



PARKS AND RECREATION COMMISSION MINUTES REGULAR MEETING



October 9, 2015

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

Quorum having been established, Chair Lundin called the meeting to order at 9:35 a.m on October 9, 2015.

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

Staff present were Chris Cawein, Kerry Baldwin, Sherrie Barfield, Joe Barr, Elisabeth van der Leeuw, Rick Harrington, Robert Vaughn, Greg Hagen, Tracey Lindskog and Ann Khambholja.

Those present recited the pledge of allegiance.

Consent Agenda

Commissioner Rivera made a motion, seconded by Commissioner Johnson, to approve the August 14, 2015 minutes. The motion passed.

Commission Discussion/Action Request

1. Update on funding and improvements at the Austin Fitzgerald Dog Park at Brandi Fenton Memorial Park (Jenn Smith): Ms. Smith, the mother of Austin Fitzgerald, provided an update regarding proposed dog park improvements at Brandi Fenton Park. In addition, she informed the commission that she had collected \$30,000 in donations toward these improvements. Commissioner Johnson asked her what happens at a dog park and she was informed that the area where the proposed improvements are planned contain two areas where both medium and large dogs can be off-leash. The area is currently bisected by a fence to keep aggressive dogs separate which is preferred by the dog community. Commissioner Chesson inquired whether trees had been planted and was informed that Ms. Smith is working with Ms. Jessie Byrd from PC Native Plant Nursery on adding additional trees to form a natural shade canopy. They propose to plant mesquite and desert willow trees. Chair Lundin thanked Ms. Smith for all her work. Mr. Cawein informed the commission that the original contract had stipulated a minimum donation amount of \$50,000, but now want to amend it to the lower figure of \$30,000 and still allow the renaming of the dog park. Commissioner Johnson asked whether there was any area for agility training. Ms. Byrd informed her that Ted Walker Park would have agility equipment since this park is too small to allow for that. Ms. Smith also informed her that the public was not in favor of it. Commissioner Johnson asked when Ted Walker Park would be completed and was informed by Mr. Cawein that it was not included in the upcoming Bond proposals and there was no funding for it at present. Commission Cesare asked Ms. Smith whether the \$30K would allow for the park improvements and was informed that the proposed improvements would not necessitate all \$30K and that the remaining funds would be transferred to the Brandi Fenton Foundation as cost share to build a restroom near the dog park. Ms. Smith informed the commission that she intends to have regular fund raisers and has proposed a fund raiser to clean the wash adjacent to the park and was in the process of getting companies to sponsor it.
2. Proposal from Rillito Park Foundation: Mr. Cawein informed the commission that the Rillito Park Foundation had sent a proposal in August asking to expand their role in Rillito Park and to take over the entire park with the exception of the soccer fields outside the infield.

Their proposal included upgrades to the kitchen to allow it to be used as a commercial kitchen for the farmer's market vendors, revenue generating users and non-profit groups. It also included plans for staging different events, increasing the number of race-days and several other suggestions. Mr. Cawein said that NRPR prefers to keep control of the park considering the number of entities involved. An agreement is still in the process of being worked out with NRPR still being in control of scheduling of events since NRPR recoups almost 50% of the costs of operations from the park. Chair Lundin asked about the length of their contract. Mr. Cawein informed him that some of the investors in the park wanted a longer contract as the year-to-year contract did not provide enough security. Commissioner Cesare said that she would support a five year contract. Commissioner Johnson asked if the county would let the Foundation take over the farmers market as she thought it would not be a good move. Mr. Cawein explained that the county had a separate agreement with the Heirloom Farmers Market which brings in revenue to NRPR which helps NRPR operate the park. He also mentioned that the pavilions were built by the county. Mr. Manish Shah who is on the Heirloom board of directors is also on the board of the Foundation and he had some ideas about running a commercial kitchen. Mr. Cawein prefers keeping these streams of revenue within the county. Also, although there are members of the soccer group on the Rillito board, most of them are not in favor of this proposal. Mr. Cawein explained that his staff works very hard to keep a balance between all user groups. Commissioner Johnson asked if the commission had any say in these matters. Chair Lundin informed her that the request for the new proposals was sent to Mr. Huckelberry and that the commission does not get involved with contract negotiations. Mr. Cawein offered to show the draft agreement to the commission for their approval or disapproval, but this is usually handled through the Board of Supervisors. Commissioner Johnson remarked that the commission did not have any decision making capabilities and feels that that is something the commission should be involved in. Chair Lundin explained that they only had a recommendatory role in these matters. Chair Lundin would prefer to see the final agreement as he felt that the commission did not need to be involved in the draft agreement. Commissioner Johnson and commissioner Cesare requested a copy of the draft agreement if possible.

