

**SPECIAL MEETING MINUTES
COLUMBIA BOARD OF SELECTMEN
PUBLIC HEARING**

Tuesday, April 4, 2017 – 6:30 pm.
Yeomans Hall
323 Route 87, Columbia CT.

Members Present: First Selectman Carmen Vance; Deputy Selectman Steven Everett; Selectman William O'Brien; Selectman Robert Hellstrom; Selectman Robert Bogue.

Also Present: Rec Director Marc Volza; Michael Wheeler; *The Chronicle* reporter Ekaterine Tchelidze; Lake Association President Mary Roickle; Marine Patrol Director Robert Powell; Lake Management Advisory Committee (LMAC) Members: Karl Then; Henry Beck; Dan O'Neill; Steve Harrington; De Ramm; Steve Adil; Gary Littlefield; Nikki Keldsen; Todd Shepard; Steve Piro; Sharon Smith; Judy Ortiz; Mike Lester; Ann Dunnack; Millie Ramsey; Tom Currier; David and Karen Vanderbilt; Emma Nyarady; and numerous other citizens.

1. CALL TO ORDER: C. Vance called the public hearing to order at 6:32 pm.

2. NEW BUSINESS:

2.1 Public Hearing on amendment to Ordinance #6-4 entitled "Activities and Conduct at the Columbia Town Beach and Penalties for Violation of Such":

C. Vance spoke briefly about the proposed amendment to existing ordinance #6-4. She explained that purpose of the amendment and implementation of a gate monitoring system to inspect watercrafts entering Columbia Lake is to try and eliminate invasive species from getting into the Lake. C. Vance turned the floor over to Lake Association President M. Roickle who discussed the importance of keeping invasive species out of the lake. She explained that once invasive species get into the lake, there is no way to get rid of them. The only thing that can be done is try our best to keep them at bay. M. Roickle stated that statistics previously stated that 1/3 of lakes in Connecticut were infested with invasives has now grown to 60%. She stated that Mono Pond, Coventry Lake and Roger's Lake are just a few of the surrounding lakes that carry invasive species. This is extremely close to Columbia Lake and we must do everything in our power to prevent infestation. M Roickle stated that the town implemented a Nutrient Allocation Plan years ago, now it is time to focus on the invasive species problem. M. Roickle explained that the number one way to prevent the issue of invasive species is to be certain that we humans do not have aquatic hitchhikers on our watercraft when launching into the lake.

M. Roickle stated that economically, the cost to treat the invasive species if they get into the lake is extremely high and can range anywhere between \$20,000 and hundreds of thousands of dollars annually. She explained that they spread rapidly and could impact recreational use such as fishing, swimming, boating, etc.

Once they are in, ecologically they cannot be removed. M. Roickle stated that we must be diligent in how we monitor and inspect boats for hitchhikers, and we must educate as many people as we can on this. M. Roickle expressed, "An ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure."

R. Powell spoke about the proposed gate monitoring and scheduling. He explained that every boat will be inspected by a Marine Patrol Officer. This includes motorized and non-motorized watercrafts. The individual inspecting the watercrafts will also be checking beach passes. The first year this new policy should be considered a work in progress. There will be someone to monitor gate at all times when it is open. R. Powell stated that the schedule at this time is as follows: (see attached) He explained that if the schedule needs adjusting then it will be looked into and can be changed.

C. Vance expressed again that this is a work in progress and if certain areas need improvement, then LMAC and the BOS will revisit these areas. C. Vance then opened up the hearing for public input.

Steve Piro of Laurel Lane expressed his concern with the schedule because he enjoys fishing early in the morning and the current schedule doesn't allow launching until 7 am. C. Vance explained that this issue has been a point of discussion and that LMAC and the BOS are working on finding a solution. S. Piro suggested that perhaps a way to remedy this would be to see that individuals receive the proper training and certification, and then based on the honor system, are granted the ability to unlock the gate off hours. R. Bogue said his assumption is that most boats on the lake are Columbia residents and that invasive species would be brought in from other towns. R. Powell stated if the boat is staying ON the lake it doesn't need to be inspected. If it leaves the lake, it must be inspected before going back in. i.e. if a watercraft is in Mono Pond right here in town, then gets launched into the lake. R. Powell said they have to assume that everyone must be inspected. All it takes is one boat with invasive species on it to infest the lake. S. Piro feels that this is why they must be educated first. R. Powell said even if they are educated, there will be fisherman and other lake goers that will not wash the boats.

Sharon Smith of Erdoni Road stated that she has been on the Marine Patrol for several years. She stated she is more concerned with kayakers bringing the invasive species into the lake, not so much the fishermen. She did suggest that moorings for kayaks are available if a resident chooses to do so. This way the watercraft will remain in the lake and will not require inspection every time it is launched.

Steve Adil of Szegda Road stated that many years ago, there was a gate at the lake. He feels the hours being offered are very generous, however when there are restrictions put in place, they are not necessarily abided by. He recalls issues regarding invasive species in 1986, but since then there have not been issues to his knowledge. He suggested perhaps spending a year inspecting boats before implementing this new procedure.

Millie Ramsey of Hunt Road asked how this will impact early morning kayakers. She had believed that these invasive species were carried on motor boats by getting caught in propellers, etc. not so much on kayaks. H. Beck explained that kayaks will be treated the same way as all other boats and must follow the schedule for inspection. He stated that there is proof that invasive species have been passed along by kayaks. M. Ramsey asked how the same standards will be monitored for those who live on the lake and may launch of their personal docks. H. Beck stated that nothing can be guaranteed 100%, but it does state that owners on the lake MUST do inspections. He stated that it is thought that individuals who own property on the lake have more of a vested right to see that the lake stays clear and are more likely to honor these rules. M. Ramsey stated that those that do not live on the lake are just as invested as those who do. M. Ramsey asked if they will be checking beach passes at 7 am. There are no lifeguards at 7 am. Will they not be able to use the beach? R. Powell stated that the beach passes will coincide with the hours of the lifeguards.

