

**BOARD OF PARKS COMMISSIONERS
PUBLIC HEARING
MONDAY, FEBRUARY 4, 2008**

Chairman Fontana called the hearing to order at 6:30 p.m. in the Town Hall Council Chambers.

Present: Chairman John Fontana, Vice Chairman Megan O. Maruzo, Commissioners David Kanute, Joseph LaPorte and Joanne D. Palmieri, Director of Recreation William J. Masci and Superintendent of Parks Richard L. Egidio, Sr. There were approximately 50 people in the audience.

Chairman John Fontana introduced himself, the board members and the Parks and Recreation Department members in attendance. He announced the procedure to be followed for the evening. He asked that people come to the podium to speak and state their name and address clearly for the minutes so that the board could follow up. Chairman Fontana asked that one person speak on any individual item. He noticed Ron Newman in the audience who would be speaking about a football field. Anyone else in support of his ideas could show support by a show of hands. If there are questions of the board or the speaker, we would try to entertain those questions.

Chairman Fontana stated that the Park Board would most likely hold a special meeting to discuss the ideas that are brought forth along with other ideas to come up with a comprehensive plan to present to the Town Council. He then asked the first speaker to come to the podium.

1. Pamela DePaolo, 54 Delahunty Drive. Ms. DePaolo asked that at least a portion of the property be used as green space/open space. Other parks are used for various uses including sports fields. She felt there was not enough green space to walk in – she suggested a nature walk, a nature preserve, aviary, flower gardens. Things that people of all ages could enjoy. Ms. DePaolo believed there are few, if any, other properties to be acquired by the town that would be adjacent to a park. With all the growth in town, the growing population, this was a lifetime opportunity but also for future generations. She hopes that at least a portion would have no cars or limited access by vehicles such as Hubbard Park in Meriden – need some places that are quiet.

2. Ron Newman, President, Southington Midget Valley Football League. The league is an independent football league for 6 to 13 year olds all from Southington. The first year there were 115 kids for 4 teams. The league just finished the 2007 season and 45 years of history with 560 kids and 25 teams, 12 flag, 6 tackle C teams, 6 tackle B teams, a junior knight team and 7 cheerleader teams. They play or practice every day of the week during the season. For the past 3 years Mr. Newman has been before the board looking for field space and have made do with what they had. He noted that once South End School construction begins another field would be lost to the league. Also need more parking. Mr. Newman agreed there is a need for some green area, too. It is a beautiful area. He distributed information packets to the board that gave more details. Mr. Newman said they are also looking for a second grassy area that others could use (a multi-purpose field). There would be no scoreboard. They would roll out the goal posts and take them away when the game is over.

People in support of Mr. Newman were asked to raise their hands. About 15 persons raised their hands.

Mr. Newman stated that the wording from the referendum held in 2004 was in the packet. It stated "recreational" purposes. Somewhere along the line the word "passive" came into it. He commented that no one is turned away who wants to play football, no matter what the skill level. He does not want to turn anyone away because there is no room.

Q: Are there any girls in the league?

A: Three girls played tackle last two years. There are about 100 cheerleaders.

Q: Doesn't the high school play on your field? Does it interfere?

A: One high school game is played. It does interfere during the week. Mr. Newman usually gets a surprise phone call a few days before and he has to contact all the teams that are affected and tell them they can't practice or they have to use the sidelines.

Q: With South End School being constructed, will the other fields get more use than typical? What is the effect?

A: We play 110 games in 3 months. Weather has been pretty good this year but the fields will get more wear and tear from overuse.

Q: Hasn't the Board of Education caused problems by eliminating programs at the middle schools and put more pressure to take on more kids? The burden becomes part of the Parks Dept. problem. We can't use their fields, either. There must be some reasons it couldn't be done.

A: Chairman Fontana responded that he has already spoken with Dr. Erardi, Superintendent of Schools, about the use of school fields and gyms and redoing the whole structure. Dr. Erardi is in the midst of budget right now but as soon as budget is over, there will be a meeting with Bill Masci, Jiggy Egidio, Dr. Erardi, Brian Goralski (BOE Chairman) and John Fontana, and something should come of that.

