

New Haven Board of Park Commissioners

Meeting No. 1366
October 19, 2011

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

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

I. Minutes of Meeting 1365: Commissioner Bush Motioned to pass the Minutes of Meeting 1365; seconded by Commissioner Torres. Commissioner Tucker asked about the East Rock Bridge information. He did get something attached to his last packet but he wasn't at the last meeting. Belowsky produced the report and gave it to Commissioner Tucker. **The Minutes passed unanimously. Closed**

II. Treasurer's Report: Commissioner Bush motioned to pass the Treasurer's Report. Commissioner Tucker asked about the use of the Jocelyn Square funds. Hannah's dreams funds will be reimbursed by the Community Foundation. They hold a small fund for the maintenance of the playground. David stated that at the last meeting we had Richard Borer from Easter Seals Goodwill to discuss their donation for using lighthouse point park for their annual fundraiser, **Seconded by Commissioner Miller and it passed unanimously. Closed.**

IV. Elm City Parks Conservancy—Grant Request:—Marge Ottenbreit addressed the Commission. Ms. Ottenbreit is the current President of Elm City Parks Conservancy (ECPC) and had sent a written request for a \$2,500 grant to help offset the cost of their student conservation program. Ms. Ottenbreit went over the role of ECPC and its extensive involvement in park advocacy. Yearly they participate in three all day exhibits; one at the Field House, another at the Cherry Blossom Festival and finally at the West River Water Festival. We support the small existing park groups assisting them in planting trees additionally we have planted 3000 daffodils this past year. Ms. Ottenbreit stated that their major fundraiser is the Polar Plunge on New Year's Day at Lighthouse Point Park. This is the first year that we co-sponsored with the New Haven Land trust so we had to split the proceeds to benefit each group. The 2011 Plunge event included breakfast, carriage rides, tours of the lighthouse, hot tubs and a rock band. It didn't hurt that it was a gorgeous day as well.

Ms. Ottenbreit has applied for six grants on a national level; two are promising for next year, however, we didn't get any grants this year. One of ECPC's most successful programs is the

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Student Conservation Program (SCA). We engage college students who work with friends groups in the parks all summer. In the past they have worked at Edgewood Park, Edgerton Park, Juliano Park, Bayview Park and many others. Over the past 12 years we have gotten rave reviews from the groups these students work with. ECPC supplies housing, supervision and some meals to the students. The cost to run the program is around \$9,000 per season.

Ms. Ottenbreit stated that they are in the process of assembling an impressive group of advisors including Deb Townshend, historian; John Cox, Master Gardener and Chris Randle of the New Haven Land Trust. Additionally, we are running a program called "Experience Your Park." We go into New Haven Schools to speak with students and teachers about the park system. We offer a community service program to the kids and sign them up for volunteer work in parks. They must complete 40 hours of community service during their high school years.

Finally, Ms. Ottenbreit stated that they were looking into producing a fundraising calendar featuring the park system. We are shopping around for a good price with the printers. It won't be a tremendous money maker; however, it will bring attention to the parks. We are hoping to get them printed for \$6 each and sell them for \$10 each. A kickoff display of the photos in City hall during the holiday shopping season could be arranged as well. We'd blow up each month's photo for display in city hall and hopefully have the Mayor and Bob Levine on hand for this event.

Ms. Ottenbreit thanked the Park Commission for their time and consideration.

The Commission discussed the grant request and the various student intern programs run in the city parks. **Commissioner Tucker motioned to grant ECPC \$2,500 for their SCA program with funds coming out of the Donation Account; seconded by Commissioner Miller.**

Commissioner Tucker asked that ECPC try to get local students to apply to the SCA Program. **The motion passed with six in favor and one opposed. Closed.**

III. Director's Report: 1) The DeLauro Monument has been installed in Wooster Square Park; with some level of controversy. There is a dedication this Sunday at 2:00 p.m. There were some negative comments in the press on the matter.

2) The Department is moving forward to upgrade four Caretaker positions to Foremen positions. We've gotten the approval from Human Resources and the CAO's office. The Foremen are working Foreman; in the past we had eight, currently there are two.

3) The week of November 14 we will be holding a team-building event for all staff at the West Rock Nature Center. The Commission had generously allocated \$700 towards this event for food and baseball hats with the Parks logo on them.

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4) The two main soccer leagues in New Haven are currently in community mediation regarding equitable distribution of the City soccer fields. Director Levine attended the first mediation meeting and it did not go well. The matter will most likely not be resolved in mediation. The fall back position would be to have each of those groups make a presentation to the Park Commission with the understanding that the Commission's solution would be the final word on the matter.

5) The SCC has asked Joe Canzanella at the Board of Education Athletics Dept. to move some of his soccer games due to the conditions of the soccer fields at Rice Field and at Eastshore. We had a ton of rain this year and these fields are much overused. We only have eight full-size soccer fields and no real way to keep un-permitted games from taking place; with the exception of the Boulevard which has locked gates. New Haven has a large population of soccer players and not enough fields to accommodate everyone.

6) "Occupy New Haven" has taken up residence on the New Haven Green. They actually came to our office and asked for permission to use park land for their demonstration. They have been very respectful to the site and the homeless population.

7) There was a rock climbing rescue at East Rock Park recently when a young woman became stranded on the face of a cliff. Director Levine met with Ranger Dan to evaluate sign options for the area. Ranger Dan has put together a map of the best locations for the signs.

