

MINUTES
Committee of The Whole Meeting
Darien City Council and the Darien Park District Board of Commissioners
June 5, 2025 – 7:00 p.m.
Darien Police Department Training Room

The meeting was called to order at 7:00 p.m. City council members present were Alderpersons: Mary Sullivan, Thomas Belczak, Joseph Kenny, Gerry Leganski, Ralph Stompanato, and Ted Schauer. Park District Commissioners present were Ray Jablonski, Luanne Spiros, Cathy Marchese, Frank Noverini, and Steve Shanks. Others present were Amy Cotter, facilitator and Lisa Klemm, recorder.

Amy Cotter explained the intention of the meeting – public conversation between the two entities. The overall intention is information sharing, learning a little bit from both sides, broadening perspectives and building upon this relationship. No problem solving, more suggestions and feedback.

Discussion of City of Darien Proposed Long Term Objectives/Goals:

Alderwoman Sullivan summarized what has been happening in an effort to bring everyone together – and better foster our relationship with the park district.

- Develop Better Communication between the two entities – both, Darien Park District Commissioners and City Council members, agree that strong communication is the key to be successful.
- Develop a Sense of Camaraderie between the two entities – important in getting to know one another. The two entities work similarly but very differently in the way they govern and work as elected officials.
- Darien Park District Commissioners and City Council members have shared values – to provide the best possible services and programs to the Darien residents and tax payers
- Work collectively with service groups; better utilization of the calendar
- Email blasts, social media, and calendar. Maybe DPD can tap into these resources. According to DPD, there was back and forth on submitting calendar events to the city and has since been resolved.
- This meeting between the two groups stemmed from the city's strategic plan. It is important to note, that while a comment(s) made from one council member regarding the park district was not necessarily echoed by the entire council. DPD did interject that prior to making comments facts should be vetted. While the past cannot be changed, the groups need to move forward!

Commissioner Jablonski discussed the Darien Park District's mission, philosophy, method of governance, method of planning, and method of operations.

The DPD's mission is to provide the highest quality recreation programs, facilities, and parks that meet the needs and enrich the lives of all Darien Park District residents.

The shortened version of the DPD's philosophy is to carry out the mission:

- Within financial limitations
- In the most efficient manner serving all residents equally
- Without significantly duplicating efforts of other agencies
- Focus on environmental sustainability

Darien Park District does not want to compete with other groups. Example provided: park district switched from concerts in the park to movies in the park once city started concerts on the green. Darien Park District wants to ensure all events are successful so there is minimal overlap.

Discussed improvement projects from the past and the future of Westwood Park OSLAD renovation project that will begin in spring 2026. OSLAD stands for open lands acquisition and development grant. DPD received a \$600,000 grant from the state – phase one will create an entertainment pavilion in left center field. Phases 2 and 3 will focus more on the younger children.

DPD produces three brochures a year. The 2025 summer program guide includes the City of Darien's concerts, DarienFest, and National Night Out (NNO). DPD tries to include all not for profits if received in a timely manner.

Discussed the city calendar and what is and is not allowed. Should the monthly park district's meetings be on the calendar?

Darien Park District's budget is 9 million. DPD has a 10-year capital project plan and an asset replacement program. Park improvements, facility upgrades and maintenance equipment are reviewed annually during the budget process. The Sportsplex is not supported directly by tax dollars but by revenue generated from Sportsplex. DPD maintains affordability of programs and services.

The grand opening of Gardenview Park recently took place. There was discussion of SEASPAR and how Darien Park District is a founding member. Many programs are held at the park district facilities including the SEASPAR Eagles adult program (Sportsplex). Facilitator Cotter spoke of her own experience and appreciates all that SEASPAR offers.

Alderwoman Sullivan asked if there is a staff member dedicated to social media - communications. Answer is no, but it is needed and one staff member is working on it. City offered cable station, Direct Connect and calendar.

DPD noted that moving forward there are several things that they need to look at. Communication is one - communication out to the community. The little engine that could analogy was used.. Will be working the rest of this year to identify areas that need to focus on. Not necessarily a full-blown strategic plan. In the meantime, DPD will identify how to utilize what is available.

Alderwoman Sullivan discussed the City of Darien's mission, philosophy, method of governance, method of planning and method of operations.

Alderwoman Sullivan discussed the strategic plan developed last year and that it is a 4-5 year plan. This was the first time the city has developed a strategic plan.

The City's vision statement - a vibrant, caring, nice place to live offering the highest quality, innovative services and amenities to ensure the community feels engaged and welcome.

The City's mission statement - provides safe, efficient, quality governmental services while improving the lives of Darien's residents, business, and visitors.

