

Minutes of the Sound View Beach Commission Formation Committee
UNAPPROVED

Meeting held: Feb 22, 2010 at Town Hall, 7.30pm

Present:

Regular Members: Gail Fuller, Frank Pappalardo (Chairman), Michaelle Pearson (Secretary), David Griswold, Skip Sibley (ex officio), Bonnie Reemsynder (ex officio)

Absent: Russell Carlo (alternate), Harry Plaut, Joann Lishing (alternate).

Call to Order: 7.47pm

Acceptance of Minutes: Frank Pappalardo made a motion to accept the February 2nd minutes. MP seconded. Motion carried.

Public Comment: No members of the public in attendance.

7.49p Business

Discussion re: Crafting Mission Statement. Final version:

“Establish and preserve Sound View as a vibrant community asset to the town, while conserving the historic characteristics of the area. Promote and sponsor effective policy for health, safety, recreation, environmental and economic concerns within the area through planned development and use with a special emphasis on alliances with the arts community.” (Voting postponed on the Mission Statement until after David Griswold’s arrival.)

8.20 Discussion of options under review. Frank Pappalardo gave a recap of the work of this Committee to date, stating that we had reviewed and discarded the ideas of doing nothing, or forming an advisory committee, which could be established by the Board of Selectmen. The reasons for these decisions were that this Committee felt that doing nothing was not an option. Clearly some entity is needed to deal with the issues at Sound View. This Committee also agreed that forming an advisory committee would be ineffective, as it had been tried before, with little effect. The remaining options before us are to form a Commission or to establish a Special Services District (SSD).

Discussion of Commission (How formed, how empowered, etc.)

Ms. Pearson asked for clarification as to the process of forming and empowering a Commission. She mentioned the Tree Commission and

Conservation Commission as examples. Selectwoman Reemsnyder said that once the decision is made to form a Commission, legal help is available. There would be discussions with the Town's attorney, review of State statutes, etc. Selectman Sibley said that State Statutes would be helpful as to language, and that this Committee should also look at Commissions that already exist in Old Lyme as a guide to what can be accomplished. Selectman Sibley then asked what the Committee had gleaned from our research into other towns' beach commissions. Mr. Pappalardo, Ms. Fuller and Ms. Pearson each stated that in some cases, the beach was administered by a special committee or commission that was either part of Parks and Rec, or aligned with it as a sister entity. Ms. Pearson asked if it would be worthwhile to have this Commission work closely with Parks and Rec regarding the administration of the Public/ Town-owned beach areas. Selectman Sibley thought that was a good idea, and that we should give some thought to breaking out beach responsibility from Parks & Rec. He suggested that Don Bugbee could help focus this. The empowerment of this entity would be limited to town owned (public) assets.

Mr. Pappalardo said that we need to talk about on which type of entity will have the greatest potential to actually get things done? Which will be the easiest sell to residents? Which will have the most flexibility to endure, and to address changing issues. The entity needs to be established, then there should be a legal review process to determine how best to proceed with enforcement. If we go with a Commission, we must delineate all of the various objectives, then let legal review play out as far as enumerating the powers of the Commission. Selectman Sibley referred us to Linda Krause of CREPA to help with writing up a commission.

Selectwoman Reemsnyder said: The next step is budgeting. Some of the things that are being decided upon may cost money so you will need to have a budget as well.

Mr. Pappalardo then stated: The next option is an SSD, which comes with statutory state powers. The issue with that is that it requires a double majority vote to be established. The Town must vote to adopt it, and the residents of the proposed SSD must also vote to approve it. An SSD also has the power to tax, which may or may not be used. What an SSD can do, and a Commission can't, is apply for grants on its own. It can also hire and fire employees on its own. That may be advantageous to us if we want extra

security guards, etc., we wouldn't have to go through a Town budgeting process.

Ms. Pearson said one of things that made her most uncomfortable about the SSD was its power to tax. She feared that having an extra layer of government, with the authority to tax, was not only unwise, but would also be very difficult to get residents to vote for.

Selectman Sibley agreed, saying: I think the SSD is just too big a step at this time. What you have to look at is that historically, the beaches have always fallen under Parks and Rec, and that's not always the best fit. In the last few years they've become more involved with some of the beach projects, but really, except for Don Bugbee, there's been next to nothing. Don is a Town employee who looks after these things. This Committee should think about integrating with what's already in place and make it better. So what you want to think about is breaking out that beach responsibility from parks and Rec, which I sense they wouldn't mind, and then Don Bugbee could be an asset for you to help implement and manage this with the backing of a commission focused on the beach. If your guidelines and Mission Statement are broad enough, none of this should be a problem. The Commission would be only involved in Town-owned assets. So you really want to focus on the public assets, because that's where you can be the most effective.

Gail Fuller added: One of the things you have to resolve is the parking lot. Whether that remains under Parks and Rec or whether you have this commission, or a few members of this commission working with Parks and Rec...I'm not sure you can separate it out, because the parking lot has such a huge impact on the area, as well as generating revenue for the Town.

Selectman Sibley: The parking lot is under the purview of the Selectmen, and I think that to try to change that would just raise too many red flags. We can work all of that out. The parking lot is such a complex issue...it's too radical. There should be input, of course, but it should be brought before the Selectmen.

Ms. Pearson: The SSD plan assumed that the SSD would be in charge of the parking lot, and my feeling was that would be a very hard sell. And without the revenue from that, the SSD would only be left with taxing to raise revenue.

