



PARKS AND RECREATION COMMISSION
MINUTES
REGULAR MEETING



September 12, 2014

Natural Resources, Parks and Recreation Department
3500 West River Road, Tucson, Arizona

Quorum having been established, Chair Lundin called the meeting to order at 9:05 a.m on September 12, 2014.

Commissioners present were Michael Lundin (Chair), Jan Johnson (Vice Chair), Peter Chesson, Karen Cesare, Kimberly Marohn, Anita Kellman, Richard Barker, Tom Purdon, Enrique Serna and Victor Rivera.

Staff present were Chris Cawein, Robert Padilla, George Kuck, Steve Anderson, Joe Kellner, Greg Hagen, Doug Siegel, Grant Bourguet, Kelly Cheeseman, Sandi Garrick (PWA) and Ann Khambholja.

Those present recited the pledge of allegiance.

Consent Agenda

Commissioner Johnson made a motion, seconded by Commissioner Purdon, to approve the May 9, 2014 minutes as presented. The motion passed.

COMMISSION DISCUSSION/ACTION REQUEST

1. Esmond Station Regional Park: Mr. Don McGann of McGann and Associates gave the commission an overview of the proposed project, which is to go before the Board of Supervisors on Tuesday, September 16, 2014. The approximately 282-acre Esmond Station Park site is located in southeast Tucson, at the northeast portion of Houghton Road and Mary Ann Cleveland Way. An old Southern Pacific rail bed crosses the site as well as buildings that were part of the railroad's Esmond Station. The rail bed and several historic structures will be retained and incorporated into the park. The area is relatively flat with creosote and cholla. It features magnificent views of the mountain ranges surrounding the Tucson Basin. Mr. McGann showed pictures of the station, which was made notorious due to a horrific head-on train wreck that killed multiple persons in 1903. There have been several public meetings held and a lot of input received. Most people attending the meetings were from the surrounding area. Some of the residents' greatest priorities were unstructured outdoor recreation, sports fields, aquatic facilities, a public library and organized sports. Mr. McGann showed the commissioners a presentation of the concept plan which includes a community center, an aquatic center, a library, a family recreation center with play structures, an outdoor performance space, dog park, tennis courts, baseball, softball and multi-use sports fields, pathways and trails, a championship field with limited access using synthetic turf (this is more expensive but would ensure year-round high quality play and contribute to water conservation) and the rehabilitated historic structures including an interpretive park. The park is proposed to be built in several phases, the first phase which is on the proposed bond package, would probably include lighted athletic fields, championship field, restrooms, utility upgrades, pathways, picnic areas, parking and preservation of the historic Esmond Station site. Commissioner Chesson asked whether an environmental impact study had been done. Mr. McGann told him that it had been done prior to the purchase of the property and that there was a biological resource assessment and there are no habitats or species that are protected under the desert conservation plan. Commissioner Chesson also wanted to know how it fit in with development in the region. Mr. McGann told him there was lots of growth in the

area and though the property is within the City of Tucson's limits, the county was working to expand parks in the area. Commissioner Johnson asked about the name of the station and whether it had been named for a particular person. Mr. McGann did not know that but also said it had had several names in the past, Papago Station being one of them. Ms. Garrick said that they are working with historical societies to find out more information about this area. Commissioner Marohn asked whether there would be natural areas. She was told that there would be some fairly large areas that would remain natural areas. She also inquired about the championship field and the proposed use of artificial turf. Mr. McGann said the county is still considering it and that the cost was considerably greater. Chair Lundin also mentioned that some soccer players do not like playing on it. He also said that the Women's World Cup team is petitioning Canada and attempting a boycott as all their fields have artificial turf. Mr. McGann said that the life of the surface of the field is longer and it helps with conserving water. Commissioner Cesare commented that she thought the plan was fantastic and that that was exactly how a regional park needed to be planned. It should meet many needs in this underserved area and that she definitely supports it and was glad it was being built to meet future needs as well. Commissioner Purdon asked about the possibility of adding pickleball, which is taking the place of tennis in Green Valley and was told that the tennis courts could be used for this as well. Commissioner Serna said that the interpretive facility should have some ties to Native American and western heritage besides the railroad. Mr. McGann said the central theme would be the railroad, but the educational programs could expand on that. The historical society is interested in a broad overview of the cultural heritage of this area. Commissioner Johnson asked whether the pool would be included in the early phase. Mr. McGann said it was probably not in the first phase, but could be recommended. Commissioner Cesare moved to endorse the plan, seconded by Commissioner Purdon. All were in favor.

