

TOWN COUNCIL
Town of Trumbull
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TOWN HALL
Trumbull

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EDUCATION COMMITTEE
MINUTES
August 1, 2012

The Chair called the Education Committee of the Town Council to order at 7:18 p.m. All present joined in the Pledge of Allegiance.

The Chair noted that there was a quorum present and that Ms. Waizenegger would be sitting as a full member in Mr. Donofrio's absence.

PRESENT: Chadwick Ciocci, Chairman, Vickie Tesoro, Tom Whitmoyer and Kristy Waizenegger, Alternate.

ABSENT: Ann Marie Evangelista, Vice-Chairwoman, Jeff Donofrio, Jim Blose and Gregg Basbagill, Alternate.

ALSO PRESENT: Pam Georgas of the Trumbull Nature & Arts Center, Al and Suzanne Stuart.

DISCUSSION: TNAC - TRUMBULL NATURE & ARTS CENTER:

The Chair stated that the goal of this meeting is to discuss its relocation and its history. The Center started in 2005 and has done some wonderful projects in the community; it has been successful with building its reputation and programming. It is the Chair's goal over the next several months to get a common set of facts and to iron out what it is that they believe the Trumbull Nature Commission should be doing in the future as it relates to its location.

HISTORY OF THE TNAC AND THE NATURE COMMISSION:

Ms. Georgas explained the history of the TNAC and the Trumbull Nature Commission as follows:

Original Agreement- The original agreement with the Town Council was to use the facility and grounds for two (2) years. The agreement included that the Town would bring the building up to code. Approximately a year after the commission started, Pam Georgas started her work with the TNAC, she subsequently went to the previous First Selectman, Raymond Baldwin and asked for an extension of time. The extension was granted for 5 years.

Relocation Discussions:

Ms. Georgas stated as the TNAC progressed discussion took place with the previous administration to move the Center to the Bell property or building a regional health building and putting them on that property. Three to four years ago they returned to the previous administration with documentation on what they had accomplished and asked for an extension of time, at which point a resolution through the Town Council granted them the use of the grounds and facility as long as they were operating and the program was successful, they would not deed restrict the property. The election took place and there was a change in administration. Discussions took place with regard to relocating the TNAC within the Parks. An appraisal was done and it was determined that it was not practical to sell the property at this time. The property was purchased for \$2 million and there is still bonding left on it.

Highest and Best use FOR THE PROPERTY:

The Highest Use for the property would be \$1.7 million as a commercial property. There is a *HIGHEST AND BEST USE REPORT* for the property, it was not recommended that the property be a commercial use property; the recommendation was for it to be a nursery or a small medical building. The property was originally purchased to put affordable housing on it. The moratorium on affordable housing happened and there was no longer a need to build affordable housing. The TNAC was asked to do research on all of the parks' properties and they did. Frank Razinski who was the Director of the Nature Center, which makes the report somewhat subjective; the report is based on his experience with nature centers. Ms. Georgas worked with the Parks Commission for a year. A sub-committee was formed, and approximately a year after they determined that the TNAC did not fit within their vision. Ms. Tesoro stated the Parks Commission vote took place on August 8, 2011, and based upon those minutes, there had been discussion with regard to the Fairchild Wheeler/Swap Property. Ms. Georgas stated that the TNAC did not agree with using that property. The door had been closed on all options except for the Swap property. They have been in a state of limbo for 3 years. The question is: should they continue to seek money for the renovation of the existing building while not knowing if they are going to be there in 2 years. Ms. Georgas indicated that the majority of the Nature Commission believes it makes sense to be located somewhere along the trail system. If they were to build a new facility, long term it would be more sustainable and successful for them to be within a Parks system where their audience already is. They had worked closely with the Parks Director and it was determined that the bigger parks had adequate parking. Ms. Tesoro stated that the Parks Commission had said in 2010 and 2011 that they did not support putting the TNAC in the parks system. Ms. Georgas indicated that there are all types of nature center models to look at. There are some that are 10% funded by the town, there are some that are solely funded by fundraising and some that are somewhere in between. It would depend on how our Town would want to do this. The position the 503c took was that they would be willing to fundraise for as much as possible and would not use grant money for any of the operational costs. There are many different options but until they know where the Town wants them to be they can not do any of them.

