide career and leadership development.

Mr. Barton had brought the farmhouse addition before the Commission and that project was completed. There is also a small information kiosk. There were a couple of items in the planning stages; one was a bus shelter and something called the harvest pavilion. Neither of

these was ever constructed. We have received two grants totally 29K for the pavilion; however, we haven't gone any further with that. When I came on board I wanted to step back and look at the site and come up with a plan for the site and gather some insight from people who have a stake in what's going on here. We have recently hired **Zarad** to complete a Master Plan process. We are putting together a Master Planning Committee and would like to have representation from the Park Commission on the Committee.

The kitchen in the school was upgraded to a commercial kitchen. We hope to develop community programs around food and cooking using this updated kitchen. This brings us to the parking lot. I do not believe there was ever a formal approval of any changes to the parking area. Currently the site has some erosion control problems. Ms. Spear's would like to invite the Commission to the site. Due to the constraints of the parking area; when students come to the site on buses, they have to be dropped off outside of the parking area. The idea for the parking area is to create an ingress and egress so that buses could come in to drop the students off and exit easily. There had been talk of paving the parking lot but we'd like to have it remain unpaved. We will be doing more research on the lot. We do not want to expand the lot. There are many areas that pool up during rainy weather. We wanted to develop a conceptual plan before coming to the Park Commission with a final product. We have been working with Elm Shakespeare and putting on a play each summer. Last year we thru together a temporary platform for the play. We would like permission to install a semi-permanent foundation for r this purpose. Nothing with a foundation. Ms. Spear's will come back to the Commission with an actual design. Lastly is 1.4 million dollar grant from the CT State Department of Education for a building grant pending the approval of the Bonding Commission which could take up to a year. This would be for a multi-purpose building. There is only one space in the school that is multi-purpose and used for the cafeteria, the kids to do dancing, the kids to assemble, awards night, etc. The concept of the grant is to build a multipurpose building where all these things could take place. We have for the first time a basketball team that would like to have a half court in the facility. The site may not even be suitable for an additional building. This will all be discussed in the Master Planning process. Ms. Spears thanked the Commission for their time.

VI. Bishop Woods Hiking Path Proposal: Michael Massimino of MASS Development addressed the Board. Mr. Massimino stated that he is involved in the development of 110 Dell Drive, a twenty unit development that has been around for some time. While walking the property he noticed the Bishop Woods walking trail. Currently the access point from the property is located directly behind what will be Unit 11. He is requesting to move the access point to the area of open space within the development. Mr. Massimino had met with Joy from the Bishop Woods Friends group and walked the site. He would not cut any trees down; he would open up 4'-6' pathway removing any invasive plantings. Commissioner O'Sullivan-Best stated that she is actually the Alderwoman in Ward 11. This had been a very controversial topic when the school was being expanded. There is a big ATV problem in the area. The site is a hot topic in the area for 10 years. It has an impact on two housing authority properties and 3 condo associations. Director Levine asked where the gas line was located on the property. It goes through the properties open space. A lengthy discussion ensued. The Commission did not want to vote on the matter out of turn, if the developer needs to go to the neighborhood condo associations and the Housing Authority. Mr. Massimino stated that in the building and development process of the development;

everything has been properly permitted. Director Levine stated that the Friends of Bishop Woods as represented by Joy are not opposed to moving the trail entrance. If the Commissioner approves I believe they should require a baffle at the entrance as not to allow ATVs into the area. Additionally we could require approval of the Management Team for the area, Housing Authority and Condo Associations. Mr. Massimino thanked the Commission for their time.