Alderwoman Sullivan talked about the top-notch services the city provides to the taxpayers; being fiscally sound. We have road programs, used to have drain and ditch programs (all completed) all with 10-year increments. Implemented a grinding program in areas where replacement could be avoided. Fortunate to have amazing staff in place.

Maintaining transparency, safety, and best police force possible and stewardship. Mayor Marchese has made it a mission to work collectively with all of the stakeholders of the community. He is a service man himself and wants to bring service groups together and work together.

The city's budget process mirrors the park district as well as the same fiscal year. Department heads work with the mayor and city administrator to prepare budget. The budget is reviewed by council and approved each April. The city is strapped with a growing police pension. It has grown significantly and real estate tax dollars no longer cover it. Alderman Schauer touched on the growing police pension. Alderwoman Sullivan then brought up the issues if there are changes to the Tier I and Tier 2. That would further affect the city.

The city does not want to compete with other city entities. We are one. Our competition is the neighboring communities (Burr Ridge, Downers Grove, and Lemont) with street fests, farmer's markets, concerts, etc. We want to make sure we give our residents a value add and bring the community together. That is the City's goal.

The Darien Business Alliance was established with the intent of all working together and working closely with the Darien Park District.

The city is willing to help the Darien Park District with whatever it needs, regardless if it is an intergovernmental agreement. The city asked if there was one thing that the city could do for the park district what is it – Jablonski responded that he would like the city to praise in public and criticize in private. Facilitator asked on the flip. City's response was to really work together on issues related to the parks. Share information on what is happening, events, etc. so we could share with our ward whether it is an equipment replacement at the park or a sign that needs to be posted in the parks.

The topic of motorized bikes/scooters racing through the streets and parks was discussed. Alderwoman Sullivan stated that an ordinance is being drafted. Jablonski requested a copy upon completion and would modify for the DPD.

Important to continue conversations – action item on motorized vehicles.

Who are the “customers” of the City of Darien and the Darien Park District:

The City of Darien and the Darien Park District customers are not a perfect overlay. The common customers are roughly 95% to 98% Taxpayers/Residents that are common to both entities. Some unincorporated areas are in the Darien Park District but not the City of Darien. Some are in the City of Darien but not in the Darien Park District. An example is the Senior Living Facility on Plainfield Road just east of Lemont Road. They are in the Brookeridge Park District.

Uncommon Customers:

- Darien Park District – Non-Resident that use the parks and or sign up for programs and events with the Darien Park District. This is especially true with the Darien Sportsplex.
- City of Darien – residents, businesses and visitors. Works with outside entities. Works with other entities outside of Darien (county roads, state roads, etc)

Both entities continue to work together in the following areas:

- Inter-governmental agreements such as for use of road salt and gasoline.
- Inter-governmental agreements for use of Westwood Park for Concerts, DarienFest, National Night Out and Octoberfest.
- Darien Park District has participated with the City for joint bidding on asphalt work such as the Sportsplex parking lot.
- Requests for use of equipment such as the City loaning its wood chipper to the Park District. This is handled at the staff level.
- Requests by the city to use Park District picnic tables.

Promotion - communication if there is a way the city can leverage the resources they have with the park district to promote one another. This would serve everybody well. Focus on the great things that are being done.

- If these efforts are successful, why are they successful and how can we build on these efforts with other programs and activities.
- If these efforts are not successful, what are the obstacles affecting their success and how can we overcome those obstacles?

Service mentality – most want to do this because they genuinely care. It makes a difference. Talked about the move from Carriage Greens to the “park”, makes it more community orientated.

Working Relationship between the City and the Park District

- Describe how you would like to see the working relationship between the City of Darien and the Darien Park District flourish?
 - How can we better communicate together?
 - Darien Action Committee – Purpose and Frequency – concern that the meeting on 6/14 only included city items. Who puts the agenda together?
 - One person from each group as a “point” person for communications
 - Do we want to establish a small working group of no more than two elected officials from each organization meet to discuss activities and planning? TBD
 - Do we want to have an annual or semi-annual meeting of our two groups to discuss opportunities for enhanced long-term collaboration? Minimally, an annual meeting; this should be discussed further.

Assessment:

- How will we measure the success of our efforts?

Next Steps: One point person was designated from each group to review minutes. Alderwoman Sullivan and Commissioner Jablonski will be the designees.

How often should this group meet (annually, quarterly, etc) – TBD

Public Comment: n/a

Closure: Both groups provided great conversation, shared values, and agree that it is important to communicate and work together to achieve common goals.

The meeting adjourned at 9:20 p.m.

Mayor

City Clerk