

PARK COMMISSION  
NOVEMBER 8, 2010

The regular monthly meeting of the park Commission was held at 7:00 p.m. at town hall with the following in attendance:

Robert Ferrigno (Presiding)  
John Scippa  
Ken Martin  
Joseph DeSabia

Tony Chmielewski  
Diane Mayo  
Gene Cellini  
Kevin Bellows (7:55 p.m.)

Also:

Park Superintendent Dmitri Paris  
Chief Park Ranger Robert Hawley  
Recreation Director Mary Markham (8:00 p.m.)

Guests:

Nature Commission Chm. Pam Georgas (7:30 p.m.)

Nature Commission Members:

Kevin Malone, Meg Barnes, Ruth Mohr, Frank Grazynski (7:30 p.m.)  
Dan Nelson, Town Hall Chief of Staff  
Michael Ayles, Antonozzi Assoc. Architects (7:30 p.m.)  
Stu Needleman, Babe Ruth League, 16 Squire court (7:30 p.m.)  
Mark Fritz, Babe Ruth League, 133 Fernwood Road (7:30 p.m.)  
Andy Elias, Little League, 2 Crescent Lane  
Joe Forren, Little Legion, 6 Scott Lane  
Mike Curley, Little League, 49 Parkway Drive  
William Crooks, 25 Dalecot Drive, Board of Finance Member (Audience)  
Carl Massaro, 61 Wedgewood Road, Chairman Town Council (Audience)

**PUBLIC COMMENTS:**

**MOTION** by Mr. Chmielewski, second by Mrs. Mayo, unanimously passed to hear guests.

No comments from attending guests at this point

**MOTION** by Mr. Chmielewski, second by Mrs. Mayo, unanimously passed to close Public Comments portion of the Agenda.

**MOTION** by Mrs. Mayo, second by Mr. Chmielewski, unanimously passed to accept the minutes of the October 18, 2010 meeting.

**CORRESPONDENCE:**

Chairman referred to correspondence from Trumbull Babe Ruth requesting time for remarks at this meeting but had not yet arrived.

**OLD BUSINESS:**

**Abraham Nichols Park Historic Barn Grant:**

Mr. Martin indicated he now has a copy of the application and will work with Commissioner Mayo, the Park Superintendent, First Selectman's Office and Representative T.R. Rowe to complete and submit the application for repairs to the historic barn at Abraham Nichols Park.

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Valley Hike, October 23<sup>rd</sup>.

Mr. Martin reported that the Historical Society conducted a very successful hike on the east side of the valley trail from the Park Street Commuter Lot to Indian Ledge Park. Shuttles provided rides back to the Commuter Parking Lot. There were approximately 80 in attendance for the 2 ½ hour duration. They provided three tour guides. Superintendent assigned a crew to clean the historic-ledge area of the trail which was greatly appreciated.

Chairman noted that he contacted the Town Attorney concerning a Cease and Desist letter to be issued to Andre Liscinsky who was circulating advertising on for-profit lessons in Unity Park which is in violation with Park Ordinances.

Mr. Martin noted that our previous approval for the Historical Society to conduct a Thanksgiving Day 5K Run will not take place this year. The Historical Society will now plan for next year.

Scout Alex Gooden had scheduling issues and has not as yet been in contact on his proposed project at the Abraham Nichols Park. The Superintendent, Chief Ranger and Mr. Martin have discussed project priorities and will pass these along to him.

Superintendent commented that there are two biker groups who utilize the park system trails who are willing to meet with the Park Commission on a Trail Monitoring system, Mark Lauri, North East Mountain Bikers Assoc. and Rick Coffee, Trumbull Trails System group. They would offer help with flagging, trail marking, and become ambassadors for proper utilization of our trails within the Pequonock Valley and our Park System which are all contiguous.

Chairman commented that we should like to meet with them first before conducting their activities in the Valley prior to park system trails.

**NEW BUSINESS:**

Members of the Nature Commission joined for a discussion on a conceptual design for a new proposed 5,000 square foot facility for a combined Trumbull Nature and Arts Center and Park Rangers Facility on the eastern side of Twin Brooks Park. Their proposed design study and associated images were developed simply to provide an idea of how a facility could work on a specific parcel of land in the park for review and approval by Town leadership.

Frank Grazynski, Nature Commission Member as well as Westport Nature Center, Maritime Center and past president of the Trumbull Land Trust, was spokesman for the Commission. He explained that they had met with Park Superintendent Paris and were reporting on their findings and logistics of this proposed site. Park Commissioners were furnished copies of their proposal for review prior to this meeting.

