

## Statement to Town Board, April 1, 2008

(Subject: Sparkle Lake Improvements)

Note: The following 2-part statement was read by Linda Miller followed by Susan Siegel)

I'd like to make some comments about the plans to revitalize Sparkle Lake that were featured in a recent NCN article as well as in the town's new Parks and Recreation Summer brochure.

I'm speaking as a mother who remembers taking her toddlers to play at the lake, as a former member of the Conservation Board, as a scientist trained to gather and analyze data before making decisions and as a member of Citizens for an Informed Yorktown.

In order to effectively manage any resource, we have to know what we have to begin with, that is, the condition of the lake, and we need to have a vision for what we want the lake to be and how as a town we want to use the facility. I submit that there are many questions to be asked and answered about Sparkle lake before any improvements proceed.

These questions fall into two categories: First, environmental questions concerning what is best for the lake based on actual data about the lake's condition and the most current scientific recommendations for dealing with this condition:

The NCN article suggests there is some disagreement about the actual condition of the lake. Some people think that it is dirty and in horrible condition. On what do they base this assessment? On the presence of weeds and algae? While unsightly, weeds and algae are not necessarily unnatural or unhealthy. A layperson's opinion of water quality in a small pond may be quite subjective, especially in comparison with swimming pool conditions. The North County News reported that Parks and Recreation Superintendent Fava had requested a lake study in 2005 which was not funded. So how do we know the water quality of Sparkle Lake? And how do we know what needs to be done without information about current conditions? Have any recent studies been done? If so, have they been made available to the Conservation Board and to the public in general?

On what basis did the DEC gave the town permission to reintroduce weed-eating carp into the lake? What data regarding the lake's conditions were submitted to the DEC, and once again, was that data made available to the Conservation Board and the public?

When I was on the Conservation Board in the 1980's, the board frequently reviewed proposed action in Sparkle Lake and other town lakes. In that time frame, the Town paid for a professional study of the condition of Sparkle Lake which included recommendations for its management. Is this study still applicable? Maybe this early study should be dusted off to see if the proposed improvements are consistent with those earlier recommendations and what new research may be necessary.

Also, the public would like to know more about the installation of a generator-powered fountain with colored lights. For instance, has the Conservation Board been consulted about its impact on the plants and animals in the lake? Will ABACA be consulted about its appearance? Is a fountain the best way to aerate the water? And as for the generator—is this consistent with the Town's goal of reducing its carbon footprint?—to say nothing of the potential noise pollution.

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I'd like to raise a second set of questions concerning the process by which these improvements have been planned, will be funded and carried out. I emphasize that we do not necessarily disagree with the proposed plan of action, but question the process by which it was decided upon.

Ecologically, Sparkle Lake is a shallow, man-made, eutrophic pond. If left alone, it will become shallower and shallower, gradually filling and becoming a wetland with a stream running through it. For countless decades, the

Town of Yorktown has been constantly trying to slow and re-set this natural process so that the lake could be used for swimming and remain aesthetically pleasing.

In the face of this relentless natural process, it is important for the Town to have a clear vision of what it wants the lake to be and to do the appropriate cost/benefit analysis. Keeping the "lake" in Sparkle Lake is a battle humans cannot win without a constant

input of effort and money.

Therefore what is the Town's long term plan for Sparkle Lake and by what process has this plan been instituted? There are long-standing differences of opinion about the best course of action for the lake, opinions that should be aired and debated before a renovation program is initiated.

Who has decided on the most recent improvements? Lake management is an on-going project that requires continuity, constant evaluation of conditions and reassessment of the effectiveness of measures instituted. Most importantly, it requires a clear definition of the long term goal of the management plan.

According to the NCN article, the Sparkle Lake renovation will cost \$10,000. This is 1/3 the parks improvement budget for 2008. How was it decided that one lake would get 1/3 the budget?

In a town with two beautiful, popular swimming pools, it would be informative to know why swimming attendance has dropped off at Sparkle Lake and whether the proposed improvements will actually change conditions enough to reverse that trend. Is there any information available about that?

All the revitalization measures mentioned so far are short term. If the goal is to revitalize and popularize Sparkle Lake for swimming, then the Town needs to consider, through the appropriate channels, a long term management plan that includes dredging, as recommended by the professional study mentioned earlier.

Have other recreational activities, in addition to swimming, been considered in the context of Sparkle Lake renovation? For example, fishing, canoeing, kayaking and walking for recreation. Chapter 9 of the Comprehensive plan indicates these activities have increased in popularity. Any decision about a long term plan for Sparkle Lake should include a discussion of how these activities could add to Sparkle Lake's recreational potential.

Yes, many Yorktowners are very fond of Sparkle Lake and so have many questions about what is happening to it. They are concerned that both its short-term maintenance and our long term goals be given the appropriate public scrutiny and review by knowledgeable experts.