

Somers Parks & Recreation Board

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Kevin Westerman
Chairman



MEETING MINUTES February 23, 2022

Chairman Westerman opened the meeting at 6:45 p.m. via Zoom.

The members present were: Jim Boniello; Chris McCormack; John Papalia; Don Penzine; Michele Sanz; Kevin Westerman; and John Zattola.

Stephen Krug and Michele Werney were absent.

Town Councilman Rich Clinchy, Parks and Recreation Superintendent Steve Ralston and Town Supervisor Rob Scorrano were also present.

Landmarks Committee members Elsie Guyot, Margaret Nicholson, Meg Timone and Grace Zimmermann were also present.

PUBLIC COMMENT

Public comment was covered under New Business – Bailey Park Project Discussion with Somers Historical Society's Landmarks Committee.

MINUTES

A motion was made by Mr. Zattola to approve the minutes of January 26, 2022, meeting as submitted. Mrs. Sanz seconded the motion. All were in favor.

MR. RALSTON'S REPORT

There were no comments about Mr. Ralston's report.

NEW BUSINESS

Bailey Park Project Discussion with the Somers Historical Society's Landmarks Committee – As a result of the discussion that took place at the January meeting regarding the Bailey Park Project, a unanimous decision by the Board as to the next steps was as follows: The Parks Board will draft a public statement of facts regarding the project to be sent to the Town Board and, perhaps, outlets such as The Somers Record.; Meetings will be scheduled with the Landmarks Committee, Architectural Review Board and Open Space

Committee for their input. Changes will be made to the design as deemed appropriate by the Parks and Recreation Board based on the feedback received from those boards and committees.

The Landmarks Committee, a sub-committee of the Somers Historical Society was invited to the meeting this evening to discuss their concerns and objections outlined in their letter of July 13, 2021, to the Town Board. They appreciated the opportunity for discussion.

The Landmarks Committee asserted that it is not specifically opposed to the plan, but the historic character should be maintained, especially in the selection of materials used. Leaving the park as all grass would be their preference as, in their opinion, the park is really Somers' village green. It was noted that, when the unhealthy trees are removed, more sunlight will be able to get through and perhaps it will dry the areas in front of the gazebo that are often damp. The Landmarks Committee suggested that areas be re-seeded which might address the problem.

The Parks and Recreation Board pointed out that the area in front of the gazebo is often damp and muddy, even on sunny days. Grass does not grow well in that area of the park. This problem would be exacerbated if the park gets more usage. For these reasons, the Bailey Park project must include a patio area. Understanding that they are all about compromise, the Landmarks Committee conceded that, if there is a need to cover the grass, the area covered by materials should be minimized.

The Landmarks Committee wants the materials used to have an historic character. The Town Code provides that sidewalks in the Historic Business District must be stamped concrete. It was suggested that using stamped concrete in Bailey Park would have the advantage of providing continuity, a unifying look, with the area around the Town House. This advantage was acknowledged by the Landmarks Committee. The Parks and Recreation Board noted that the design of rose pavers was originally selected as another way to achieve that unifying look and to tie in the park aesthetically with the rest of the historic district, while also providing a nicer overall look than stamped concrete. The Landmarks committee noted that, if pavers are used, they should be the flat variety, not rounded, to provide easier usage by wheelchairs and walkers, etc. If the Landmarks Committee, or anyone else, has a specific suggestion of what materials should be used, the Parks and Recreation Board would welcome it. The Parks and Recreation Board noted that it has agreed to reduce the size of the patio in front of the gazebo. When a decision as to the updated patio size is made, but before the new design is presented to the Town Board, the Parks and Recreation Board will communicate it to the Landmarks Committee for its review and comment.

The Landmarks Committee compared Bailey Park to Red Mills Park, a larger park located in Mahopac, which was characterized as having been developed while maintaining its historic charm. As an example, the Red Mills Park has lights along its walkway, which could be considered here. It was appreciated that the Landmarks Committee approved of modern pragmatic touches such as lighted walkways. Bailey Park, however, is considered a dawn to dusk park, and additional lighting will not be part of the project. Responding to a suggestion by the Architectural Review Board, the planned project already includes wiring so that if it is decided to add lights or other electrical devices in the future, that same can be easily and efficiently added.

The Landmarks Committee commented that the drawings for the plan were difficult to follow and, as a result, it was unclear about the plan for the existing benches. They would prefer that they not be moved, especially those dedicated to the residents lost on 9/11, out of respect for their families. The Parks and Recreation Board plan was to move the benches to locations in the park that make most sense based on the new design. The Landmarks Committee was told that the design will not include any changes to the benches that would be disrespectful to the families or the memories of those for whom the benches were dedicated. The Board will look into whether there is special importance for the specific locations where the benches were placed at the original dedications. The Board is committed to making sure that the new park design and placement of the benches will be appropriate for the families and the memories of those honored.

The Landmarks Committee objected to a vinyl fence, feeling that if it is necessary to install a fence to screen that side of the property, the fence should be made of wood. A split rail fence with a bush planted in front of each section was suggested. Installing a fence is not an essential element of the park redesign and plan to attract people to use the park. It was considered as a way to improve the look of the park to block the mess of old pallets, tarps, wood, brush and old cars that have been stacked along the edge of the park for years. Perhaps the owner of the property on that side of the park should be asked to clean up that area. Vinyl was selected because it provided a nicer look and required less maintenance. The Parks and Recreation Board will look into using a split rail fence and will reconsider whether any fence should be included in the project.

