

New Haven Board of Park Commissioners

Meeting No. 1449

Zoom Phone Conference Meeting

June 17,2020

New Haven, CT 06510

Present: President Belowsky, Commissioners Carl Babb, Kevin Walton, Hector Torres, Georgia Miller, Ernie Santiago
Absent: Ronnell Higgins
Staff: Acting Director William Carone

- I. **Minutes of Meeting #1448: Motion to approve Minutes of Meetings 1448, Motion Seconded, unanimously approved. Closed.**
- II. **Treasurer's Report:** Commissioner Belowsky suggested that the department should start spending money in the flower account to purchase flowers in the park. **Motion to approve Treasurer's Report, Motion Seconded, unanimously approved. Closed.**
- III. **Common Ground Pavilion Request:** Joel Tolman (35 Clark Street), a member of the Management Team for Common Ground, presented the commission a request to build an open sided pavilion on their campus. As part of their lease with the Parks Department, they are required to bring all requests to make improvements to the land to the commission. The project will be funded by the CBDG.

At this moment, there's a temporary shade structure and they would like to replace it with a large structure that would better benefit their programs. They brought the project out for bid and selected a CT vendor. Mr. Tolman presented the commission with photos and a site map of the current site and the prospective structure. The commission and Mr. Tolman went into discussion about the structure placement. The pavilion is 20x50 which will be able to accommodate a school field trip or high school and encourage social distance.

Commissioner Walton questioned the estimated time to complete the structure. Mr. Tolman responded that they hope for it be completed by August 28th or sooner. Commissioner Walton followed with a question about how many students does it accommodate underneath it once its completed. Mr. Tolman informed him that the current structure is about 20x40 and is only available for three seasons out of the year whereas the new structure will be accessible throughout the year and is larger in size. The new structure can accommodate a high school class, a school field trip, a NHPS afterschool program, and a large summer camp group.

Commissioner Belowsky questioned if the contractor has any minorities staff. Mr. Tolman informed him that he doesn't know the staffing of this bidder. He wasn't involved with the final decision making for the bid documents, but they did request for women owned and minority owned businesses.

Allen Appel (resides at 233-A Front Street), New Haven Independent Reporter, questioned if the funding is entirely from CDBG grant? Mr. Tolman informed that \$30,000

from CDBG grant and was lucky to get bids that fit into the allocation from CDBG.

Commissioner Walton questioned about Common Ground's relationship with New Haven community. Joel Tolman responded that it is a community non-profit as well as a charter high school. They serve high school students who live in New Haven and are from the West Rock neighborhood. A lot of their programs (i.e. summer camp) are tuition based that help subsidized their free programs (i.e. after school programs). They have 5000 NHPS students that come to their campus for field trips. They take produce grown from their urban farms to donate to local families includes some of their students. **Motion to approve building a pavilion at Common Ground, Motion Seconded, unanimously approved. Closed.**

IV. Temple Plaza Lighting: Elizabeth Bickley (from Town Green Special District) discussed with the commission a collaboration project between Town Green Special District, Parks Department, and Engineering Department to upgrade the overall lighting in Temple Plaza from LED and warm temperature for energy efficiency and to improve overall ambience which would be good for safety and night-time programming.

Ms. Bickley showed the commissioners the light poles they are looking to upgrade in the plaza. She mentioned that currently there are bollards in the park that are safety hazard in which young children were touching them and burning themselves because it would be too hot.

The funding will come from multiple sources like: Elm City Innovation Collaborative, a state grant through innovation places, Town Green is putting forth \$32,000 of their funds for materials to replace the bollards and Engineering is assisting to retro fit the existing light poles in the alleyway and along the driveway that comes off Temple Street. Commissioner Belowsky asked the total cost which is 75K. Commissioner Babb asked for clarification on who would be funding this project. Ms. Bickley responded that Town Green is paying half, there will be funding from some grants and Engineering will be assisting with some of it as well. Commissioner Babb questioned will it cost the Parks Department anything. Ms. Bickley informed him it will not. **Motion to approve upgrade the lighting at Temple Plaza. Motion Seconded, unanimously approved. Closed.**

V. LCI Proposed Kensington Land Swap : Commissioner Belowsky put a motion on the floor to approve the land swap with LCI for Kensington Street Park. The commission held lengthy discussion with Serena Neal-Sanjurjo from LCI and Kristin Anderson from LCI about the details of the land swap and how it will impact the park land.