The Chair stated that if the Town were to commit to finding land within the parks system, to build a new center where they would be indefinitely, would give the center the opportunity to reach out to corporations for help with the costs associated with building the new facility. Ms. Georgas agreed and added that when she has had conversations with their sponsors they ask about the Town's commitment status. The Town Council started the TNAC. Ms. Georgas indicated that the present location is not the best location for a Nature Center; it should be within the rail system to encourage all ages to participate in the programs. The present property is 11 acres with a lot of frontage.

The Chair stated that Ms. Georgas and the Chairman of the commission had committed to funding the relocation with private financing as much as possible. Ms. Georgas stated that without the Town's commitment they can not solicit the private financing or even write a grant. The agreement with the Town needs to be resolved as well.

The Current TNAC Property:

Ms. Tesoro indicated that the purchase of the current TNAC's location agreement included a stipulation that the property would be left as park-like property. Ms. Georgas stated she had a conversation with the previous owners where they had indicated to her that it was their understanding the Town had purchased the property for affordable housing.

Al and Suzanne Stuart neighbors of the current TNAC, stated that they would not like to see anything commercial built in the TNAC's place. Ms. Georgas stated that there is a possibility that the TNAC could stay where it is a satellite location. Ms. Tesoro spoke favorably of building a nature center, but is concerned and would want to review this as a whole issue, including what will happen to the current TNAC location. Ms. Georgas stated that the funding for the new building would not be coming from the sale of the current property because it has been determined that is not an option due to the current appraisal. Mr. Whitmoyer stated that it would not be prudent to sell the property for several years due to the amount of bonding left on the property.

Programs:

Mr. Georgas stated that the registration for all of the programs is very good. The popularity of the programs is based on the program not the location; they have a very good quality program. Groups are coming from as far as Ansonia, based on word of mouth. People are definitely responding to the current programming but in terms of expanding the program they are limited to the property. Ms. Tesoro stated that there is the possibility of having off-site programming. Ms. Georgas indicated that if they were going to build a new facility she would like the programs to be on the same site. Currently if they plan off-site programs she has to go before the Parks Commission for permission. The programs are regional, which is a part of the Parks' Commission's concerns.

Ms. Georgas stated that most Nature Center's do have in-kind services from the Town, which is why it is important to have an agreement with the Town. The Nature Centers usually take on the responsibility of trail maintenance, trash pick up and other items of that nature, but there are all different agreements that can be put in place. The center's

goal is education which is why she would like this to start with the TC Education Committee.

The Chair reviewed the Duties of Parks Commission section of the Town Charter, specifically the Town Council's authority. The committee discussed having this reviewed by the Town attorneys. The Chair stated that he would like the following information for the next meeting:

- Town attorneys to answer the question if whether the Town Council does or does not have final authority over the Parks Commission.
- Whether or not the Town Council can take land and dedicate to the TNAC.

The Chair also indicated that he would like hold a public hearing on this topic.

Ms. Tesoro suggested before having a public hearing that they should invite the Parks Commission to discuss this. Ms. Tesoro stated that the present property has to be discussed along with all viable options for the TNAC as well as what will happen to it if the TNAC should leave that property. Ms. Tesoro stated that either First Selectman Herbst or Mr. Nelson should come to speak to the development of the current TNAC's property.

The Chair stated that he would like the following information for the next meeting:

- Town attorneys to answer the question if whether the Town Council does or does not have final authority over the Parks Commission.
- To hear from First Selectman Herbst or Mr. Nelson their thoughts on the matter.
- To hear from the Parks Commission on their thoughts on this matter.

The committee discussed the Broadway Road location and the Bell property. The Broadway Road property would need a bridge built over the wetlands to enter the property that would double the cost of building a new facility. The Bell property on Huntington Turnpike has major issues with U.I. and the access issue (shared driveway). The Access and egress would be a real issue. This site does not get them closer to the rail system.

Mr. and Mrs. Stuart stated that they are supporters of the TNAC but do have issues with tying the sale of the current building. If the TNAC needs to be move then so be it but they would like to see the land left as park-like. Ms. Georgas suggested that many neighborhoods in Town do have pocket parks. Mr. and Mrs. Stuart stated that this would impact many of the neighbors' property values.

There being no further business to discuss and upon motion made by Mr. Whitmoyer and seconded by Ms. Tesoro the Education Committee adjourned by unanimous consent at 8:06 p.m.

Respectfully Submitted,

Margaret D. Mastroni, Town Council Clerk