

# *Park and Recreation Commission*

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## **Minutes**

(meeting taped)

Monthly meeting: Monday, January 14, 2008 in the New City Hall.

Meeting was called to order at 7:00 p.m.

By roll call, members present: John Walsh, David Mikos, Nick Serebnitsky, James Benanto and Red Clynch. Andrew Cota arrived at 7:15 pm.

Parks and Recreation Director Dennis O'Connell was present. Athletic Director Joseph Orazetti arrived at 7:20 p.m. Superintendent of Schools Michael Abdalla and Board of Education member Kenneth Marcucio were also present.

### **ADDITIONS OR DELETIONS TO THE AGENDA:**

Without objection, the agenda was accepted as written.

### **APPROVAL OF MINUTES:**

A motion was made by Red Clynch and second by Nick Serebnitsky. Move to accept the minutes of December 10, 2007, as written. Motion carried unanimously.

### **PUBLIC PORTION:**

No public came forward at this time.

### **CORRESPONDENCES:**

Mr. O'Connell reported that he and the Southern Connecticut Physical Therapy group that uses the Derby Veteran's Community Center have been discussing handicapped accessibility to the swimming pool. Currently, they have a portable aquatic lift. They will be gathering data for possible outside funding through grants or other avenues to acquire the desired equipment that would offer full handicap accessibility to the pool. Mr. O'Connell will keep the Commission advised on this matter.

### **ELECTION OF OFFICERS:**

A motion was made by James Benanto and second by Red Clynch. Move to nominate John Walsh as Chairman of the Parks & Recreation Commission. Motion carried unanimously.

No other nominations were received. The floor was closed. Members congratulated Mr. Walsh and commended him on his continuing efforts for recreation in the City. Chairman Walsh noted that there would be many challenges this year.

### **DIRECTOR REPORTS:**

**Parks & Recreation Director's Report:** Mr. O'Connell noted that basketball season is progressing well. The numbers are down in all the leagues. The league uses the Derby Veteran's Community Center and Bradley and Irving Schools. Because of the after-school program, Irving School use is limited. With the lower participation, the facility need is manageable but gymnasium space in the city continues to be at a premium.

The retainer for the bleacher installation will be released. The request for funding will be presented to the Board of Apportionment and Taxation. Mr. O'Connell continues to communicate with the City

Engineer with the intent to move forward on the code compliance issues, the railings and the emergency lighting, for the bleachers.

The Derby Veteran's Community Center has received a defibrillator funded through a grant from Griffin Hospital. All community center supervisors have been trained and certified.

The budget is going well. Spring is the heavy time for expenditures.

Shelton has reopened their pool. Only a few Shelton residents used Derby's facility during their closure.

**NEW or OTHER BUSINESS:**

B.) Recreational use of O'Sullivan Island: Chairman Walsh spoke with Arthur Bogen, the City's liaison for the Brownfield projects and other environmental concerns. The Council of Governments is pursuing the GE grant funding for the Housatonic River and Derby is being strongly considered. The GE funding is the result of a court settlement requiring GE to financially assist in the remediation of the pollution in the Housatonic River as a result of their factories upstream. The Council of Governments has applied for grant funding to improve the boat launch and add a fishing pier and additional trails on the Island. The area still has environmental concerns so there remains only limited access to the land but the proposals would use areas in the outer perimeter of the parcel. The parcel is subject to high tidal flooding so the use will have to take this into consideration.

Motion was made by Andrew Cota and second by James Benanto. Move that the Parks & Recreation Commission supports the grant to improve the recreational use of O'Sullivan's Island. Motion carried unanimously.

A.) Discussion of athletic fields, facilities and scheduling with the Board of Education: Chairman Walsh noted the chronic problem of field space limitation and overuse and the fact that it is a gray area when it comes to who oversees the facilities. He stressed that the Board of Education owns no recreational fields. Witek Park is still under Board of Alderman oversight. The playgrounds were an issue last year when maintenance was needed. Programs continue to be added even though there is insufficient space now for the existing programs. The Recreation Department and the Athletic Department continue to work together trying to keep everything flowing but the challenge is great. Chairman Walsh noted for the record that the track program has not had a meet in Derby for fifteen (15) years because there is no facility for them. Derby has one of the last cinder tracks in the State.