He commented they looked at all park land parcels in thinking about the building and how it could be incorporated and blend into the park sites. All sites with less than five acres were immediately eliminated. Also eliminated were sites that are currently used extensively for active recreation

purposes. Utilizing these criteria, the sites remaining were ranked on ability to blend in, residential area, nearby amenities, centrally located, well established, proximity of volunteers and ecological features. Twin Brooks was the selected location.

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Commissioner Martin questioned who determined that location was best. Mr. Grazynski said he and the Nature Commission Chairman evaluated the locations and made their recommendation to the entire Nature Commission. Those who were in attendance voted favorably on the Twin Brook Park location. He noted that the building design is more exciting than the land. This is a great opportunity for the Nature Center.

Commissioner Martin indicated he felt there are contradictions in the ranking summary. In viewing the parks listed, he does not agree with Twin Brooks Park being the best location. He is in full agreement that the current location of the Nature Center is not the right one. But feels that in his opinion the best location based on their review and criteria would be the Kaatz property. He noted that the Kaatz property is very close to Long Hill Green currently being developed and the Nature Center would be a draw to that area, close to the senior citizen housing complexes, has 17 acres of woodland surrounding it with a pond, with the current Veterans Center in great need of maintenance and repair as well which could be combined with the use of the proposed building. It is east of the river, in an historic area right up to Old Mine Park. It would tie in nicely with what they are trying to do with the Nature Center. Trumbull High School, the Middle School and VOAG are close to the Kaatz property as well. Twin Brooks has 15 parking spaces, Kaatz Property at Veterans Center has 30 parking spaces. He has been trying to understand their analysis of the sites.

Mr. Grazynski commented that Kaatz Pond property is not centrally located, while it is close to Indian Ledge Park there is not a lot of activity at that location. Twin Brooks has a ready-made audience which they are looking for. Volunteers for Twin Brooks is well established.

Superintendent noted these were all valid points but he is not sure that the Kaatz Property is the ideal site. They took into consideration the Nature Center and Ranger Station and a central location where the two could exist together. We looked for common ground.

Mr. Martin said if we are looking at the building, we should be looking at the location as well.

Chairman commented that this is a first attempt at coming forward with recommendations and we can proceed from that.

Mr. Martin questioned how they would rank the Kaatz Property.

Mr. Grazynski said relatively low. Not a lot of people hiking through that passive use location. Twin Brooks has many walkers and full of activity, which they are looking for.

Pam Georgas noted that one of the complaints they get now at their current location is that they are too far off, not central enough and that Beach or Twin Brooks areas would be better.

Mr. Martin said he agrees whole-heartedly that the Nature Center should be moved and allow for commercial property development. People look at a Nature Center as a destination, you look for environment. People go to the Stamford Nature Center...it's a destination. He doesn't think the Twin Brooks location blends in with what is trying to be accomplished.

Mr. Scippa said that looking at the statistics, Beach Park comes in at a close second, the two locations are almost identical.

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Mr. Grazynski said that traffic is not being considered in this report. But, adding everything, Twin Brooks is their selected site.

Superintendent stated that growth and expansion must be looked at as well. This is a 5,000 sq. foot facility with outdoor lab space. One piece of the puzzle is future growth.

Michael Ayles, Antinozzi Assoc. Architects said the unit itself is \$200 a sq. foot...\$1,000,000. No detailed cost estimates yet. If approved then they could get a more-detailed sustainable design. This location close to utilities, traffic pattern, no trees to cut down. Whole idea here is to blend into the site...tucked back into the hill, has the meadow around it. Solar panels could be utilized, long-term maintenance issues include composite material for construction. "Green" composites comparable in price. They sat down with the Nature Commission as a collaborative effort, with Pam, Dmitri, on program and what needs to be in the building, exact space needs...had a couple of samples of nature centers very similar but larger than ours.

Chairman asked is we could view these sample buildings. He said yes, he would provide this information.

Chairman ask Pam Georgas if she would address the funding issues.

Dan Nelson, Town Hall Chief of Staff, indicated that there is a possibility of energy grants, and other state and federal cost-sharing grants but not enough to cover the entire cost of the building, a portion would be bonding as well as proceeds from the sale of the Ranger Station property on White Plains Road. State and federal grants not enough to cover the entire cost of the building. Three portions, Grants, bonds and proceeds from sale of building. This is just conceptual at this point in time. The Wagner Parcel is bonded. Won't be able to sell it for several years, until the market comes back up for commercial development.