2. Meeting Schedule and Frequency of Meetings: It was decided that meetings would continue to be held on the second Friday of the month, at 9:30 am instead of 9:00 am. Commissioner Johnson moved to change the time of the meeting to 9:30 am on the second Friday of the month, and was seconded by Commissioner Kellman.
3. Buffelgrass Presentation: Doug Siegel introduced Marilyn Hanson, the volunteer coordinator of the buffelgrass coordination center. She started the docent program at the Desert Museum and then became involved with buffelgrass removal efforts since 2000. She is also an active member of the Arizona Native Plant Society. The Weedwackers work in Tucson Mountain Park. They work every third Saturday, digging out dormant grass in winter as well as removing it when it is green after the monsoon rains. Ms. Hanson showed them before and after pictures and what a difference the Weedwacker program has made. Buffelgrass is a problem as it outcompetes native plants and burns very hot (greater than 1400° F) and fast which destroys most native vegetation. Mr. Siegel showed the commissioners pictures of Bushmaster Peak where they worked from September 2008 to June 2010 and cleared over a mile of slope north of Gates Pass. They also cleared buffelgrass from Cat Mountain and Brown Mountain. Commissioner Lundin asked how long it took before becoming re-established. Mr. Siegel said that the seeds are viable for three to five years. Commissioner Chesson mentioned that it had been eradicated at Sweetwater. Awareness of buffelgrass has spread through the area mainly due to the efforts of the Environmental Education program. The Sonoran Desert Weedwackers works with several different volunteer groups and Ms. Hanson collects data and maps it in Google iMaps. She has mapped neighborhood groups monitoring and removing buffelgrass. She told the commission that the volunteer groups have provided approximately \$670,000 worth of volunteer service to the county based on the federal value of \$22.14 per hour. Ms. Hanson told the commissioners that Tucson Mountain Park is one of the best protected parks for removal of invasives due to the work they do there. She said that her group had removed several tons of buffelgrass to date – the equivalent of 600 elephant units! Mr. Siegel recommended a video on the SABCC website (<http://www.buffelgrass.org/>) that was produced by the county and has a lot of information about it and the threat it poses. Commissioner Chesson asked whether

bighorn sheep graze on buffelgrass. Mr. Siegel said that it was possible though sheep are grazers not browsers, but buffelgrass is not valuable to wildlife especially desert tortoises. Commissioner Chesson also mentioned that there was not enough information to clearly identify buffelgrass. Mr. Siegel showed him a new booklet that was produced by SABCC that provided more detailed information on identifying buffelgrass. Commissioner Purdon said that Green Valley has completed phase II using herbicides and it is also working with the county. It has been declared as a noxious weed by the State of Arizona and has been banned, though it is still grown in New Mexico and Texas. Commissioner Johnson also said that there has been a lot of buffelgrass removal in the Ironwood Forest area and that is still ongoing. Ms. Hanson said there were also groups working in Saguaro National Parks, Oro Valley, Bureau of Land Management and the Forest Service, neighborhood groups and the scouts. Commissioner Johnson wanted to know if there was any removal in Pima Canyon and was told the University of Arizona is trying out a new treatment to eradicate it. The commissioners were told to mark their calendars for the next 'Beat Back Buffelgrass Day' to be held on January 24, 2015. Commissioner Chesson inquired about buffelgrass on private property that is not occupied. Mr. Siegel told him that it could be reported to DEQ who has ordinances in place but the biggest problem was that DEQ was understaffed at this time and unable to enforce this. Ms. Lindy Brigham of SABCC said that they have applied for a grant from the Arizona Forestry Service, which if obtained, could be used to provide a 50% match for private properties. Chair Lundin thanked Mr. Siegel and Ms. Hanson for their presentation.