Comment from the audience that a lot of parents have kids playing at multiple levels. It is difficult for parents to move from one place to another, such as from DePaolo Middle School to the high school. He hoped that certain age groups would play in the same area. Mr. Newman said one of the reasons for having two fields is for the convenience of families, safety issues, storage of equipment. The field house has full rest rooms and many other amenities that people could use. He offered to show any board members the inside of the field house if they haven't seen it.

Another person in the audience stated that he has seen Mr. Newman picking up trash himself, keeping the park clean, along with Park staff. Having another spot to play will help and it would be maintained as well as Recreation Park is maintained.

3. Lou Puglielli, 72 Candlewood Lane. When the land was purchased it was so that developers wouldn't get their hands on it. The Town Hall has space problems. The Gura Building is falling apart. Save a small section in the front to build a one-story building for town use. He is not against kids having ball fields. A building would be appropriate there for Town Hall purposes. He had suggested the old nursing home on Meriden Avenue when space was

being considered but apparently it was too expensive and was not feasible. A brand new building would alleviate the problem here. At about \$200 a square foot, you can put in a nice building in the front close to the main road, on a level piece of land with all the parking we need.

Mr. Egidio said the Town Council is currently looking into that front area for putting up a building.

4. Richard Koczera, 75 Metacomet View. Mr. Koczera handed out a draft color-coded conceptual plan for the property. It includes a multitude of different fields to facilitate the needs of everyone at Recreation Park. The plan showed a soccer field, football field, softball field, baseball field, two parking areas, picnic area with playscape, one pavilion in the center as a moveable concession area, another pavilion for showing town movies and a seating area using the existing screen. On the west side there is a wooded area which would be far too expensive to clear for fields; this could be used for perhaps nature, green area, walking area. This would, of course, be a long term plan. It is a comprehensive approach. The property is 14+ acres; the fields would only use a small portion.

5. Will Parker, 81 Cedar Drive. Mr. Parker would like to see a canoe launch at the site. It was pointed out to him that there is a canoe launch across the street that was put in a couple of years ago by Boy Scouts, but that is on State property. Mr. Parker said there was at least 3-4 ft. from the high ground to the water. He'd also like to see a paved area, not asphalt. The Town of Milford is building a canoe launch using something like cement pavers with holes in them. Quinnipiac River State Park has one right behind a service station. It doesn't have to be done right away. Just need a small place to park that does not need to be paved. Mr. Parker said he can't hike or bike anymore but he can still paddle.

Commissioner Kanute said the area has flood plain or watershed and that is why the canoe launch was built on State property. The DEP frowns on disturbing wetlands or floodplain. Mr. Parker believed it was possible to get permission from DEP for the boat launch.

6. John W. Mayo, 33 Vernondale Drive. Mr. Mayo believed the purpose of the hearing was to consider whether it is feasible to maintain the drive-in. It has become obsolete, a dinosaur if you will. He does not believe that anyone would go there to watch a movie. He believes the needs are more for green space and, having been involved in women's soccer, the parking as become a tremendous problem because of all the activities going on. Additional green area most definitely and a different approach to parking.

Mr. Masci did not believe that showing movies is a "dinosaur". Many recreation departments have family movie nights. Commissioner LaPorte commented that the question in the newspaper was misleading. The speakers are gone. We are not maintaining the drive-in theater. The screen is there. It will not take anything away from the rest of the property.

Janet Cekovski of Yorktown Road spoke from the audience. She said she liked the proposal that Rich Koczera made. She supports fields but liked the whole idea that encompasses a lot of everything. She absolutely would go to movie night with kids or without kids. She has driven to New Haven to do it; it's fantastic.

Mr. Mayo commented on the cost. He wanted to be sure there is space for additional parking

and space for sports.

7. Phil Pomposi, 1215 Pleasant Street, member of the Board of Finance. When this was brought before the Board of Finance it was emphatically stated that it would not be used for a ball field. That is not to say anything against kids in this town. Every taxpayer in town paid \$1.6 million for the property and are entitled to the use of that property. We will never have enough ball fields. He believes the property is to be used for the benefit of all our citizens, not just one segment of the population. If we could work out a situation for the best of both worlds: movie screen, pavilion where several organizations can come in and use it, picnic tables, bocce courts – a lot can be done to utilize the property for the benefit of all citizens. Some items will cost a lot of money; have to see where this falls in the line of priorities regarding all other things that are going to be coming up in this town. It will be competing with the Town Hall or Town Hall addition which is certainly a top priority, schools, etc.