Mr. Ferrigno said there are two separate components to this proposal...building construction itself and then major dollars for long-term maintenance and operational costs (telephone, heat, custodial, etc). Town would have to pick-up the associated costs.

Superintendent said both the Nature Center and Ranger Station currently need structural maintenance, both in very bad condition. The question is do we put dollars into maintenance of current structures which are in deplorable condition or do we build a new facility.

Mr. Martin questioned the Nature Center applying for a 501c3. Nature Center depending on the Town. Does that status give them a clear path to funding back into caring for the building? Grants would have to be applied for by the Town.

William Crooks, member Board of Finance in audience, commented that we should look at building statistics and get a legal opinion on tax exempt status of the Nature Commission and its ability to fund into the project. 5013c may be for program only. He suggested we tread carefully when you are dealing with bonds. He didn't think it would impair the use, but, we should check with Bond Counsel. Could affect the bond sale.

Carl Massaro, Town Council Chairman, upon question by the Chairman, said we should refer bonding questions to Town's Bond Counsel.

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Superintendent mentioned Kaechele Park barn being built by the Soccer Groups and then gifted over to the Town. Town owns the building.

Mr. Ferrigno queried if there was thought given to the Nature Center paying down the bond through corporate gifts or fees...non-resident and resident fees, or were they just planning on funding programs.

Mr. Grazynski said they would pay for program only.

Superintendent said this is currently a town-operated facility. Programs grow over time. Need to keep programs running and growing. Program saves their useful life and determines how much money o we put into them.

Chairman commented that this is just the beginning, for Park Commission approval we need review and approvals for Town code compliances...building, zoning and traffic study. To pursue this project, two determining factors, what is the dollar amount for the sale of the two properties and what is the cost of the project.

Mr. Nelson commented that the Ranger Station has no debt, estimated sale at \$445,000; Wagner Property with \$2 million in bonding, \$1,700,000 estimated value. We are at the low end of the real estate market. Should pay-off a majority of bonding prior to sale...perhaps five or six years hence. Cash will come from the sale of the Ranger Station on White Plains Road.

Chairman questioned if the Town would change zoning to make the property more valuable?

Mr. Nelson said yes, this is considered. They would propose extending the current design district to the next street.

Chairman asked for comments by Park Commissioners.

Mrs. Mayo said she liked the idea. Liked what they propose for Twin Brooks Park. Great place for it. Central location. Lot of people utilize the park. An asset for the Park Rangers.

Dr. Bellows: No comment.

Mr. DeSabia, No comment.

Mr. Scippa, No comment.

Mr. Chmielewski: Leans toward Kaatz Property. Twin Brooks not a good area to bring in more activity with a lot of people coming to the Nature Center.

Mr. Martin: Twin Brooks already active, open play fields, playground, lot of people use the park for walking. Has its own identity as it is right now. Doesn't see how putting a facility out there will blend with what they are promoting. It has a pond. It is a park that residents use now with 15/18 spots for parking. These would be used for the Nature Center and take away from people who want to utilize that end of the park for walking, etc. This will affect the topography of the park as it is now. What is the adaptive use of a whole building? Might not be cost effective. Think we should think about combining the Veterans into this too and locate at the Kaatz Property.

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Superintendent said it is planned for 5,000 sq. feet, combining in what the ranger space is currently.

Mr. Martin commented that the major portion is for the Nature Center, very little for Rangers.

Superintendent noted that our Park Rangers might as well have been the Nature Center for the town for a very long time prior to the Nature Commission being formed. They have exhibit space and programs and an environmental footprint in town and through their school programs. Nature Center is providing the same type of programs. Rangers will continue to do their programs, and the Nature Center will do their own programs. Because they parallel the ranger programs, it is fully possible to integrate these.

Mr. Martin said this is a matter of who has access to our park. Rangers, because of funding constraints, find it is almost impossible to monitor the parks now. Resources for the nature center is a question...how will budget to maintain that facility be handled?

Superintendent said he doesn't see it that way. Twin Brooks is at the southern portion of the trails. Bringing outside individuals into the park system is now almost impossible to control.

Mr. Martin said that this park is a preferred benefit to residents of the Town of Trumbull, this is in their "home". Should we draw upon the resources of the town for this?

Chairman clarified that what Ken is saying is that if paying \$1 million for a park facility, why should other than Town residents have access to that Town facility.