4. **Informational Update Report: Pool update (Grant Bourguet)** Mr. Bourguet told the commission that the Manzanita Pool, which had two major leaks, was repaired in the off season using 1997 Bond funds and NRPR general funds. The pool is very popular and filled to capacity daily, with a two-hour wait list for entry on most weekends. The county has primarily employed teenagers as lifeguards and many leave to do summer school or take internships. Thus, water safety instructors had to teach an emergency water safety class to get the pools ready for the summer season. NRPR has several swim partnerships with different organizations. The Knights of Pythias provided \$1000 or the equivalent of 50 free swim lessons, as did the Golder Ranch Fire District and Parklands Foundation which provided \$2000. This season NRPR had over 1400 swim lessons, 570 kids were in swim team programs. NRPR has a great partnership with the Special Olympics who bring approximately 40 children to practice for their swim meets. We also offer water aerobics and family swim at most pools. Mr. Bourguet also said that the swim team Facebook page was very popular and reached over 2500 people each time an event was posted. Mr. Bourguet showed the commission a video that had been posted previously on Facebook of a swim meet at the Wade McLean pool. He also mentioned that Recreation recycled/refashioned some old medals into a belt, which has become the new trophy for the Battle of the Belts, a parent/coach relay race. It was a great success!
5. **Informational Update: Arizona Parks and Recreation Association Conference – Boards and Commissions Workshop (Jan Johnson and Richard Barker)** Commissioners Johnson and Barker attended the recent APRA conference held in Phoenix. There were three sessions for Boards and Commissions. One of the many topics covered was vandalism, and they advised to make the public more aware of this. There are Heritage funds available to combat it. Commissioner Johnson said a lot of the counties have boards and commissions and is grateful that this commission has a lot of staff support. There were panel discussions and she mentioned that the City of Tucson was more represented than the county. She also advised the commission that APRA can send a person to talk to the commission and she recommended that the commissioners attend the next conference. Commissioner Barker mentioned that the next conference will be in Tucson and he hopes this commission can help make a change, as there were a lot of rookies at the conference who had no answers.
6. **Robles Ranch: The Robles Ranch Community Center** was awarded the 2014 Public Works Project of the Year for small cities/rural communities from the Arizona chapter of the American Public Works Association. Pima County Natural Resources, Parks and Recreation, design

consultant Kimley-Horn & Associates and contractor Durazo Construction were the award recipients for the project. It was a difficult project as it involved four different county departments. The challenge was to incorporate all the improvements including a playground, shade structure and basketball court in a historic property. It was completed with funding from a series of Community Development Block Grants. Chair Lundin was glad to see this project recognized. Ms. Cheeseman said that Commissioner Barker came to the opening ceremony. Commissioner Serna commented that unlike South Tucson, parks are not walled off. Ms. Cheeseman said that they may be fenced off for security. Ms. Cheeseman would love to have Commissioners Barker and Johnson on the boards' commission committee and hoped the other commissioners would attend the conference next year when it is held from August 8 – 10, 2015. It is a great opportunity to meet other parks and recreation commissioners and see what is happening all over the state.