3. Informational update on the new contract with the Ortega Group for management of Colossal Cave Mountain Park: Mr. Kerry Baldwin informed the commission that the Board of Supervisors were interested in the operations at Colossal Cave before the contract was scheduled for renewal, thus an audit was conducted. They recommended that the Board put out a request for proposals to see what kind of operators would be interested in running this kind of operation. Only two viable operators were found and in the end the Ortega Group was awarded the contract. The Ortega Group is a national company which operates concessions in several national parks in different states. They also have deep ties to Tucson. They have several plans to revamp the park like having additional hiking, biking and horse trails, redoing the gift shop, tentative plans for a zip line from the top of the mountain to the ranch below. This is a new venture for them as they have never operated a cave before. Colossal Cave is still a county park, however within the park footprint exists the cave, the ranch and the campground which are under the management of this new group. They will manage approximately 400 acres and the remaining 4000 acres will be managed by NRPR. Only in their second month of operation, they have done a tremendous amount of work, redoing the gift shop, working on one of the CCC buildings to convert it into a restaurant, working on renovations to the Post Quemada Ranch, etc. They retained nearly two thirds of the old staff and are retraining them. There has been a 200% increase in visitation compared to last year's figures. One of the things they have implemented is eliminating the \$5 charge to get into the park and due to this more people are willing to come in and stay longer. Their revenues have also improved dramatically. The biggest challenge they face is working with a historic property and the permitting processes it entails. NRPR and Cultural Resources is aiding them in the process. Besides the directors of NRPR and ED&T, other county departments are also working with them to get through the process. Mr. Baldwin

predicts that within 3-5 years, Colossal Cave will become a very attractive destination. Commissioner Johnson asked whether the cave would be enlarged and was informed by Mr. Baldwin, that it would not be opened up any further, but the tours would be restructured to utilize more parts of the cave. There would also be more and different tours as well as special events as income generators. NRPR is working with them to redesign trails for different activities like hiking, biking, ADA accessibility, etc. They are working on a feasibility study for a zip line. NRPR has also reassigned staff from Catalina Regional Park to look after the rest of the park that the Ortega Group does not have responsibility for, and a survey is being conducted to see how to identify and protect those resources. More open space has been added and the park will probably increase by 400-500 acres. Mr. Baldwin invited them out to the cave to see the new amenities and changes made. Chair Lundin asked whether they have changed the amenities like trail riding and add things like mountain bike trails. Mr. Baldwin informed him there was still equestrian trails, but that is being reviewed at present. He explained that the equestrian center is in their footprint, but the trails are in NRPR's park, therefore any use outside the footprint is not covered by the contract. Thus in future, the equestrian program will have to have a separate agreement with NRPR for utilization. Mr. Baldwin and Mr. Steve Anderson will be working on sustainable trails in the future. The Ortega Group is also looking at 'glamping' or glamor camping with upscale amenities and high rental costs. They are also looking into an RV park as well, which might generate more income than equestrian programs. If they want to continue the equestrian programs there are many local options available. Commissioner Johnson wanted to know whether Ms. Maierhauser had left, but was told that she owned a property called Bear Paw which was on the boundary of the park. She uses the park to drive to her home and also gets water from the park. The new operators are respectful of the fact that she has 50+ years of experience with the park and they do use her as an informational resource.