Superintendent: How do you restrict them? We are attempting to bring in a benefit to the town of Trumbull. No benefit to going up to the Wagner parcel. If this is the best value, we are selling a piece of land to get \$700,000. \$1 million to build. Facilities management is currently a losing proposition. Heat, utilities, air conditioning all costs. This would be putting up a building to stop bleeding of other facilities. Rangers would continue in a new building.

Chairman noted the residency and non-residency issues.

Ken noted he respect the nature center and the ranger station. But, this is a huge cost and what is the Nature Center bringing into the park system?

Mr. Scippa commented that when you put a building like this up, you can expect to attract.

Mr. Martin mentioned that in Stamford, non-residents pay \$12 to get in.

Mrs. Mayo: If they have a Nature Program with 25 people, non-residents should pay \$30, residents perhaps \$25.

Chairman noted we need to know the Nature Center budget dollars they need to sustain themselves. We are going to give them \$1 million building starting out.

Park Superintendent noted that the Nature Commission was given use of the Wagner Parcel, they went on to maximize that area and develop a successful program. Now we are saying, we are going to move you to a more suitable place because the building is not suitable and in need of maintenance and in the future we will sell that property at a hefty return.

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Chairman questioned if superintendent is recommending this location, and is his priority maintenance or consolidation?

Superintendent said there have been long discussions on optimal location for a combined building. Kaatz is centrally located but logistically won't work. Veterans Center is isolated. We should give the Nature Center the opportunity to succeed. Isolated, it will not succeed. First priority is our parks and the components that go into. Rangers have day-to-day involvement dealing with the public in our park facilities. Their presence is important in our parks. Teaching about caring for our parks is important as well.

Mr. Martin said they don't have time for that. Take the burden off the Rangers. We need more security in the parks for our residents.

Chief Ranger Hawley commented. They do a lot of teaching in the down-season...December to April. We have met with the Nature Commission and don't compete with one another. Theirs is a different type program, more hands on projects. We do hiking, nature walks, in-school programs. We are 100% resident programs.

Mr. Scippa mentioned neighbors to the proposal. There are homes right there. This could be viewed as an invasion of that park.

Mr. Martin said that Kaatz property has less impact. 600 acres of open space around it. It took fifteen years to create Twin Brooks Park as it is today.

Mr. Scippa questioned as to where does the final decision rest?

Chairman noted, parks and facilities fall under the jurisdiction of the Park Commission.

Mr. Martin said with funding, Park Commission can only recommend to Board of Finance and Town Council.

Chairman noted we have agreed to the concept of placing a combination building somewhere within our park system. We should look at other sites as well. Twin Brooks is the priority of the Nature Commission. The Park Commissioners will get together for a short tour of park facilities. We are in control of the park system. We have agreed only to the concept of utilizing park property for a combined facility, and we have the ultimate decision.

Mr. Scippa said that we need to come up with some recommendation and then have a Public Information Session.

Mr. Chmielewski feels we need to find somewhere not so active.

Mr. Cellini noted we are making it a commercial center, at what cost?

Superintendent feels that they will put resources back into the park system.

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Dr. Bellows questioned if the proposal to sell the White Plains Road property took into consideration the agreement with the neighborhood to maintain an exit roadway from the park along the side of the ranger station to eliminate after-hours traffic on the side roads. This agreement was put in place due to the installation of the lights at both Little League and Babe Ruth fields.

Mr. Cellini said we need to establish what resources will come from the Nature Center to be put back into the park system as they generate money. We need to know the intent of the Nature Center. What revenue stream comes back to the town if it is successful. For long term control, a system must be set up to allow for constant monitoring. He is concerned with why the need for becoming a 501c3.

Superintendent feels that the driving force for them to succeed is, in fact, heavy traffic. We are talking \$1 million to build, rather than maintaining the two current buildings.

**MOTION** by Dr. Bellows, second by Mr. Chmielewski, unanimously passed to re-open the Public Comments portion of the meeting to allow for late-arriving guests.

Stu Needleman and Mark Fritz, Trumbull Babe Ruth League:

Mr. Fritz said they went back to Unity Park to look at other locations to site a batting cage. He distributed a site-plan of the field area with three locations noted. Expense will be born by the League. Original proposed location, they thought was discussed with the superintendent in the past. That location has a stone wall and ledge rock. Location B right up against fence where the bullpen is adjacent to that fence. Problem is with a drainage swale. They would have flooding if removed. Discussed placing it on the 'flats' close to Little League.

Chairman questioned cost. \$3,000 on a pristine site without site work. Site work not taken into consideration until location is agreed to.