8) The restoration to this building is on-going. The main reason for the project was to fix the leaky roof. We're getting close to a final check list for the contractors. The new computer servers will be placed in the basement and a dehumidifier will be installed to help solve our moisture problems in the basement. In conjunction with the new servers we will be up-dating our permit and activity registration software. RecTrac has been in place for almost 10 years and has never been upgraded due to our servers. With the upgrade we should be able to do on-line activity registrations and payments as well as simple permits.

9) There is a nightclub the City has had issues with and their back door is located in the Temple Plaza. As the Commission knows, Temple Plaza is park land. Corporation Counsel has been dealing with some issues with this business; recently they were promoting Jell-O wrestling at the club. We could be the first park system in the country with this type of activity on park land.

10) The Pastore Memorial clock project is moving along; the conduits have been placed and we are waiting for UI to hard wire the electrical. The plaque has been installed; unfortunately it has a dedication date in mid-October. President Belowsky stated that we need to give the Verdin Clock Co. two weeks notice to get on their schedule in order to get the clock running. We were looking at Nov. 19th as a dedication date.

11) Several months ago the Commission approved funding of nearly \$90k for the restoration of the lower bronze work on the Soldiers' & Sailors' Monument. As the restoration crew took off the plaques and statues they discovered some stones had moved about 1" over the last hundred years. They want to secure these stones to prevent further movement; additionally they discovered deteriorated mortar that was not visible until bronze work was removed. All told there is approximately \$21K worth of additional work that they recommend be done. The Director would like to request the additional funds to cover these costs. The funds would come from Simeon Baldwin Fund and/or possibly the Philip English Fund.

12) Director Levine stated that Commissioner Bush had requested information on revenue at Lighthouse Point Park. The following collections were made at the gate: FY09 \$141,000; FY10 \$165,750 and FY11 \$160,700. These numbers represent entrance fees alone; they do not include money raised for carousel rides or pavilion permits, etc. Additionally, for the first time ever, a portion of this money was used to pay staff at the gate and the splash pad. In past years, all the revenue from parking fees went into the City's General Fund; the CAO approved this change which will help the Dept.'s budget. Parking fees for non-residents went up to \$20 per day or \$100 for a season pass.

Recreation & Ranger Programming: Martin Torresquintero, Outdoor Adventure Coordinator addressed the Commission. Mr. Torresquintero stated that the Rangers are doing more adaptive programs; specialized activities for people with disabilities. The adaptive programs include rock climbing, canoeing & kayaking. He added that with funding we collected from the Rock 2 Rock bike event we purchased some large scale adult tricycles. These new bikes enable us to take special needs groups as well as seniors on outings in the park system. Additionally, for the fall we will be doing our traditional fall hikes, bird watching and other cool weather activities. Archery is a new very popular program being run at the West Rock Nature Center. It is a non-competitive instructional course that is great for first time students. There are two very active friends groups in Edgewood & East Rock Park and we are doing a lot of programs in conjunction with these groups. We also run a program with the BOE that targets at-risk youth. These students participate in team-building activities, mountain biking, skiing, canoeing, rock climbing and other activities. In the winter we offer snow shoeing, cross country skiing and ice climbing clinics as well as our traditional candle and wreath making workshops.

Information on all our programs can be found on the Parks Web-site, flyers and our Facebook page. In addition to the web sites, we are marketing our programs more and more via mass e-mail broadcasts and local news media including the New Haven Advocate and Register.

Felicia Shashinka, Recreation Program Supervisor addressed the Commission. Ms. Shashinka stated that the recreation division will be running an "Open Schools" program beginning Nov. 8th. Activities will include dodge ball, volleyball, board games, basketball and others. We are also running a flag football league and youth basketball clinics. She stated that the main way we

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get information to young people in New Haven is via their classroom teachers. We literally drive packets of flyers to the schools and place them in the teachers' mail boxes for distribution. Commissioner Walton stated that his children are in private schools and he has a hard time finding the Park & Rec info. Felicia stated that all the flyers and information are always on our website as well as our facebook page. Director Levine stated that 10-12 years ago we had a full-time public information officer, thousands of dollars for publishing a quarterly newsletter and mailing it to all New Haven households. With all that in place we still had trouble spreading the word on programs and activities. There was a discussion regarding youth programming in the city and locations of the available programs.

Director Levine stated that we currently have one Recreation Supervisor and one open position; just a few years ago we had ten Recreation Supervisors. We now have five Park Rangers and they have taken on some of the programming and put an outdoor spin on their programs.

Commissioner Torres motioned to grant the Parks Department use of the English fund for the additional work on the S & S Memorial. If there is not enough funds to cover the cost in the English Fund the balance needed would come from the Simeon Baldwin Fund; seconded by Commissioner Miller. Commissioner Tucker stated that you should only take about 4% from a given fund in order to keep the principle in tact; also, we're getting killed by the market. Director Levine stated that he doesn't recall using the Simone Baldwin Fund in the 13 years he's been Director. **The motion passed unanimously. Closed.**

President Belowsky stated that he went to the Bank of America and moved all the checking account money to Start Bank. It was over \$239,000.

President Belowsky asked for an up-date on this year's golf course figures. Additionally, we should have a Golf Course Advisory Committee meeting since we haven't had one in a long while.

President Belowsky presented a very high quality police grade flashlight that he thought would make a good gift for employees at this year's holiday gathering. The Commission discussed past gifts and how to get a logo on the flashlight. President Belowsky wasn't sure of the cost but would check with the company.

Meeting Adjourned: 6:50 p.m.

Next Meeting: November 16, 2011