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TOWN HALL  
Trumbull

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EDUCATION COMMITTEE  
MINUTES  
September 27, 2012

The Chair called the Education Committee to order at 7:08 p.m. All present joined in the Pledge of Allegiance.

Members Present: Chairman Chadwick Ciocci Vice-Chairman Ann Marie Evangelista, Vickie Tesoro, and Jeff Donofrio.

Members Absent: Jim Blose, Thomas Whitmoyer, Gregg Basbagill and Kristy Waizenegger.

Also Present: Carl A. Massaro, Jr. Town Council Chairman, Pam Georgas Chairman of the Trumbull Nature Commission, Bob Ferrigno, Chairman of the Parks Commission, TNAC Commissioner Kevin Malone, TNAC Commissioner Scott Kare, John Massari, resident and Chief of the Bow Hunting Instructor with the CT DEEP and observer Matty Kentosh.

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**DISCUSSION: TNAC**

Overview of the Nature Commission:

Ms. Georgas indicated:

- The Nature Commission was formed by the Town Council 5-6 years ago and were given the use of the current property for two years by the previous administration, when they reached the two (2) year mark they went back to the administration and were given an extension of time to prove their success. Three (3) years ago the current administration had asked them to research moving to park land. They worked with the Parks Director and the Chief of Staff. They presented their information to the Park Commission, in the end the Park Commission was not agreeable to the TNAC moving to the parks system.

There are other properties under consideration, although there are issues with them. The TNAC is in limbo and needs someone to help them make a decision as to where the TNAC will be in order to move forward with developing the TNAC.

Mr. Malone stated the TNAC commission is focusing on the children, since this is an educational endeavor. They have done field trips with mainly elementary school children. There is a value to the *No Child Left Inside* state initiative. The parks system is a jewel of the Town.

Relocation of the TNAC and Study Provided to the Parks Commission:

Mr. Ferrigno stated that the Parks Commission had worked with Ms. Georgas on where the TNAC could be relocated to. The Parks Commission's decision was based on the following critical points:

- *Finances* - The cost of the building itself, possible expansion to the facility and maintenance issues. At this point in time it is difficult for the Town to address the financial issues.
- *Impact on the Park Personnel and the Park Itself:*  
One of the locations discussed was Twin Brooks Park - A study by Don Watson was distributed to the Park Commission for review and outlined that there would be 15,000 visitors per year; 430 bus trips per year and potential for a 5,000 sf facility (banquet facility).

Mr. Ferrigno indicated that the Park Commission in the end was concerned with the impact to the parks, that the TNAC may not be self sustaining and that at a certain point the Town would have to take it over and absorb the finances. The sub-committee brought this information to the commission and it was a unanimous decision of the Park Commission not to provide a location with the parks. Those two issues were critical in their decision but primarily it was the financial concern.

Mr. Ferrigno gave a brief overview of the study done for the location at Twin Brooks as follows:

- The cost to build would be approximately \$200 per sf based on the water issues of the location.
- Kitchen Facilities for catering banquet and weddings.
- Projections - 15,000 visitors per year, 430 bus trips per year, building rentals for birthday parties, weddings and other events.
- The use of one FT person and multiple part time personnel.
- High visitor use and the potential to double its size.

Ms. Georgas stated that the agreement has always been that they would be self sufficient; they do not get a budget from the Town other than their utilities. For the past five (5) years they have self funded all programs. In response to the Chair, Ms. Georgas stated that if the TNAC would move to Old Mine Park (theoretically only), the positive aspect of having a new building would be to have the room that would hold more people. Not having the room is what restricts them. Once the room is built it would allow them to have more school programs, which is one of their biggest income areas. They would still self fund because all of the costs are rolled into the program. All nature centers have written agreements with their Towns; they do not have one at this time. A written agreement allows all parties to know what they are responsible for. The Chair indicated that he shares the Park Commission's financial concern, but is confident that the TNAC will remain self sufficient and spoke in favor of the written agreement.

Mr. Ferrigno raised the question of what would happen if the TNAC did not meet the requirements. The answer would have to be written into the agreement. The Chair agreed. Ms. Georgas indicated that they are in control of their programming; they have done their

research and have studied other nature centers to see where they have gotten into trouble. They have looked at what aspects of nature centers are costly and will stay away from those.. If the program doesn't cover itself they do not run the program. Mr. Ferrigno questioned what would happen to the new facility after it is already built; it could become a burden to the Town and the taxpayers. Ms. Georgas stated that the programs are solid. Nothing can be guaranteed. The demand is there. The Chair indicated that the supply is not meeting the demand, because we do not have the facilities to support the programming the towns' people want. If the 501(c)3 would be willing to risk a certain amount of their capital to cover the expenditures that would be above a beyond programming expenses. Ms. Georgas stated that the town had asked them to be a 501(c) 3 at which point and the commission would no longer be running the TNAC. It was a requirement by the Town to be 501(c) 3.

Sites Explored Outside of the Parks System:

- The Belle Property - unavailable at this time
- Broadway Road - 17 acres, (many wetlands)
- Swap Property

Ms. Georgas indicated for Ms. Evangelista that staying where they are now could be considered, although it is not an ideal location it at the edge of Town, it is not visible to the residents, it should be a central location, they should be next to the trail system where their audience already is.