Chairman commented that the field itself is in great need of repair. Would they consider addressing the field repair first and then the addition of a batting cage?

They stated that the batting cage is important to them. They agree the field repair needs to be done. Field needs to be upgraded. They will continue to put money back into the field. They will agree to shutting down the field next fall.

Superintendent said the field is in such poor condition, nothing will improve it until a complete rebuild which is a mammoth expense.

It was agreed the Superintendent, Chairman, and others will meet with them to locate a possible site for a proposed locked batting cage. Once they come in with approved engineering plans, a final decision will be made. Cost to replace the netting is around \$1,000 every three years which they feel is not a major expense. They will install a security fence as well around the net cage.

Mr. Fritz said they want to do their part, whatever funding, corporate sponsors, is necessary will be done.

Chairman said that in the next few years, they should try to find alternate fields for fall ball. We need an attempt to mitigate this problem. If the problem had been addressed in the past three or four years, we would not have the field problems we are faced with today.

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Mr. Cellini stated that he attended Park Commission meetings where fall field closures were requested for repairs, but scheduling continued by Babe Ruth.

Superintendent said that this year we are prepared to close it down. They have come too far. Resting the field would not accomplish any thing. Right now, you can't do any more harm to the field. It is beyond our scope to address the problem. Cost is estimated at between \$15,000 and \$30,000.

Mr. Scippa said they need to get a Request For Quote out to develop a hard cost of what needs to be done to bring the field back.

Mr. Fritz said they would get three quotes. Once we know how much we need, we will fund raise.

Mr. Cellini noted that he has seen less Babe Ruth play at the Madison field in the past two years. Scheduling play there and at Jane Ryan would have taken some of the heavy use off the Unity field.

Mr. Needleman said they put a lot of money into Unity field. We do play at Jane Ryan. Madison has safety issues. We really don't want to play at Madison. Madison is used for football and lacrosse and in pretty bad shape. Sometimes the grass was not cut. Area around the field was cut, but not the field itself. Players preferred to play at unity.

Mr. Chmielewski said they should have a schematic for the field, exactly what you need to do, what you are going to cut out.

Mrs. Mayo said if they are going to put up a batting cage, some money has to be provided to addressing the field issues to bringing up the field to a condition where kids won't get hurt.

Chairman requested a long-term maintenance plan be incorporated in their request.

Mike Curley, Little League, noted that at our October meeting there was a proposal for a new 10/11/12 year old program beginning. He noted that Little League Williamsport now has a new pilot program which incorporates big league type play and a larger field 50/70 as well if leagues want to incorporate it into their program.

Joe Foren, Little Legion said that their program was in response to the concern to retain kids in Trumbull. The for-profit groups take them away from Trumbull. They have been doing well working with Little League. They have three teams. Upon question as to how many do they turn away, he responded 6/8 a year.

Mr. Cellini commented that we should be trying for no-cut in Town programs. As long as they are using Town facilities, all kids who want to play should be able to play. The age is filtering down over the years. Not enough fields in town.

Mr. Needleman commented that the Babe Ruth proposed Cal Ripken Program was in response to parents wanting bigger field play. The core program is eroding. Pulling away for Legion Program.

Chairman said the Superintendent and Commissioners will take a tour of Unity and come up with a recommendation for a batting cage site.

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Mr. Martin feels they should take care of the field first, remove the trailer and then think about constructing a batting cage.

Superintendent said that a batting cage is a good thing to do for that program. The most practical location needs to be determined and the total cost for whatever it takes to put it in at that determined location.

**CONSENSUS** that commissioners will walk Unity Park Babe Ruth Field site, Wednesday, November 17 at 8:00 a.m.

A Nature Center Site Tour will be set up at future date.

Mr. Martin reported that an axel from one of the historic train crashes was found in the Pequonnock Valley. He needs assistance in moving it from its location. Water unearthed it. Commissioners Chmielewski and Scippa along with the Park Ranger will take a look at what was found Friday, November 12<sup>th</sup> at 8:00 a.m., will meet at the Whitney Avenue entrance to the Rail Trail.

Superintendent's Report:

Winterizing systems throughout the parks.

Having difficulty with Beach Pool sprinkler park. Can't get air into the line to purge.

Picking up leaves.

Limbs snapping off many trees.

Mr. Martin noted that the Historical Society has an Art auction planned for Saturday, November 13<sup>th</sup> at the Society building.

**CONSENSUS** to adjourn at 10:05 p.m.

Respectfully submitted:

Joan E. Plouffe  
Clerical Adm. Assistant

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MOTIONS**

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