Commissioner Miller questioned Ms. Neal-Sanjurjo about the uses or benefits of the acquired land if the land swap should take place. Ms. Neal-Sanjurjo responded that the land that they visit during their site visit the week prior was city property. The amount of properties on that land is doubled the amount of property for Kensington Park. The Community Builders (TCB) does not own any of this land. This is a City of New Haven swap with the Parks Department.

Commissioner Torres questioned what can be done with the land that they offering to trade with them. He mentioned that the land that they are trading with them is for park use but the land that the department would be receiving in the swap doesn't seem to have any use. Ms. Neal-Sanjurjo explained that they are in a different time in the city in the means of development. They are trying to utilize areas or bring areas back to transform them and

give them the opportunity for revitalization. The park is located between two of the projects (one is being demolished and one is being remodeled). They are trying to add an amenity that hasn't been done in the past. They are hopeful that the development is approved.

Commissioner Babb asked if there has been research done to see if there are other properties throughout the city that they could do the project at. Ms. Neal-Sanjurjo informed him they cannot because of its existing development and they are on Phase 2 of Kensington apartments project. They are trying to revitalize the existing development and expand on it to include additional units. They cannot take it on the other side of town because they are trying to transform that area.

Another speaker from LCI added that 3 out of 4 parcels in Kensington Square are not restricted as a park. Only one is. She went on to state if they are going to be doing a park for park restricted land swap, the Winchester Ave. park they are trying to put in as part of their development is twice the size of the land that is restricted for a park on Kensington St.

Commissioner Belowsky stated that the land on Winchester Ave doesn't have any trees, and he wanted to know the plans for the trees on Kensington Street? Speaker from LCI responded that while developing their site plan they worked closely with former Parks Director Rebecca Bombero to make sure that they did not lose tree canopy while building. They will be building where there are currently trees and adding in additional trees. There will also be another park that is privately owned by the community builders that they are building on Garden Street that could bring additional trees and amenities.

Ms. Neal-Sanjurjo added that they worked closely with the Parks' director at the time who helped identify opportunities for land swap, helped identify land, identify where it would be best suited, and she worked with us to put this all together. We had the Parks Department on board to work with us to answer all questions and negotiate with TCB the opportunity to build on Day Street park as well as other amenities.

Commissioner Belowsky questioned are they going to be cutting down the trees. They responded yes.

The commissioners and Serena Neal-Sanjurjo and Kristen Andersen went into a lengthy discussion about the purpose of the land swap and how there's a necessity for affordable housing in the city. Commissioner Santiago questioned them if without the land swap does this halt the project. Ms. Neal-Sanjurjo responded the project was funded to include the new development that they are proposing to go on the site. If denied, they are in jeopardy of losing their funding awarded to the state and other funders. Commissioner Santiago questioned how many units are affordable housing? Ms. Neal-Sanjurjo responded there will be 103. Commissioner Torres asked how many out of 103 are to go into that vacant lot. Ms. Neal-Sanjurjo told him that 15 units will go on the vacant site.

Kristen Andersen from LCI displayed a presentation that went over the benefits of the project. During the presentation, she shared with the commission that they received a lot of support from the community including letters of support. They have also been working closely with the New Haven Police Department. They have been a big advocate working with TCB to make sure all the plans we have are addressing community needs and enhancing the quality of life which includes this project.

Commissioner Belowsky made a statement about how the community members who are in support may not live there forever which would lead to new people joining the community who could have smaller children but there's no park present. Ms. Neal-Sanjurjo agreed with part of statement about the members not being there forever and added that there's a growing need for affordable housing units in the city. The units they are putting in are larger units geared towards families. Commissioner Belowsky questioned if another apartment building being built in the city offers affordable housing. Ms. Neal-Sanjurjo responded that they do not have affordable housing. Since those buildings are privately owned, the only thing the city can do is encourage developers to include affordable housing. Commissioner Babb questioned about the units that were demolished at Church Street South. Ms. Neal-Sanjurjo explained those units were privately owned.

