

Daniel V. Jerram  
First Selectman



Town Hall  
530 Main Street  
Post Office Box 316  
New Hartford, CT  
06057

Alison Murdock, Chairman  
New Hartford Conservation Commission  
Town Hall  
530 Main Street  
New Hartford, CT 06057

January 17, 2012

Re: Letter dated October 28, 2011 (received November 16, 2011)

Dear Alison & Conservation Commission Members:

I would like to catch up with you regarding the letter the Conservation Commission sent to me regarding Brodie Park South. There are several misconceptions contained within the letter that I would like to address.

As I read the letter, it implies that the Conservation Commission has legal authority for “stewardship” over Brodie Park South. Unfortunately, this is not the case. While there was a task force implemented to discuss care of town properties in 2006, no formal action was taken by the then Board of Selectman. The only document that outlines the official roles and responsibilities of the Conservation Commission is the existing town ordinance. To that end, the Conservation Commission remains an “advisory” board tasked with conducting research and making recommendations. The official “stewards” of all town owned land are the Board of Selectman and Recreation Commission. Operational implementation goes to the First Selectman who guides the paid town forces (or contractors as the case may be) who maintain our properties. The Town greatly appreciates the Conservation Commission’s efforts in facilitating volunteers who perform occasional tasks (i.e. Earth Day clean-up, trail maintenance, etc.), but it would be inappropriate to have a volunteer commission oversee paid town forces or contractors.

Regarding mowing and the recreational use of Brodie Park South, there have been no significant changes to mowing patterns/practices over the past two years since I’ve been First Selectman. The Town has successfully pruned some trees to remove non-native invasive vines that were choking the trees. Most, if not all, of the pruned conifers have been saved. No trees have been cut down; although a few may be beyond salvage (information pertaining to tree maintenance was documented in a letter from me dated August 22, 2011 and is still posted on the town’s website). With regard to recreational sports activities within the park, Brodie Park South has been used for sports for many years. Football has been playing there since 2005 (long before I was elected). Both the Planning & Zoning Commission and Recreation Commission have no objection to use of the park in this fashion as “parks” have been a permitted use in the R2 zone for many years. There have been some concerns raised relating to the use of temporary lighting and insufficient parking, but not the overall use of the fields in their current condition for sports practices (Note - any new improvements would require Planning & Zoning / Inland Wetlands approval, but I have not proposed any new improvements for Brodie Park South).

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I recognize that a few neighboring families and some other interested individuals would like to see Youth Football move to another location. However, development of new sports fields takes a long, long time, and a substantial amount of money. We are actively considering alternative locations for possible development, but this again takes time. I have documented the “growing pains” we are experiencing due to the growth of our recreational sports programs at several meetings of various Boards and Commissions. As our town continues to grow, so do the needs of its people.

There is no perfect solution as to where football practice can be held. Football currently occupies roughly 2.5 acres of the fields at Brodie Park South. While Brown’s Corner has the size, it is utilized by other sports organizations. There is no other town owned property that offers a field of this size (Antolini and New Hartford Elementary have fields of 1.4 acres each). Brodie Park South containing over 150 acres offers ample space and opportunities for all to enjoy. Hikers, bikers, bird watchers, dog walkers, and athletes should all be able coexist in this town park until such a time as additional fields come online.

I agree that the Brodie Park South Task Force has veered from its original charge. My understanding was that the group was formed to make a recommendation to the Recreation Commission for possible future uses of the entire 150 acres (as viewed by the stakeholders). The charge given (but never formally recorded in their minutes) did not include finding new sports fields. Unfortunately, I think the study group now finds itself in an impossible position with several individuals exhibiting predetermined opinions, before the study group could complete its recommendation. One representative/stakeholder (the seniors) has left the group entirely. The Recreation Commission/Department has no funding or approval from the Board of Selectman to either negotiate on behalf of the Town or contract to purchase land for new fields. While I continue to work on a compromise that could ultimately shift Youth Football to Antolini (that will require taxpayer funds for improvements, zoning approval and time to complete work), this move would dislocate Youth Soccer who would then need a place to play; with Brodie Park, Brodie Park South and New Hartford Elementary School remaining viable alternatives.

Regarding the Conservation Commission’s request to draft an interim stewardship plan, I would be happy to meet with you to discuss what type of recommendations for changes from current practice you envision. As for defining roles and responsibilities for care and maintenance, existing employment practice will remain in place with town forces continuing to be guided by the First Selectman.

Please contact Christine Hayward at your earliest convenience to set the time for a meeting.

Sincerely,

  
Daniel V. Jerram  
First Selectman

CC: Board of Selectmen

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New Hartford Conservation Commission  
"Stewarding and celebrating our natural resources."

The Honorable Daniel Jerram  
Town Of New Hartford  
530 Main St.  
New Hartford, CT 06057

October 28, 2011

Rec'd  
11/16/11  
CJH

Dear Mr. Jerram,

The Conservation Commission is concerned about recent activity at Brodie Park South that impacts the park's ecosystem and natural resources. We refer specifically to changes in the mowing of the meadow areas, the trimming and cutting of trees, and the intensive use of the meadow area for playing fields resulting in heavy traffic, loud noise and lights after dark.

As you know, the Conservation Commission has been an acknowledged steward of Town owned property, particularly Brodie Park South, for a dozen years or more. In 2006 the Stewardship Task Force reinforced that acknowledgement, and in an email dated August 28, 2006, Chair Donna LaPlante stated that the town land use attorney "has indicated to me the Conservation Commission has all the powers necessary to successfully oversee Town properties." She went on to say: "I am confident that the Conservation Commission has the knowledge and sensitivity necessary to steward all Town owned property, Open Space or otherwise".

From the development of the Franklin Kearney Memorial Nature Trail and the Forest Stewardship Plan to the building and installation of Kestrel and Bluebird houses, and the development and maintenance of the forest trails, we traditionally have collaborated with other New Hartford citizens, organizations and town officials to maintain the park as a viable habitat for the species of concern that depend on it. As a member of the ad hoc BPS Study Committee we commissioned a baseline study of BPS that indicated that, at least until the time of the study (May 2010), we had been successful at protecting the ecosystem and natural resources.

Unfortunately, recent activity may have undone much of our conservation efforts, particularly the expansion of the mowed area, and the widening of the paths through the meadow. This encroachment has fragmented and reduced the critical habitat. The intensive activity of organized sports practise is also very disruptive to wildlife.

The ad hoc BPS study group's charge has veered from the original focus of coming up with a recommended future use and disposition of BPS. In the absence of such a recommendation the Conservation Commission respectfully suggest that we immediately draft an interim stewardship plan with specific guidelines for managing the unforested portion of BPS (eg: mowing pattern and schedule, invasive plant interdiction, tree management, etc). Much of this plan is already current practice, but it needs to be formalized and accepted, and roles defined as to who will do what. The Conservation Commission have the knowledge and resources to do this quickly so it can be reviewed by interested stakeholders and experts, and be adopted and in place before the next round of seasonal demands on the park's resources.

Respectfully submitted,

  
Alison Murdock, Chair