III. Director's Report: 1) Director Levine handed out flyers with dates and events for the Soldiers' & Sailors' grand opening celebrations. The City spent about \$750,000 and the State has spent about \$250,000 to restore the monument. We decided to hold a series of events that will bring attention to the monument instead of one big event. The events are on our web site and in our new e-newsletter. This weekend there will be an event where re-enactors will represent each war on the monument. Additionally, we have a lecture series that is very nice. 2) Letter from Walter Pop Smith Little League. The Board of Directors from Pop Smith is requesting to name their fields to Jones, McBride, Taylor and the other Bush Chambers Field. They had wanted to rename them right away prior to opening day. They were told we would not be able to move without the Commission's approval. Currently they use a field in Bowen Field and at Veitch Field. Pop Smith is the name of the little league. It would still be Pop Smith Little League; they would just rename the fields. The group will be invited to the next Park Commission meeting. 3) We are running a school break vacation camp this week at two locations. Both sites are at capacity with campers. On Monday we will be welcoming five new Caretakers to the Department. We had permission to hire seven; however, two did not pass a pre-employment drug screen. Migdalia asked how many of the Caretakers hired were New Haven residents. 4) As mentioned at the last Board meeting; we are in the process of merging the programs run by the Youth Department with the programs being run by our Recreation Division. There was an Open Schools program run by the Youth Dept. and now we will provide these programs. Additionally, we have Nate Harris working with us on program development. 5) Director Levine asked if the Commission would like to make a donation of \$4,500 to purchase t-shirts for the summer camp attendees. The Commission has donated \$6k in the past; however, we have enough of the larger sizes for this year. **President Belowsky made a motion to donate \$4,500 from the Commissions Donation Account to the Parks Department for summer t-shirts for the summer campers, Seconded by Commissioner Miller and it passed unanimously.**

VI. Other Business: 1) President Belowsky asked to hold a meeting of the Golf Course Advisory Board. Director Levine will have the meeting set up.

2) Commissioner Walton stated that in response to the recent violence in the city and nobody was there from Parks. With this youth program revamping, are we looking at things that will engage young males to participate? Another thing is this past weekend his son played a game at the Field House; the facility was packed with kids. At some point can we open that up to run programs in New Haven? It would be great to open it to New Haven kids. Director Levine stated that the Field House is run by a private management company for the City. It is run as a venue for events; rather than community access. He believes it is programmed at a very high level by outside events and the Board of Ed..

3) Commissioner O'Sullivan-Best stated that the increase in park fees came up last night at the Finance Board. There was a question about what would happen with the additional revenue. Also what will happen when people don't pay that fee and park on the residential streets? Director Levine stated that this was being looked at with by Alderwoman DePino from that Ward. She wanted to setup a residential parking designation for that area and then enforce it. The reality is unless it is enforced and people are ticketed and towed it will not work.

4) Commissioner Castro asked about benches being placed in a soccer field. Dir. Typically at our soccer fields we provide players benches for the teams to sit on; we don't provide bleachers at every site. Some of the sites are too small or we don't have a set of bleachers. People sometimes bring chairs to the Little League and soccer games.

- VII. **Cont. Bishop Woods Hiking Path Proposal:** The Commissioners discussed the proposal. **Commissioner Torres motioned to approve the connection of the pathway accessing Bishop Woods Park; conditioned upon Mr. Massimino contacting City Plan to liaison with the Condo Associations and the Housing Authority to work out any issues, seconded by Commissioner Castro and it passed unanimously.**
- V. **Cont. Common Ground High School:** Common Ground would like a volunteer from the Park Commission to sit on their Master Planning Advisory Board.
- IV. **Cont. Knights of Columbus Plaza:** The Commissioners asked Director Levine his opinion on the land swap. Director Levine stated that the Columbus Plaza has always been an area that takes resources away from us. There have been several lawsuits against the city from this site. Economic Development went in and invested in leveling all the pavers in the area. We have never used it for any event or permit. Temple Plaza is currently under our oversight but is not park property. Temple is used for events and has some value to us. From a Parks perspective, losing the responsibility for Columbus Plaza would be a good thing. The Commissioners were concerned that Economic Development couldn't tell them what the Columbus Plaza would be used for after the swap. . **The matter was tabled.**