Another speaker from LCI stated that they are not looking to take away a park from the area. Day Street Park will still exist and will have more amenities to make it more useable and accessible. They are going to bring the park to the front of the street.

Katherine Jacobs, Chief Landscape Architect, questioned LCI about their plan to develop the parcel and how much input or communication from Parks on reviewing the plans and giving feedback. Ms. Neal-Sanjurjo responded in the past they worked with the former Parks' Director and are currently working with the Acting Director and other members of the city to ensure we make a viable park. Commissioner Miller questioned why we can't build around the park. Ms. Neal-Sanjurjo responded there's limited space in terms of the existing Kensington site.

The commissioners voted on the motion to approve the land swap to Kensington Ave. 3-Yes and 3-No. Standstill.

The commissioners went into lengthy discussion after voting about the land swap and the benefits of it. Serena Neal-Sanjurjo placed emphasis on the necessity of affordable housing the city. Commissioner Belowsky stated that he appreciates that work they are trying to do but no one informed the commission of this project until 4 months ago when there's a lot of pressure on them. Ms. Neal-Sanjurjo informed him that they have attended the meeting back in fall of last year. She understood their position but this project has been well-planned and thought out and they cannot lose it. It's too important to the community and the city.

Commissioner Belowsky suggested cutting out the 14 units on the vacant lot and going on with the project. Kristen Andersen (from LCI) responded that they cannot eliminate the units because it is part of the investment of the buildings so they can have more opportunities for local development and home ownerships. They must make sure the residents already residing in these units are not being displaced. Also, some of the units are going to be donated to local community organization. They must make sure there's affordable housing units for all members in the community.

Motion tabled.

- VI. **Old Business:** Commissioner Babb requested an update on Bowen baseball field. Acting Director Bill Carone informed him that it has been delayed to the fall.

VII. New Business: Christopher Columbus Statue Removal – Wooster Square: Commissioner Torres questioned when it will be removed. Commissioner Belowsky responded that we must hire a company with a crane to remove the statue and then we can ask Knight of Columbus to take the statue in their museum. If that doesn't work, possibly store it in a building.

Commissioner Santiago questioned who will be funding the removal. Commissioner Belowsky responded yes, and it's costly. Commissioner Belowsky and members approved taking down the statue, he voiced it's in their park. Commissioner Belowsky stated that he rather pay to take it down then to have it destroyed by a group of people. Commissioner Torres asked if they can get a quote for the removal. Acting Director Carone stated that he will investigate it this week.

Acting Director Carone questioned appoint a committee to recommend its replacement from Historic Wooster society and maybe people from the community. Commissioner Belowsky agreed and asked to be placed on a committee with Commissioner Babb. He feels that the replacement should represent Italian heritage.

Amber Diaz (from Plymouth, CT) from WTNH-8 questioned Commissioner Belowsky is there a deadline of when you would like for the statue to be taken down? Commissioner Belowsky responded that we must contract somebody out and would like for it to be removed within the next 60 days. Amber Diaz followed up with a question about security and when will police presence at the park stop. Commissioner Belowsky stated that it is very costly to have police presence in the park, but they don't want the statue to be beheaded like in Boston. They will keep police presence in the park until it's removal.

- There has been an issue in which residents in the apartment next to the Ralph Walker Skating rink on State Street has been parking in the skating rink parking lot. Commissioner Belowsky suggested there be No Parking signs placed and get in contact with PD to enforce no parking and possibly ticketing the vehicles.

VIII. Director's Report:

- The basketball courts will open the week of July 6
- We will start issuing athletic field permits on the week of July 6
- We will start issuing permits based on CDC guidelines
- Summer Camp Registration opens on Monday
- Parks office will open on Monday
- Lighthouse Season has been busy with no issues

Meeting Adjourned: 6:45 p.m.

Next Meeting: July 15, 2020.

Location: Pardee Rose Garden & Zoom Meeting