4. Informational update: Response to call to the public regarding fee schedule revision to add a non-profit rate at the South East Shooting Range: Mr. Cawein informed the commission that in response to a call to the public, a member of a non-profit group asked for a reduced fee at the shooting range, and NRPR also received a letter from them. There is a fee schedule for the range which does not include non-profit groups. It was discussed with Mr. Huckelberry who said that the fee should be charged. Mr. Cawein replied to the member of the group letting them know that this would be considered in the next fee revision which is probably after the end of this fiscal year. Mr. Cawein informed them that the fee is \$100 per hour which includes staff and the entire shooting range and he has not received any reply from the group to date. He also said that he does not want to continue adding fees to the schedule because it ultimately is up to the Board of Supervisors to approve them. Commissioner Johnson asked whether there is a limit on the number of people and Mr. Barr said they did not have a limit. Chair Lundin commented that it costs NRPR far more than that considering the staff and utilities that are provided. Commissioner Cesare said she would be concerned about the county subsidizing too many non-profit groups. Mr. Cawein said that there would be a discussion about this at a later date.
5. Informational update on the GIS Infrastructure Inventory Project (Elisabeth Van Der Leeuw): Ms. Van Der Leeuw gave a presentation to the commission on the current status of the GIS Infrastructure Inventory Project. To date, the data models on 36 urban parks has been completed. Data collection will be completed by the end of this month. GIS data processing should be completed by the end of November. River Parks, including The Loop as well as Natural Resource Parks, ranches and open space are scheduled to be completed in 2016. Trails, community centers, pools are scheduled for completion in 2017 and the shooting ranges in 2018. Ms. Van Der Leeuw gave the commissioners a demonstration on how the system worked, with the ability to view documents like masterplans, memoranda and photographs attached to the projects, to visualize data as well as to search and query different features. For example, the system can show ramadas which are reservable as well

as show the amenities available at each, or areas of turf at different parks. It would also allow other layers from different departments to be incorporated. Chair Lundin said he was amazed at how much had been completed in the last six months. Commissioner Johnson asked whether there would be a simplified system for the public without the information they do not need and was answered in the affirmative. Chair Lundin asked if layers could be turned off and Ms. Van Der Leeuw said that these were for development only and the public would have a limited version. Chair Lundin asked Mr. Cawein about how apart from the public view, how NRPR would use the data and update the commission. Mr. Cawein explained that there are different categories and that urban parks and the loop are critical elements thus their priority, after which it would move to Natural Resource Parks, trails and other infrastructure. One of the goals is to have staff in the field be able to geospatially locate what is at their park without coming in to look for plans and other information. Chair Lundin said this was a good example of how this work is justified, even though it is a lot of work now, it will make things easier in the future. He also said that it was a really awesome project. Commissioner Johnson asked if the old paper work would be preserved in case of a crash and was told that that would be put into permanent storage at the Records Center.

DIVISION UPDATE REPORTS:

1. Natural Resources Division: Mr. Baldwin gave the commission an update on the reintroduction of black-tail prairie dogs on the Sands Ranch. At present 25 new starter burrows consisting of acclimation cage connected to an underground chamber have been installed on the ranch. The prairie dogs are expected to be introduced in June or July next year.
2. Operations Division: There were no questions. Mr. Cawein showed the commissioners a prototype for park signs. He informed them that he wants to have standardized signs that will be installed at all NRPR parks.

Commissioner Chesson wanted to ask about the parks, and while there was a lot of emphasis on infrastructure, he was concerned about the impact of infrastructure on natural resources like reptiles and insects in the parks. Mr. Cawein said that primarily within the urban core there are sites that are being designated as recreational, but if they are big enough like at Arthur Pack Park, there is a recreational element and the Maeveen Behan area which is a more natural area. Thus there is a significant consideration in larger parks. In small neighborhood parks there is not, due to the size. But this is certainly taken under consideration. Mr. Cawein also mentioned Rillito Park with its many ball fields and heavy recreational usage that does not allow for much natural areas. Commissioner Chesson mentioned that it was adjacent to the Rillito River and that there was vegetation retained there. Mr. Baldwin explained that the strategy is to maintain a level of habitat along the edges as there is no control over flooding in the middle. Along the edges, in parts there are also bosques as part of parks adjacent to the Loop. Commissioner Chesson said that he hoped those would be maintained and that there would be opportunities to add more in situations where a person would want to donate land along the river path or abandoned industrial spaces.

FUTURE AGENDA ITEM(S) : Sweetwater Preserve discussion on parking, signage and trails

ADJOURNMENT: As there was no further business to come before the commission, duly motioned and seconded, the meeting adjourned at 11:15 a.m.