7. Future Bond overview: The next bond meeting will be held on September 19, 2014, at the River Park Inn at 8:00 am, which will be an oversight meeting to determine deliberation for the fall meetings. Completed bond projects will also be presented. Future proposed meeting dates covering parks and recreation facilities are November 21 and December 12, 2014. Pima County has 24 parks and recreation projects with 18 of them being previously approved by the Bond Committee. Six are new. The current Pima County funding request is approximately \$105 million. Approximate funding for all parks and recreation projects is \$250 million with Tucson having \$75 million and the other jurisdictions with \$70 million. Currently the bond package is over \$1 billion and will need to be reduced to around \$650 – \$700 million. The committee's job this fall is to determine the final bond package. During spring meetings there were presentations on the projects but no vote was taken on individual projects. During the upcoming meetings, all projects will be voted on but there will be no presentations and questions may be asked about individual projects. The Bond Committee was adamant about the bond proposals having future operating and maintenance costs defined and how that would be funded. The possible bond election is scheduled for November 2015. Chair Lundin mentioned that the bond has been pushed back for years now, hence more and more projects have been added. He hopes that as many parks projects will be added and would like to have the dates for the meetings when these will be discussed.

DIVISION UPDATE REPORTS:

1. Planning (Steve Anderson): Commissioner Lundin commended Mr. Anderson on his report and said that the trail canopy looks very interesting. Commissioner Johnson had a concern about smaller rocks falling through the screen. Commissioner Chesson asked whether volunteers were needed for trail removal at Sweetwater Preserve, and if so, he would find volunteers for the project. Mr. Anderson will keep him updated.
2. Natural Resources (Joe Kellner for Kerry Baldwin): Commissioner Chesson asked whether any white nose fungus was found on any bats in the area. Mr. Kellner told him that it had not been found west of the Mississippi and that he had no other information, but studies are being done. Chair Lundin asked about cow removal as he thought the county did not own cattle anymore. Mr. Kellner told him that NRPR still has cattle but are slowly phasing them out and that should be done in about a year's time. NRPR also has zero use on Six Bar Ranch and Buckelew Farms due to the drought conditions. Commissioner Chesson had a question about the species at Agua Caliente springs. Mr. Kellner told him that a few fish had died off, but they were not native or protected species. Mr. Kellner told him that almost every species that was in there was introduced. Since it is a public park, it cannot be protected. Commissioner Chesson also asked if sports fishing was allowed and was told it was not permitted. Mr. Kellner also explained that if native fish were introduced, NRPR would have to meet certain requirements and that since it was a public park it could not meet those requirements.

3. Recreation (Grant Bourguet for Joe Barr): Commissioner Johnson asked about the Heirloom Farmers Market at the Rillito Park. This farmers market is being temporarily held in front of and to the west of the lower grandstand, and it has about 60 vendors at present. Mr. Cawein explained that a permanent pavilion would be constructed by the next month. Commissioner Johnson inquired about their hours, which are from 8:00 am to 12 noon on Sundays.
4. Operations (George Kuck): Commissioner Cesare asked about the tool stations on the river parks and Mr. Kuck told her that they were still being vandalized with people cutting and stealing the tools. Usually one station is hit every week. NRPR has spent about \$2,000 in repairs for the last year. Mr. Kuck said the stations are very helpful when they are in working condition. Chair Lundin asked about the value of the tools and was told that they were not expensive.
5. GeoMedia (Joy Mehulka): Mr. Cawein told the commission that Ms. Mehulka was out on medical leave. Chair Lundin is looking forward to having the online registration in place soon.
6. Special Projects/Trades (Chris Cawein for Robert Vaughn): Mr. Cawein told the commission that the 'Kick-In for Canoa' event to fund the Anza Riders on Anza Day on October 26, 2014, was being held at Canoa this Saturday. Commissioner Johnson asked about the proposed competitive dog park at Ted Walker Park having an agility course and whether agility competitions could be held there as well. Mr. Cawein said that was the intent, but it is part of the bond program. At present, the fence has been installed and the grass is being put in. She also wanted to know when it would be completed. Chair Lundin reminded her that it all depended on whether the bond would be passed, and if it did, it would still take about six years.

CALL TO THE PUBLIC

FUTURE AGENDA ITEM(S):

ADJOURNMENT: As there was no further business to come before the commission, duly motioned and seconded, the meeting adjourned at 11:10 am.