After reviewing the two arborists reports about the trees at Bailey Park, the Landmarks Committee is satisfied that healthy trees will not be removed for the project. The Parks and Recreation Board noted that it has sent the arborists reports to the Somers Open Space Committee and Tree Board and requested advice and counsel as to whether the trees at Bailey Park can be saved. The Parks and Recreation Board will follow up with the Tree Board to see if they have a plan that can avoid us cutting down the damaged trees.

The Landmarks Committee is concerned that the upgrades proposed for the park will result in events attracting larger amounts of people causing parking and facility issues. It was confirmed that Reis Park would be the destination for large gathering events, not Bailey Park. All were reminded that the footprint of the park is not being expanded, the proposal is to enhance what is existing. A comment was made about how difficult it is now to cross Route 202 to get to the park. The Parks and Recreation Board noted that the state roads are beyond its purview, but that there were both crosswalks and traffic control devices in place to allow for safe pedestrian crossing of the streets. It was confirmed that the water trough was never planned to be moved. Though it would have been clearer if it was included, it was not listed in the landscape architect's drawing because it was outside the area where changes were being made. A request has been made to light it at some point in the future so the wiring will be laid during the renovation process. As in the past it is the hope to once again offer an Arts Circus in the park. All artists erect a tent and the tent spikes can only be driven into the ground, not pavers or stamped concrete.

Mr. Westerman thanked the members of the Landmarks Committee for joining the Parks and Recreation Board this evening. He reminded them that the Board is always available if they

have questions or concerns and their monthly meetings are opened to the public. The Board still has to meet with the Architectural Review Board and Open Space Committee to get their feedback. At that point, all suggestions will be taken under consideration.

Reis Park Playground Equipment – A photo of a piece of playground equipment donated in 2002 was shared with the Board. Wear and tear are evident, and replacement parts are no longer available. Mr. Ralston provided photos of the piece he would like to replace it with along with quotes. All were in favor of his proposal.

Resident Property Donation/Purchase Request Referral Discussion:

Myrtle Drive Land Donations – The Town received an offer of a land donation from the owner of two lots on Myrtle Drive. The Parks and Recreation Board did not see any benefit to the Parks Department to accept these donations.

Narcissus Drive Land Purchase – A request was received from an owner on Narcissus Drive to purchase a lot owned by the Town so they could expand their property. The Parks and Recreation Board did not see that the sale of this lot would provide any benefit or detriment to the Parks Department.

Trailside Estates – Developer Ken Kearney met with the Town Board on February 10, 2022, to present his latest proposal for Somers, Trailside Estates. The plan is to build 79 townhouses for purchase and a community center he would donate to the Town in Baldwin Place. Although the Board has not received a request to comment on the project, some questions for thought include who is going to be responsible for maintaining the community center; will the community center be for the exclusive use of those who live in Trailside Estates or for all residents; and since the community center will abut the County bike trail will those folks park in the parking lot for the community center and want to use its bathrooms. Should this development proceed, the Parks Board will pursue these areas of inquiry.

1.8 Million Dollar Grant – At the end of 2021, the Town received a 1.8 million dollar grant to upgrade the Van Tassell house. A meeting was held in early January, but there has been no update.

West Somers Park – Mr. Westerman spoke to a resident in West Somers Park about their interest in maintaining the pond and area surrounding it that is under the auspices of the Town. The parks staff mows the area, but the pond has been an issue since the dam is broken in two sections and, until it is repaired, nothing can really be done. Mr. Ralston has spoken to former Supervisor Morrissey and Principal Engineering Technician Steve Woelfle about the issue with the pond. It is on the list for grant funding when available. In the meantime, though Mr. Ralston is happy to discuss what these folks are proposing.

OLD BUSINESS

Public Statement About the Facts of the Bailey Park Plan – Although not unanimous, last month a decision was made to draft a public statement about the facts of the Bailey Park plan. A draft was prepared and circulated amongst the Board for review and comment. During this process a question came up as to whether the Parks and Recreation Board could make this

public statement without approval. They can. With the approval of the majority of the Board, the final draft will be submitted to The Somers Record. Mr. Westerman reminded everyone that as individuals and residents, they are always at liberty to submit individual statements as well.

Day Camp Updates – It was reported last month by Mr. Ralston that all of last year's camp staff in good standing were offered a position for this summer and the response has been very low and as a result a staff shortage is a concern and two camps (Day Camp and Tuskers Trax) may not be able to be offered. The thought was to offer Day Camp to those entering grades Kindergarten through 8th, with the 6th, 7th and 8th graders having an opportunity to go on a lot of trips. This will allow for the mixing and matching of staff. Extensive advertising was done to solicit new applicants. That advertising was redone adding salary amounts, again with little or no response. Mr. Ralston met with Supervisor Scorrano and Finance Director Bob Kehoe to discuss this further and they agreed with the plan he and Andrew. Johnson decided upon. All efforts will be made to find ways to attract new hires.

MR. RALSTON'S COMMENTS

Mr. Ralston had no additional comments.

BOARD COMMENTS

Mr. Penzine complimented Mr. Westerman on a job well done in dealing with the backlash that has been received about the Bailey Park project. All echoed his sentiments.

Mr. Papalia gave kudos to Mr. Ralston and the parks staff on how well maintained the playground at Reis Park is. He was there recently with his grandchildren and they had a great time. Mr. Penzine added that he is at the park two to three times a week and there are always people who are participating in some activity. Reis Park is really a great park.

The meeting was adjourned at 9:05 p.m. and the next meeting will take place on Wednesday, March 23rd at 6:30 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Denise Schirmer, Secretary
Parks and Recreation Board

cc: Parks and Recreation Board
Superintendent of Parks and Recreation
Town Board
Town Clerk