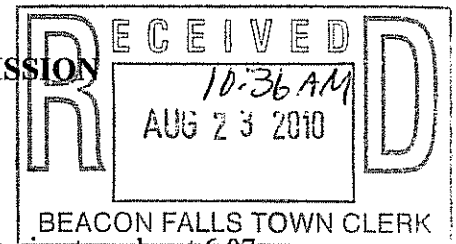


BEACON FALLS PARKS & RECREATION COMMISSION
PUBLIC HEARING MINUTES
AUGUST 16, 2010



Beacon Falls Parks & Recreation Chairperson Lisa Swanson called the Public Hearing to order at 6:07 PM.

The Call of the meeting was read by clerk, Erin Schwarz. The purpose of the public hearing was stated as follows:

“The purpose of the Hearing is to solicit suggestions, comments and recommendations from citizens, Municipal Departments, and other interested parties for consideration for the future funding of repairs, maintenance and improvements to Matthies Park.

The public is encouraged to attend to learn more about the repairs needed to Matthies Park and TPA Group plan for the future of the park.”

L. Swanson welcomed the public present and explained that the commission began working with park designers, TPA Group, over a year ago to come up with a plan for the future of Matthies Park. She stressed that the sluiceways and the pond are man-made and in need of great repair and now the commission is seeking the public’s input on how to proceed.

The meeting began with a PowerPoint presentation by commissioner Steven Ruhl outlining the history and man-made structure of the park, repairs currently needed to Matthies Park, and showing some of the improvements which the commission would like to see at the park, and the plans made by TPA Group. The price tag associated with the TPA plan for improvements is over \$1.9 million. (A portion of the TPA Master plan is currently available on the town website. The commission hopes to have the PowerPoint presentation available on the town website soon.)

Leonard D’Amico of 57 Maple Avenue inquired if the commission had any monies guaranteed towards the park from state and/or federal grant sources. L. Swanson confirmed that the town has no commitment of any funds from any state/federal agencies. No applications have been submitted because the park is for residents only and if the town accepts state or federal monies, the park must be open to the public. L. D’Amico explained that while Pent Road is an open park, Matthies Park is a different matter, due to the stipulation which was in Mr. Matthies original bequest, when he sold the park to the Town of Beacon Falls in 1972. Mr. D’Amico felt the TPA proposal was excellent and the town should proceed in a measured way with improvements to the park over time. He suggested that the town consider bonding the monies which would be needed to repair and improve Matthies, for the general good of the town and spread out the tax dollars over time. Opening the park to the public outside of Beacon Falls is not in line with Mr. Matthies bequest and Mr. D’Amico stated that he would be opposed to opening the park to non-residents.

Beverly Krenesky of 75 September Lane responded that she has always been concerned with what the town would be able to do with Matthies Park and agreed that the town needs help in developing this property. She explained that she has no problem with out of town people coming into the park and enjoying what it has to offer. Mr. Matthies bequest is to be respected, but it is not binding.

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Gerard Smith of 163 Lasky Road inquired whether repairs to the house on the island were included in the \$1.9 million figure. L. Swanson explained that the house of the island is not part of the plan and stabling the island, as well as repairing the house, would be very costly. No one, including TPA Group, knows what to do with the house. It contains hazardous materials and construction access to the house is a major problem. Mr. Smith also asked if the commission had a dollar figure for annual maintenance to the park, once this \$1.9 million investment was made. The commission does not have an estimate for maintenance, but will obtain one from TPA Group. Mr. G. Smith mentioned this is a very important figure to have, as continued maintenance will protect the \$1.9 million investment. He also asked the commission if they had thought of selling the park. The answer was no.

Bernie Moeller of Back Rimmon Road supports the need to abide by Mr. Matthies' bequest, without Mr. Matthies there would be no Matthies Park. Mr. Moeller would like to see the "for residents only" restriction enforced, the park better maintained and better secured.

Dave Scott of 26 Cedar Circle agreed with Mr. D'Amico's suggestion to use town funds and bonding to secure monies for Matthies Park. He felt this also met our moral obligation to Mr. Matthies, by keeping the park for residents only and extends the tax dollars needed for the park over time. He agreed that he would like to have a dollar figure for ongoing maintenance to the park, once improvements have been made.

Len D'Amico of Maple Avenue pointed out that in the past, there have been full-time employees working over at Matthies Park, maintaining, patrolling and controlling access.

Sal Falzone of 195 Lasky Road asked if the town had any grant monies collected for Matthies Park. The commission confirmed that there are not grant monies set aside for Matthies Park.