Mr. O'Connell reviewed the status of Ryan Field. Football has been playing there for more than fifty years and soccer was added a decade ago. Last year there were sixty to seventy games played on the field. The field struggles each spring to come back but by fall it is worn and then each year the deterioration worsens.

Mr. Orazetti noted that he is working to develop a Middle School feeder program for the various sports so that this program could strengthen the High School programs. This will further add to the use.

Trying to develop a schedule that will balance the use on the fields, Mr. O'Connell suggested relocating all soccer from the Ryan Complex. He stressed that the suggestion was to begin the discussions on how to move forward and that any scenario will have challenges.

### **Spring Schedule**

#### **Ryan Complex:**

High School/Babe Ruth Baseball  
Track  
High School Softball  
Youth Softball  
Spring Football practice  
Little League

#### **Bradley Field:**

Middle School/Babe Ruth baseball  
Girls Middle School Softball  
Youth Softball  
Little League

#### **Witek Park:**

Youth Soccer – in house/travel  
Men's Soccer – Sunday morning  
One full size field and one lined for youth soccer

### **Fall Schedule**

#### **Ryan Complex:**

High School football (3 teams)  
Pop Warner football  
Girl's Softball –HS League

#### **Bradley Field:**

Youth Soccer –In house/travel  
Men's Soccer  
Middle School soccer practice  
Girl's Softball – HS league  
Babe Ruth Baseball

#### **Witek Park:**

High School Soccer – Boys/Girls  
Middle School Soccer games  
Two full size soccer fields

Everyone discussed these suggestions. They noted the difficulties. There may be exceptions and changes and this was certainly only a first draft. Juggling practice areas and games is always a challenge. They also recognized the limited lighting on the fields and that the softball lighting will not be replaced in the near future because of the capital expense. To add programs to already overused facilities will be a strain.

Chairman Walsh noted that under the new school building plan, no fields were included. The schools have no fields and they have not pursued developing any fields. He suggested that the Commission and the Board of Education have to take a hard look at the issues and work together to develop solutions. One may be to explore artificial turf at Ryan Field as it has the ability to support so much more play than the regular field. It was felt that the Commission and the Board of Education have to look at the indoor facilities as well. The schools have been juggling the gymnasiums for years and also use the Derby Veteran's Community Center. The Recreation Department also is juggling with what available time there is in the facilities. The long-range plan that was presented a few years ago addressed many of the concerns but the voters voted against it in the referendum. It was felt that the plan should be revisited and brought forward for the residents to consider. Certainly, the Commission and the Board of Education will have to work hard to convince the voters that this is the right solution.

It was decided that further joint meetings should be held and sub-committees from both boards should be formed to discuss this issue in greater detail. Chairman Walsh noted that President of the Board of Alderman Ken Hughes has expressed great interest in this matter and is willing to attend the meetings.

The Parks & Recreation Commission has seen accomplishments with the new fields at Witek Park, the creation of the Greenway and the Skate park over these past few years. They have also seen the visitor's football bleachers condemned and dismantled, lights falling on the softball field that were removed but not replaced and a season without full use of the football bleachers because of their disrepair. There have been challenges and rewards and members felt strongly that the Commission continues to move forward and they welcomed discussions that will create a long-term plan of recreation that benefits all.

**High School Athletic Director's Report:** Mr. Orazetti had nothing further to report.

**NEW or OTHER BUSINESS:**

As the new budget deliberations are approaching, Chairman Walsh appointed James Benanto and Andrew Cota to serve as the Finance Sub-Committee to work with Mr. O'Connell to develop the 2007-2008 Parks & Recreation budget.

Motion was made by David Mikos and second by Red Clynch. Move to adjourn the meeting at 8:40 p.m.  
Motion carried unanimously.

Respectfully prepared,  
Karen Kemmesies, secretary