Mr. Ferrigno questioned whether the valley had been explored. Ms. Georgas stated that she had been told that was not possible because it is not buildable. If that is an option, that is a different direction. Mr. Ferrigno indicated that the Town does not control the valley, they are second on the deed, and the state is first. The Town assists in the maintenance. Ms. Georgas stated if the TNAC were in the parks system it would cost less to maintain because the parks dept. already maintains the area. Ms. Georgas stated the original concept brought to them by Mr. Nelson and Mr. Paris was that since the Ranger station is in disrepair combining the TNAC and the Ranger Station would make sense if it were to go into existing park land, if it is not going into the existing park land that may change that proposal.

Ms. Evangelista voiced her concern with any construction in a park, because it would displace nature and questioned why this discussion was taking place if the Park Commission had already rendered their decision. Mr. Ferrigno stated this had been reviewed by Town attorneys, the only way to overturn the Parks Commission's decision would be by a change in the Town Charter. The Chair requested a copy of that be forwarded to him, Mr. Ferrigno agreed and noted that Atty. Nicola was on vacation. Ms. Tesoro stated that if the Park Commission has rendered its decision and the only way to over turn it is with a change to the Charter then the only discussion that can take place would be with regard to non-park property. The Chair disagreed; the Parks Commission could change its decision in two ways, a Charter change or by changing their own decision. Mr. Ferrigno suggested working outside of the Parks instead of trying to change the Parks Commission's decision. Ms. Tesoro stated to have a meaningful discussion it would be necessary to have all of the parties present, including someone from the administration to give their view of what they want for the TNAC. The Chair reviewed the progression of all of the Education meetings that had to taken

place to date, noting that they are getting all of the interested parties input. Speaking with the administration would be the next natural step. Along the way they are trying to form a consensus, to have all parties understand all view points so that at some point whatever the decision is that it had involved all parties and had input with plenty of time and information invested.

In response to Ms. Tesoro, Ms. Georgas explained that the Don Watson study did not start with the TNAC criteria; it included his vision that is not the TNAC's vision. They want to stay focused on programming; his vision is very different from what they wanted. The Park Commission had formed a sub-committee and based upon that meeting Mr. Watson had contacted Ms. Georgas with a regard to being a representative on the sub-committee. That is how Mr. Watson became involved in the study. The Chair stated that the study that Park Commission based their decision on is not the vision the TNAC has. He would not support building a facility unless it was self funded by private donations and sponsorships. Mr. Kare stated that they can not start fundraising until there is Town commitment. They need to know something to be able to move forward.

The Chair stated a clear document outlining what the TNAC envisions with maximums outlined is necessary and requested that the TNAC commission provide that document. Mr. Ferrigno stated that document could be brought to the Park Commission and asked that the document include their research of properties outside of the parks system. If the Town is going to have control over the facility, the agreement will be with the Town not the Park Commission, the facility should be outside of the parks system. They can not have a facility within the parks that they do have control over. Mr. Donofrio stated that the Park Commission does not enter into agreements. Mr. Massaro stated that they would need to get authorization from the Town Council. Mr. Donofrio added that the Town is the legal entity. Mr. Donofrio stated that the Park Commission has jurisdiction granted to them under the Town Charter and the CT General Statutes.

Mr. Kare summarized that the TNAC would prepare a document that redefines the scope of what the TNAC wants and outlines the programs and projections. The purpose of that would be to have the Park Commission take a second look at what they want to do. Mr. Kare stated that one of the properties that is outside of the parks is the current location and they would have to have a sense of what the future holds for that property. The Chair requested that the report include information on how each of the locations would affect their programming.

Mr. Massari stated the current facility is outdated and small; this location holds back and limits the Center's potential. The feel of the location does not give the feel of the vastness of nature. What the TNAC is doing is important for the children, these types of programs and experiences keep children out of trouble. These types of things should be considered along with the financial aspects.

Mr. Kentosh stated that no one seems to be sure who owns the TNAC; the thought of a banquet facility concerns him. He had asked if any actuaries had been done on the current TNAC property with a progression of years and the funds necessary to enhance the TNAC. If this piece of paradise is made into a parking lot it would be gone, what he is interested in is developing the property as it is now by looking for federal grants and private donations. This

would work if presented with a solid plan. Ms. Georgas and Mr. Massaro confirmed that the Town owns the current TNAC property. The Town would make the final decision on what would happen to the property. Mr. Massaro explained that the Town authorized the TNAC to use and occupy the space; the Park Commission agreed to maintain it with help from the Public Works Dept. Mr. Kentosh agreed the current facility is small but noted it could be expanded.

Ms. Evangelista stated that she respects both the TNAC and Park Commission.

In response to Ms. Tesoro, Mr. Ferrigno stated that the Park Commission had been told about a study that was done by a resourceful individual; they had not had the study until that meeting had taken place. The TNAC commission had told the Park Commission that this was a study (Don Watson's Study) that the Park Commission should consider. Mr. Ferrigno stated the Parks Commission was criticized for not reviewing the document. Mr. Georgas disagreed and stated that a sub-committee was formed by the Park Commission; they were supposed to meet to discuss the study so they could say what was good about the document and what was not, the sub-committee never met.

The Chair stated that moving forward they will be getting all the information necessary, the study may have created unnecessary angst; there may have been miscommunication along the way which could now be solved. Moving forward a discussion can be fostered.

There being no further business to discuss the Education Committee adjourned by unanimous consent at 7:55 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

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Margaret Mastroni, Town Council Clerk