Liz Falzone of 195 Lasky Road believes that Matthies Park is a beautiful area and a vital part of Beacon Falls. It is a hidden secret and she would not want to turn it over to anybody. She believes that the volunteers in town, who love the park, do not want to open the park up to the general public and would be willing to give their time to help improve and repair the park. Mrs. Falzone inquired about the Yale School of Forestry study which took place many years ago and provided a study with recommendations for the park. Commissioner Joe Rodorigo had a copy of the study available and at that time, the results of that study confirmed that the park was in disrepair and the costs for fixing it were astronomical. Mrs. Falzone asked if there were any grants which would allow Beacon Falls to keep the park to ourselves. Joe Rodorigo explained that there is private foundation money available, but it is typically not for parks. Katharine Matthies Foundation has been very generous to us, by contributing approximately \$10,000 annually toward improvements to the park, such as the playground and pavilion area. In order to raise the dollars that are needed, we would need to seek state and federal grant monies, which means the park could not be restricted and must be open to the public.

Commissioner Joe Rodorigo explained that the town budget has \$4,000-\$5,000 annually to spend on the settling ponds. J. Rodorigo received estimates for cleaning just one course of the sluiceways for \$80,000. There are stressed bridges over the sluiceways which cost \$20,000 each to repair. The pump house water stopped working a decade ago and this is an \$8,000 repair.

L. D'Amico believes the residents of Beacon Falls would be in agreement if we tried a bond package for the repairs to the park. He feels the people of Beacon Falls want to keep the park and would support a plan of conservation development. He would rather pay more taxes over time and see the park repaired, while abiding by Mr. Matthies' wishes. He recommends giving the public the dollar figures and trying a

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municipal bond. Mr. D'Amico also spoke with Representative Len Greene on this issue and Mr. Greene is also opposed to opening the park to the public.

Harriet D'Amico of 57 Maple Avenue inquired about the safety of the pond, as a swimming beach is part of the TPA proposal. J. Rodorigo replied that the water has tested safe for swimming and the more the pond is utilized, the undesirable creatures, such as snapping turtles and snakes, would be deterred. In order to have a swimming beach, the pond would need dredging and we would need to create a grade for entry in the water.

Beverly Krenesky asked about the costs to clean the pond and J. Rodorigo explained that he has explored several options for dredging the pond and they are quite costly.

Liz Falzone asked the commission what they saw happening with the house on the island. J. Rodorigo explained that the house has asbestos and the chimney is falling off.

G. Smith stressed the importance of having a dollar figure for annual maintenance of the park.

L. D'Amico added that the work can be done gradually and a full time person dedicated to the park is an option.

First Selectman Susan Cable of 196 Blackberry Hill explained that the current budget has funds in the neighborhood of \$20,000 - \$30,000 for grounds maintenance to Matthies and all the other parks. Maintenance of the grounds at Pent Road takes money away from Matthies. The Board of Selectmen and Board of Finance deal with many groups which are passionate about their cause, such the firehouse and the library, and they are currently working on a bond package. Grants are one way to do this. Volunteers are wonderful, but can only do so much. Mrs. Cable has no problem adding repairs to Matthies Park to a larger bond package which would be 10-15 year package.

Selectman Mike Krenesky of 22 Maple Avenue added that at the recent canoeing event, he studied the wall surrounding the island, and explained that if the wall is 3 feet wide, a depth of about 1 ½ feet of this wall has collapsed all around the island. It is in serious need of repair. Selectman Krenesky added that the firehouse has requested \$1.2 million, there are failing streets in town which require millions of dollars of repair work and we are talking about a large bond package, as the town is far behind in maintenance.

First Selectman Susan Cable explained that the town currently has an excellent A bond rating, so it is a good time to bond. The public would need to get the vote out and the wording on the bond package must be addressed.

L. D'Amico agreed that other areas need to be addressed and if we are talking about a \$10 million package over 20 years, this amounts to \$500,000 annually. Every one of these projects is needed and they should be presented as a collaborative package.

Ryan Smith of 185 Burton Road agreed that bonding sounds like a good way to proceed. He asked the commission if any of the grants that were discussed were guaranteed. There are no guarantees that the town would receive any grants. Mr. Smith asked if the park were opened would it draw a large number of outsiders to town and if TPA could project the amount of traffic opening the park would bring to Beacon Falls. J. Rodorigo will request this information and advised that statewide park use is in decline.

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Selectmen Krenesky also mentioned that Toby's Pond is open to the public and grants can be applied for this property. Liz Falzone agreed that the existence of Toby's Pond does not change the need for money to be spent at Matthies Park.

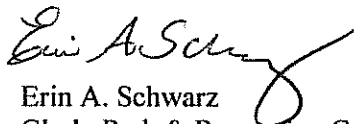
Ryan Smith asked about the timing of the grant process and J. Rodorigo explained that grants would take years to obtain in pieces and the TPA plan is intended to be a 10 year plan for the park. Mr. Smith concluded that costs would increase for these improvements over the next 10 years, so the overall price tag would be higher. The monies discussed would fix the sluiceways, the pump house and make some improvements, but not address the issue of the house.

The commission needs to come up with dollar amounts which would include repairs, improvements in the TPA plan, and estimates to repair the house and the island.

Dave Scott advised the commission not to wait too long for these repairs.

The hearing concluded at 7:30 PM.

Respectfully submitted,



Erin A. Schwarz
Clerk, Park & Recreation Commission

AUG 23 2010