Dave Denino spoke from the audience. He believes it should be used for everybody. Mr. Koczera's plan had a lot of ideas.

Pam DePaolo believed a nature walk would be very low cost. She supports a multi-purpose field.

Mr. Pomposi said a field is fine but believes design of other things should be first. You don't want to put in a field, then another field, and then before you know it, there is no room for anything else.

Commissioner Kanute said when we build a field it is utilitarian – can be used for many purposes. We are not looking for any restrictions like fences that make it a football field or a baseball field. Trying to get the best we can for the most people for the money.

Ron Newman asked what the status was for the \$250,000 bond he heard about. Where is it? He also said he has a lot of parents lined up to assist with fund raising, building, etc.

Mr. Egidio responded that we put in for a grant in 2004 and are just now getting close to seeing it. It was approved but the money has not come in yet. Question arose about whether there was bond or grant money available for fields. The answer was no.

Pam DePaolo asked if the public would be informed or have further opportunities to speak on the matter. Chairman Fontana said the board would submit the proposed plan to the Town Council.

8. Michael Riccio, 100 Old State Road, member of Town Council. Mr. Riccio stated that knowing the Town Council there will be plenty of public input. He continues to support open space. He stated his points. First, history of the parcel. When it was brought before all the boards at the time of the referendum, it was sold as "passive recreation" and we will strongly put emphasis to saving one section if we can. It was encouraged all along the line. It is in the minutes of all the boards it went to. The referendum itself did not read that way.

Mr. Riccio has not heard any proposal that couldn't be accommodated. Football, passive, movie theater. Take six months. Hire the right planner and design it properly.

The old picnic grove is not used anymore; maybe it could be used for football. Bocce courts could be moved near the pavilion. He believed the plan could accommodate a lot of this stuff. People said no one would go downtown but Music on the Green is one of the most popular events. People said no one would walk on a straight path yet Rails to Trails is packed. We need to look to the future and see what we can do to accommodate these things. Music in the Park would be a huge success. Westerly, RI, has it; you can't get near it. Falmouth has movies downtown, big success. San Francisco has movies in the park; it is a smashing success.

Mr. Riccio said we can do it with the needs of football, seniors, and families in mind. It needs to be designed properly so that if you want to have the ability to drive your car in there, you can do it once a week without damaging it. He noted that there are a lot of bugs to contend with; you wouldn't want to sit on damp grass to watch a movie.

Commissioner LaPorte said having been on the board for many years along with John Fontana, Dave Kanute, Bill Masci and Jiggy Egidio, there is a lot of experience. Joanne Palmieri and Meg Maruzo haven't been on the board long but have a lot of good ideas. He doesn't believe they get enough credit. He said we would have a pavilion. We would have movies. We would have a field off to one side. It would not be a multi-field complex. Crescent Lake and Panthorn Park trails are underutilized about 90%. We could put a football field off to the side. A pavilion would be used a great deal. Then it is a question of money. There are many good ideas. We will come up with a plan and submit it to the Council.

Q: Will there have to be a referendum for items over \$1 million?

Commissioner LaPorte said the major cost we've been talking is \$250,000. The rest if grading, seeding, etc. Mr. Egidio said every year you would add to it, perhaps \$50,000 a year. Commissioner LaPorte said we do have an extensive investment in this property. Can do it relatively inexpensively, probably \$600,000 as a guess over the next 3 to 5 years.

Q: When will the Park Board discuss the plan?

Chairman Fontana said it could not be done at a regular board meeting. There is a regular meeting scheduled for Wednesday, February 6. Perhaps we could pick a date for a special meeting at that time.

There being no further questions or comments, the meeting adjourned at 7:30 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Patricia Berardinelli
Recording Secretary

Next Meeting:

Wednesday, February 6, 2008 – Regular Meeting