



PARKS AND RECREATION COMMISSION MINUTES REGULAR MEETING



June 12, 2015

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

Quorum having been established, Vice Chair Johnson called the meeting to order at 9:35 a.m on June 12, 2015.

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

Staff present were Chris Cawein, Robert Padilla, Kerry Baldwin, George Kuck, Joe Barr, Steve Anderson, Greg Hagen, Joe Kellner, Heather Ruder, Elisabeth Van Der Leeuw and Ann Khambholja.

Those present recited the pledge of allegiance.

Consent Agenda

Vice Chair Johnson made a motion, seconded by Commissioner Purdon, to approve the May 8, 2015 minutes. The motion passed.

Commission Discussion/Action Request

1. A summary on the horse racing season at the Rillito Regional Park: Mr. Tom Moulton, Director of Economic Development and Tourism (EDT) introduced himself to the commissioners and gave a short history of Rillito Racetrack. He informed the commission that he started working for Mr. Huckelberry in 2001 to market all the tourist attractions in the county. EDT was created in 2005 and all the leased properties were transferred under it, including Rillito Racetrack. After the racing season ended in 2014, there was an opportunity to look for other parties to continue to operate the racing component. A committee was formed to review proposals and make a recommendation to County Administration. Two proposals were submitted, one by Horsemen's Association and the second by Rillito Foundation. The committee reviewed both proposals and recommended Rillito Foundation as the next racing operator. Rillito Foundation were given a one year contract with the option of renewal for the next two years. They have now completed the first year and negotiations will begin shortly to either renew or terminate their contract. Mr. Moulton informed the commission that Rillito has a long history which started with the Jelks Farm. Once the vision included quarter horse racing the owners decided to build the track at the back of the ranch. Quarter horse racing has been going on here for approximately 70 years, thoroughbreds were introduced later. Many of the innovations in racing like the photo-finish and chutes were developed at this track. In the '80s there was a slowdown and the Horsemen's Association was formed to revitalize the track and they were the operators until 2014.

Rillito Foundation realized that Rillito needed some upgrades. The initial assessment called for upgrading the audio visual equipment in the clubhouse, track repair, paddock repair, etc. Mr. Moulton then introduced Mr. Russell True and Mr. Frank DeFazio of the Foundation to give the commissioners more information regarding the upgrades made. Mr. True is a third generation dude rancher and interested in bringing tourism to the area. He said he is honored to be a part of this historic park which is important for Tucson and Pima County. The Rillito Foundation decided that the racetrack preservation effort needed to be part of a multiuse concept. Thus the board has Kaissa Gurvine who is from the Soccer League, Manish

Shah of the Heirloom Farmers Market. The Jelks House is also part of the Foundation. When they took over Rillito, they realized that it needed help. The tracks were unsafe, thus they resurfaced the racetrack at a cost of \$100,000, installed a new audio and video system, repaired the kitchen, and made improvements to the paddock, grandstand and clubhouse. They hired an experienced general manager, Mike Weiss, a graduate of the University of Arizona Racing Program as well. They have realized new revenue streams like simulcast wagering, installed a full bar and improved parking. They have also partnered with the UA Race Track Industry Program and the El Charro Family Restaurants which almost doubled their per patron average revenue. The Foundation has increased marketing and sponsorship opportunities and increased purse sizes, added simulcast racing and have hired 222 employees. During the race season, the live racing wagering totals increased by nearly \$500,000 and the newly introduced simulcast wagering brought in \$220,000. The total attendance was lower, however the paid attendance was higher. The challenges they face are extending the season into late March and April, the limited amount of available parking and demand for clubhouse tables. The contract terms are also limiting as they are short term for now. Another challenge is relocation of the barns. For the future, they are looking at renovating the horse barns, making ADA improvements and will continue to upgrade the facilities.

Mr. Frank DeFazio, also from the Foundation, informed the commission that he moved to Tucson in 1970 to help turn around the track in South Tucson. When he left it in 1985 it was making \$60 million up from \$25 million. He informed them that he had worked for several tracks around the country, and had also worked as an overseas staff member for the Department of Defense. Mr. DeFazio told the commission that he had met Mr. Wells a few years ago and teamed up with him to start the Jelks House project. Several weddings and parties have been held there since the house has been renovated. Mr. DeFazio agreed with Mr. True that a great deal still needs to be done at Rillito. He also informed the commissioners that this year, the public was impressed with the work that had been done there. Mr. DeFazio also spoke about the successful parties held for the Derby, the Preakness and Belmont races. He commended the great partnership with ED&T as well. Commissioner Kellman asked about his position in South Tucson and was told that it was at the dog track in South Tucson. Commissioner Cesare said she appreciated the partnership with the Foundation for providing extra parking. Commissioner Rivera asked if there were any minorities on the Foundation Board and was told that Ms. Gurvine and Mr. Shah were.

2. Bond and budget update: Mr. Cawein presented the commissioners with a hand-out showing the timeline for the 2015 Bond election and informed them that the final budget adoption would be next week (June 16, 2015). Mr. Padilla informed the commission that NRPR was under budget for this fiscal year and said that Flood Control was to be thanked for helping with maintenance of the river parks.
3. Informational year end summary: Natural Resources Division (Kerry Baldwin): Mr. Baldwin gave a power point presentation about the Natural Resources Division illustrating the work the division does. He informed the commission that the division's mandate was to manage, maintain and conserve open space for the citizens of Pima County as well as to educate them in environmental stewardship. The division has 21 full time staff members and a budget of \$2.7 million. Revenue is approximately \$260,000. Natural Resources has about 135 properties covering 250,000 acres including ten working ranches. They have 75 program volunteers as well as over 2000 project volunteers which translates to over 10,000 hours of volunteer work per year. Staff drives over 120,000 miles annually. Their direct public education/outreach contacts number over 30,000 and they give out about 680 research and filming permits. Mr. Baldwin also gave them a breakdown of the budgets for their different programs like Conservation Land Management, Environmental Education, Natural Resource Parks and Administration. He informed them that over 47 tons of buffelgrass were removed with the help of the Sonoran Desert Weedwackers. The Arizona Conservation Corps (AZCC), a youth conservation group, contributed to about 7900 hours of

work effort. Environmental Education had 2400 participants at their family programs, 9000 at school programs, 8000 at park programs and 5400 visitors to the Agua Caliente ranch house. The commissioners were extremely pleased with the report and there were no questions, only commendations.

DIVISION UPDATE REPORTS: There were no reports

FUTURE AGENDA ITEM(S) :

Mr. Steve Anderson will present the commission with a year-end summary of the Planning Division and Mr. Robert Vaughn will present the year-end summary for the Special Projects and Trades Division, including the Native Plant Nursery.

ADJOURNMENT: As there was no further business to come before the commission, duly motioned and seconded, the meeting adjourned at 10:54 a.m.