Mr. Pappalardo stated that one of the reasons he favored the SSD was that he keeps hearing from beach residents that a committee or a commission would be “just another ploy by the Selectmen to keep everyone at the beach quiet for a few years,” and that an SSD would be a chance to accomplish something on a larger scale.

Selectwoman Reemsnyder: I think the biggest issue is the parking lot. It’s a dump. If someone put something like that, to generate money, in my neighborhood, and didn’t take care of it, and took all the money to spend somewhere else, I think I’d be pretty upset. I would want to have a little bit of control and influence over what went on there. It needs to be cleaned up. I agree that it will be a battle to fight over the parking lot, but I think it’s worth fighting for, because it should be beautified.

Selectman Sibley: I think the parking lot is one issue, but there are a lot of other issues such as drunken people, illegally parked cars, swim lines, tractors on the beach...there are a lot more issues a Commission could deal with before we tackle the parking lot.

FP: But there’s nothing that would prevent the Commission from managing the parking lot, through Parks and Rec. That would allow residents to have an interest in how it’s run, but still create revenue for the Town.

Selectman Sibley explained that Don Bugbee is currently in charge of the buoys, swim lines, lifeguards, etc. Discussion ensued as to why there is a lifeguard at White Sands and not at Sound View. Ms. Pearson stated that most of the other beaches we surveyed, and all of the ones which allowed alcohol, had lifeguards. Ms. Fuller stated that there used to be a lifeguard at Sound View.

Mr. Pappalardo suggested we return to the topic at hand, stating: The Commission could create the Standard Operating Protocol and overall management for the parking lot in conjunction with Parks and Rec, and Parks and Rec could continue to operate it. That would give us everything we need...the residents would have input into how the lot is managed, and the town would keep control and maintain revenue.

Selectman Sibley suggested that we have this discussion directly with Don Bugbee.

Selectwoman Reemsnyder stated that she thought adopting an SSD would take a tremendous amount of work from a committee much bigger than this one. She stated: While it would be incredible for the area, and I think that the area deserves a big solution, this would be impossible to get passed in Old Lyme. Selectwoman Reemsnyder advised us that a commission would have the ability to assess the situation and propose solutions, along with presenting a budget proposal to the Selectmen. A portion of the parking lot funds could certainly be used to improve the area,

David Griswold disagreed, stating: "I would strongly prefer an SSD. I think a Commission is a mistake. I think it's the same old stuff. If you talk about open space, 77% of the people in this town support open space. Most of the people in this town could care less about Sound View. When you get from Main Street, North, nobody cares about Sound View. Sound View is unique. It's different from all the other beaches. I hear people say, why does Sound View have so much trouble? Well, because at Sound View you have public, private, residential and commercial all cobbled together. It's a unique situation, and it should be a unique district, governed as such. I think we should try something different. The town and Sound View have been embattled for what, 50 years, 100 years? I hear it from both sides...the people at the beaches say the Town is indifferent. That the Town takes out money and they don't do anything. And I hear the other side too, which says, you can't satisfy those people. They are hopeless down there. They can't agree amongst themselves. And no matter what we do, it's always a mistake, it's always, it's coming up again this Spring...we have to deal with Sound View, and then, September's coming and they'll go home. That's the attitude of a lot of people. If you have a separate district, then Sound View residents can govern themselves. Let them take some more responsibility. That's what an SSD could do. Of course, you need good people to do it. I think we should try a different approach.

Ms. Pearson: I think that trying to integrate within Parks and Rec could be key, because if everyone thinks of Sound View as a marginalized area...that marginalized area is less than two streets. There are many well-kept homes and cottages in Sound View that are doing just fine, thank you. The blighted portion of Sound View is a tiny commercial district established before the advent of the automobile, when people would take the train to Sound View station and they needed a place to mail their letters and buy groceries and beach essentials. That commercial district had outlived its usefulness as soon

as people started driving down instead of taking the train. The only thing that kept it going was Prohibition. And that's why it became this rowdy commercial area. But an SSD focuses on an urban renewal type plan, which seems to be overkill for such a small area. What Sound View really needs is a series of small fixes: enforcement of quality of life violations, such as public drunkenness and driving on the beach, and deal with the few blighted properties through a blight ordinance. Then let market forces take hold. Offer tax incentives. If we want to attract the Arts, offer a tax benefit for artist/ artisan live-work housing or galleries. No one has ever tried tax incentives on Hartford Avenue. It's a small area, and the SSD is a big solution. Once the area is cleaned up, development will happen. The last thing we need is another Sound View Development Corp.

Mr. Griswold: I don't think it will be that hard to sell. If you tell the Town people, we're going to turn over a portion of Sound View to this SSD, I bet the town would say go ahead.

Mr. Pappalardo: A Commission would be an easier sell. An SSD might be a better solution, but I think that we could get people to vote for a Commission well before they're ready for an SSD. If a Commission could maintain the powers necessary and have authority similar to an SSD, and that could be part of the commission's charter, we could accomplish a lot, but we really can't speculate until we are under legal review. We don't always know what's going to happen down the road, so one of the issues is longevity. At our next meeting hopefully we'll have the data to vote for a Commission vs. an SSD.

9.20 Ms. Pearson read the Mission Statement, and moved to accept it as read. David Griswold seconded. Motion Carried.

9.23 Mr. Pappalardo stated that our next meeting would be March 22 at Town Hall at 7.30 pm. The following meeting is tentatively scheduled for April 26. Location TBD.

9.24 Ms. Fuller moved to adjourn. Mr. Pappalardo seconded. Meeting adjourned at 9.25pm.

Respectfully Submitted,
M. Pearson, Secretary