Dan O'Neill of Route 87 likes the idea of educating individuals that was suggested by Steve Piro. He feels that it is inevitable that there will be a way to get around that gate no matter what. This is why he feels that it so important to get gate in place to begin monitoring things as soon as possible.

Dr. Robert Kortmann of Ecosystem Consulting Service explained that he has been working with Columbia since the mid 1980's. He expressed that he feels that this is a superbly put together plan to help the prevention of invasive species in Columbia Lake. He discussed environmental threats relating to fanwort, hydrilla or waterweed, milfoil, curly leaf pondweed. Economic threats to lakefront property once algae blooms and invasive species become an issue will result in "for sale signs going up, and real estate values going down." Once the lake is contaminated, treatments do not stop and can be extremely expensive. The best safeguard if they do get in is to know what to look for and catch it as early as possible. Dr. Kortmann expressed that he is strongly in favor of passing the amended ordinance, and is particularly happy about the education portion. He stated that perhaps down the road, if someone gets certified and receives proper training the opportunity to launch his/her watercraft off hours may be considered. Dr. Kortmann also spoke in favor of vessel stickers, which would be affixed to a watercraft to show that the user of the watercraft has been properly trained. S. Adil stated that theoretically, Columbia has the ability to empty our lake and asked if this would remedy the issue. Dr. Kortmann stated no, it would not be a

cure. He explained that it would not kill hydrilla and it would wreak havoc with the habitat.

Diane Wishnafski of Erdoni Road expressed how happy she is that the town is being “proactive not reactive” and thanked everyone involved in this. She asked what the plan is for those who launch off the other beach on Erdoni Road. C. Vance said technically, they are not supposed to be doing so. She explained that this area will be closely watched and patrolled by the Resident State Trooper.

Bill Preuss of Route 87 said that he is thankful for all the work going into this. However, being a kayak owner, he asked if he will be required to bring his kayak to be inspected every time he wants to put it in the water. He explained that it is very difficult to transport. H. Beck referred to section 2.4 of proposed ordinance regarding “Launches on private property” B. Preuss acknowledged this. He asked if registrations will be checked. R. Powell stated a complete boat inspection will take place prior to launching. W. Preuss expressed that he feels the limited hours on the schedule may make it difficult to get a boat in the water, especially for those who will be required to transport. B. Preuss asked what is the cost of this implementation is. C. Vance stated that \$20,000 has been budgeted for this upcoming season. B. Preuss expressed concern, being such a challenging budget year.

Paul Wishnafski of Erdoni Road stated that he does not feel that \$20,000 is a large dollar figure for the price of the lake.

Gary Littlefield of Pine Street asked what the consequences will be if someone circumvents the gate and gets their watercraft in the lake, and it carries invasive species. H. Beck stated that per a state ordinance they will be faced with a \$100 fee, plus a \$50 discretionary fee from the town. He explained they will also get a visit from the Resident Trooper.

Bill Lithe of Erdoni Road asked how these rules will be addressed with renters. R. Powell stated that rules and procedures can be placed on rental properties. H. Beck said that he feels those landlords will be diligent in terms of explaining this to renters. R. Powell stated that procedures and rules may be posted at rental properties also.

Neil Swenson of Route 87 stated he rents a house in Maine and doesn't feel that renters always follow the rules. This is all about education and people who live on the lake seem to have an honor system with 100% access. Those who aren't on the lake are cut off at the gate. N. Swenson suggested focusing more on keyless entry for those who have been educated and certified. He explained that he has not heard what the revenue streams will be and that \$20,000 doesn't seem feasible considering the hours that are being proposed. C. Vance stated we considered charging for the safety inspections, but at this time the cost for both the safety inspections and inspections for invasive “hitchhikers” will be paid through taxes.

S. Smith stated she feels that this needs to be looked at more as a safety issue, and for the purpose of prevention and protection. She truly feels kayaks are a big problem in terms of spreading invasive species. It is so important to inspect all watercrafts and educate all users. S. Smith stated that in terms of the budget, she feels that this cost may not be as significant as it seems considering the gate monitor will now be responsible for checking beach passes.

Karl Then of Upper Woodland Terrace stated he has been on this lake every summer for many, many years. There have ALWAYS been rules on this lake. He stated that invasive species are a nightmare and there are a lot of people who go on our lake that do not belong there. He feels that if someone is from Columbia, there should be no issues placing a sticker on your kayak or canoe to prove this. When people have guests over, they bring their kayaks and go out on the lake. Last summer he saw seven (7) kayaks launched that were “guests” of a resident who lives on the lake. K. Then stressed the negative impact invasive species would have on property values on and around the lake.

Ann Dunnack of Lake Road explained she is the Chair of the Conservation and Ag Committee and that they are charged with protecting all natural resources in town. She stated that the Commission applauds all the hard work that has been done on this; the research, budgeting, etc. With this new system in place, we will be provided with statistics which will enable us to monitor what is going on, and to what extent.

Letters of support to this ordinance change were submitted from the following individuals: Sharon Ladd, Martha Carter, Mike Matthews, Gary and Shirley King, Donna William, Tom Hartzog, Linda Hopper, Mary Mayer, Ann and Robert Hudd, Phyllis Dunn, Diane and Paul Wishnafski.

No letters opposed to this ordinance amendment were received.

C. Vance asked if there were any further questions or comments. Hearing none, the Public Hearing was adjourned.

3. ADJOURNMENT: The Public Hearing adjourned at 7:47 pm.