

CITY OF DARIEN
GOAL SETTING SESSION – MINUTES OF THE SPECIAL MEETING
November 19, 2025, 6:30pm

Present: Mayor Joseph Marchese, Alderpersons Tom Belczak, Ralph Stompanato, Eric Gustafson, Joe Kenny, Ted Schauer, Mary Sullivan, Gerry Leganski, City Administrator Bryon Vana, Treasurer Coren, Clerk Ragona, April Padalik-Director, Darien Business Alliance & Community Events

1. Environmental Committee

Mayor Marchese advised that the city has been discussing the need to maintain the Environmental Committee since they seldom meet. Additionally, the staff and city have been working directly on environmental issues facing the city and other volunteer groups work on environmental issues. The council discussed the committee's meeting history and what the committee has done. Five members from the committee spoke and urged the city to maintain the committee. The consensus of the council was to keep the committee between 6 to 12 more months, allowing the committee to develop environmental programs. Alderman Gustafson volunteered to be the council informal liaison to the committee.

2. Review of success of DBA so far and what can be done to assist and attract more businesses to Darien

Staff provided an update regarding the DBA and Community Events Department. Mayor Marchese advised that while the business luncheons can be valuable, they take significant time to plan and there is just not enough interest in continuing those on a regular basis. Mayor Marchese and staff advised that as one tool to support local businesses, we are considering promoting retail businesses by their individual business center. Some ideas include developing a short video of the center/businesses that we can put on Direct Connect and our web site that may include certain special events, business ad on marquee sign, etc. Staff advised that if the council supported this concept, more details would be forthcoming. The council supported the concept of promoting businesses by individual centers.

3. Review of our marquee sign policy to implement program to get advertisers

The council discussed the use of the marquee sign for business advertising. The consensus of the council was to reduce general business advertising price to \$100 per ad and provide business ads at no cost as part of event sponsorships and business promotions by individual business centers. The council also felt out of town businesses should be allowed to advertise with the price to be determined but not lower than a local business. The staff responded to a question asking if High Haven could advertise. Staff advised all local businesses can advertise but some may have additional restrictions based on the business.

4. Resident communications survey review

The council reviewed the results of the resident communications survey conducted this year regarding city communications. It was recommended that future surveys include questions such as age, years in home, renter /owner. The council discussed the Darien Connections newsletter that is sent out and the consensus is it is a useful communication tool. The council discussed the challenge for our information to reach residents as sometimes they hear that a resident did not know about an issue even if we had it in Direct Connect.

5. Revenue to fund police pension fund

The council discussed the rising costs to fund the police pension on a regular basis. Mayor Marchese advised some communities raise their property tax every year to try to keep up with increased pension costs. The consensus was to make the funding determination in conjunction with the annual budget and review current revenues that could be used instead of property taxes

6. Civility at meetings; between elected officials

The council discussed meeting protocols and interactions during council meetings. The consensus was to ensure meeting guests are aware and follow the rules established by the council and the council be cognizant of protocols such as turning off computers prior to a meeting ending and being recognized by the Mayor to speak so there is not participants talking over each other. The elected officials also expressed that public comment period is a chance for the public to express their opinion but should not be used as a debate or back and forth discussion and staff can respond to questions as a follow up after the meeting.

7. List an item giving each elected official a chance to review their survey focusing on topics they listed to discuss but did not make the agenda

The elected officials reviewed their surveys they completed for the meeting. Some specific issues were presented including the number of water main breaks and tree health in Alderman Belczak's ward, general condition of water mains throughout the community, reinstating the auxiliary police program, and the possibility of a program to encourage residents to repair coach lights that no longer work.

Meeting adjourned at 10:17 p.m.

JOSEPHA.MARCHESE, MAYOR

JOANNE E. RAGONA, CITY CLERK