

**TOWN OF OLD ORCHARD BEACH
TOWN COUNCIL WORKSHOP
WEDNESDAY, MARCH 19, 2008
TOWN HALL CHAMBERS**

A Town Council Workshop of the Old Orchard Beach Town Council was held on Wednesday, March 19, 2008 at 6:38 p.m.

Present were:

**Chairman James Long
Councilor Roxanne Frenette
Councilor Shawn O'Neill
Councilor Sharri MacDonald
Councilor Robin Dayton
Town Manager Stephen Gunty
Assistant Town Manager Louise Reid
Jessica Wagner – Planning Department**

The Council Chairman, James Long, opened the Workshop with an explanation as to why he called the Council workshop. First he presented some background information on what was done before in the decision of whether to sell the ballpark. We are all aware when the facilitator Alan Holt of Holt & Lachman Architects and Planners of Portland, Maine presented a summary of the historical listing of the ballpark and the unique opportunity for the citizens of Old Orchard Beach to choose the path that will be taken. That process developed through an open, transparent process that includes citizens, constituent groups, government, the private sector, and exports. He explained that there must be a defining of a commonly shared vision; agree on fundamental principles; establishment of guidelines for future actions; and the recognition and building on existing community assets. Chairman Long indicated that previously various constituencies with different points of views; including key supporters and skeptics; and working sessions were all open to the public, which made possible an outreach to ensure broad attendance and participation at the public meetings; identification of divergent points of view and logistic support. As everyone recalled there were the following mix of citizens:

- o A representative from the Chamber of Commerce**
- o A representative from the Ocean Park Association**
- o A representative from Crime Watch**
- o School representation of some kind – PTO, students, teachers, etc**
- o A representative from a Veteran's group – American Legion, VFW**
- o A representative from the Historical Society**
- o A representative from the retirement community (Pines, etc)**
- o A representative from housing for over 60**

- o A representative from BRASS
- o Old Orchard Alumni Association
- o Pines-senior housing
- o Parent Teacher's Association
- o Ocean Park Association
- o Crime Watch Committee
- o State Representatives
- o Former municipal officials
- o Salvation Army
- o School Board representation

During those meetings the citizens identified goals, issues, and potential direction that they wanted the Ballpark to go. Background, data, and analysis in graphic presentations; handout materials distributed and explained; and instructions to participants on the meeting agendas and process were carried through in the last process.

In order to move the process Councilor Long suggested that we ask again if there is an interest on behalf of the citizens to put the question to the voters and voters approve the question – is there any interest in any groups in doing something with the ballpark. I do not believe there is an interest in selling all the lands and we need to have the right to set aside property. If the voter's approved it and we asked for Request for Proposals it would then become a land use issue and that would go to the Planning Board. That would allow for significant public input. It is always acceptable to view the property as an asset and hold on to it. The Chairman indicated it was time to look at the Council's opinion on possible sale or development of the Ballpark.

Discussion continued among those in the audience sometimes marked by conflict over what residents have said they wanted for the property and what the Councilors say that the Town can afford. Several Councilors who support a vote said it would be a first step toward finding a private investor who could develop that land and work with the Town to construct some public amenities on the property. But many members of the public, some of whom took part in a long public planning exercise for the Ballpark two years ago, objected to what they saw as a rejection of that process. The effort, which involved hundreds of residents, failed to result in a plan of action but did reveal widespread support for building a community center and other amenities on the property. There was some anger expressed that the Council would consider this again when the will of the people had been given during the last referendum.

The Council members reminded the citizens attending that the Town faces a very tight financial circumstances and it would be impossible for the Town to build recreational amenities on its own. The Town is going into the coming year's budget cycle with one million dollars less in revenue. The suggestion has been made that the Town borrow five million dollars to begin addressing extensive public

infrastructure needs. Although the Council recognizes we have want lists, it isn't going to happen with the financial conditions facing us at this time. It was suggested that this was like a field of dreams.

Councilor O'Neill indicated that the Town's finances are too dire to even use part of the money from the sale of town-owned property to build a recreational facility. He said the Town needs revenue to replace its inadequate public safety building among other things. He indicated he had no desire to sell the Ballpark to fund a community center. He indicated there are far greater needs in the community.

Chairman Long indicated that it is a land use issue and he did not agree how it was handled before. We understand the needs and requests of the citizens but the Town cannot afford to have what is on a wish list. Councilor Frenette reminded those attending that the Ballpark has been a source of friction in Old Orchard since soon after the Town underwrote its construction in the early 1980's. It was a home for a ball team for four years until the team left in 1988 and local taxpayers were forced to pay the remainder of a \$2.3 million construction loan. The practical sense is that we can't do anything for the people and keeping all that property doesn't make sense. I don't say selling property for the sake of selling property. Something could be done with a piece of property that could bring something for the good of the people. We will probably have a difficult time selling it in the economic market today but we are in control and can make the decision what to do with it.

Councilors MacDonald and Councilor Dayton said they oppose putting the Ballpark up for sale. Councilor MacDonald indicated the Town should explore private funding sources that might be available to carry out residents' wishes for the property. Councilor Dayton indicated that Town should update its comprehensive plan and decide how the Ballpark fits into Old Orchard Beach's future before selling any land.

Councilor Dayton read from newspaper accounts of the previous process for consideration of the future of the ballpark. She reminded the group that many residents were too displeased with the plans to express a preference. She reminded those attending that the blueprints did not reflect the priorities they had expressed during the planning sessions. She indicated that many believed that the plans were an unbalanced representation of what residents envision for that parcel that is vacant. There was near unanimous support among residents for a community center at the all-day planning session and that was not evident in the plans. The general consensus of those attending those planning groups was not to sell the Ballpark so she expressed her questioning as to why this was happening at all.

Residents Linda Jenkins, Helen Whittiker, Mike Tousignant, Eileen McNally, Barbara Ultsch, Andrea Berlin, and Dru Laduke spoke on their support of their community center. The Council Chair indicated there is no money to building anything at the Ballpark at this point and even if this was approved in the June referendum, it would take at least 18 to 24 months for this to even become a

discussion tool. Chairman Dayton indicated that the number one issue is that this community wants a community center and she indicated she has not seen any effort to organize ourselves to look forward to that goal and get us down the path to get us to that point. She suggested that a committee needs to be set up to get us to that point. She reminded those attending that a lot of citizens have put a lot of effort into this and we should not move so quickly as to reject their suggestions.

Councilor Frenette suggested that we have spent all the money on Memorial Park. She indicated she does not want to waste time on something that is not doable and that if we could sell a small portion of it and come up with something that would benefit the entire community I believe this is the way to go. She reemphasized that she would like to see something in her lifetime dedicated to the citizens.

Councilor MacDonald mentioned a climate of mistrust and that what the citizens have been suggesting should not be disregarded. Councilor O'Neill suggested that the same of approximately 25 acres would assist in the financial bind the Town finds itself in with the infrastructure needs.

Chairman Long reemphasized again that we can't afford a want list. We have a two million project needed on West Grand, odor problems in Ocean Park that residents have complained about for years, so this field of dreams is just that. Jessica Wagner of the Planning Department encouraged more work firming up the master plan and that good work has started but needs to be continued.

The Chairman thanked all those who attended The meeting ended at 8:20 p.m.

Respectfully Submitted,

V. Louise Reid
Secretary to the Town Council

I, V. Louise Reid, Secretary to the Town Council of Old Orchard Beach, Maine, do hereby certify that the foregoing document consisting of four (4) pages is a true copy of the original Minutes of the Town Council Workshop of March 19, 2008.

V. Louise Reid