



PARKS AND RECREATION COMMISSION MINUTES REGULAR MEETING



November 13, 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 November 13, 2015.

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

Staff present were Chris Cawein, Robert Padilla, Kerry Baldwin, George Kuck, Steve Anderson, Elisabeth van der Leeuw, Robin Hadden, Robert Vaughn, Mark Flint and Ann Khambholja.

Those present recited the pledge of allegiance.

Consent Agenda

Commissioner Johnson made a motion, seconded by Commissioner Chesson, to approve the October 9, 2015 minutes. The motion passed.

Commission Discussion/Action Request

1. Action item to amend the agreement for renaming Austin Fitzgerald Dog Park at Brandi Fenton Memorial Park, reducing the minimum donation amount from \$50,000 to \$30,000: Mr. Cawein informed the commissioners that initially the Austin Fitzgerald Memorial Foundation expected to receive over \$50,000 in donations, however that did not materialize and the foundation collected only \$30,000. He asked the commission's approval to amend the agreement to allow for the reduced donation and allow the renaming to go forward. Commissioner Johnson asked whether there was any rule on what the donation amount should be and was informed that the county only asked for a significant amount and that NRPR considered the \$30,000 to be sufficient. Commissioner Purdon moved that the agreement be amended and Commissioner Johnson seconded it. All were in favor.
2. Sweetwater Preserve: Discussion on parking, signage and trails (Steve Anderson): Mr. Anderson gave a brief history of the acquisition of the 700 acre Sweetwater Preserve which was acquired in the 2004 Bond. In 2007, the county trails program began work at the preserve. Mr. Anderson also considered the creation of a wildlife corridor by connecting Saguaro National Park and the Santa Cruz River corridor with the preserve. In 2008, the main trailhead was installed. While designing and constructing the trails, concern about area wildlife was taken into account and by 2009, the first round of trails were complete. A group of stakeholders, including Commissioner Chesson, named the trails. Signs were designed and installed and trees were added to the trailhead. In 2011, the 187-acre Sweetwater Canyon property, also known as the 'annex' was acquired and in 2014 work was started on a concept plan for the annex. The plan was approved by Mr. Baldwin and surveyed by professional biological and cultural surveyors. In February 2015, a letter was sent to 150 residents closest to the preserve informing them that the process of rehabbing and closing off some of the old trails had begun. In June 2014, the Sweetwater Preserve was recognized by being voted the 4th best in scenic mountain bike trails in the western U.S., and in 2015 the trails in the annex were completed. Signs were also added encouraging dog walkers to clean up after their dogs as that was becoming a problem. NRPR installed a wildlife camera at the main trailhead access point to estimate the number of people using the park. The number is roughly 600 people a week,

but is not completely accurate since some enter from other access points. Fencing was added at Paseo de los Rancheros to block off the former main access road and rehabilitated with cacti and native plants. A new large Sweetwater Preserve sign was installed at the park entrance. NRPR is in the process of replacing all 24 trail signs, a new interpretive sign, which includes the annex was added along with signage of NRPR's park rules and the Arizona State Statutes. Commissioner Chesson remarked that Mr. Anderson has done an outstanding job and he was very pleased with what has been accomplished, especially regarding signage and parking. He also remarked that there were some issues that members of the public had come to talk about.

CALL TO THE PUBLIC:

Ms. Judith Meyer spoke to the commissioners about the problems she and her neighbors faced due to parking on an improvised trailhead which she wrongly assumed was created by volunteers. She said that when TMA raised thousands of dollars for Sweetwater Preserve, the county promised them that Tortolita Road would be the only road and parking area for the whole preserve. She said that most residents lived on small dirt roads that are very narrow and that parked cars on them made it impossible for emergency vehicles to get by. Ms. Meyer also informed the commission that people unfamiliar to unpaved roads drove too fast, causing dust clouds and that many of her neighbors suffered from respiratory illnesses due to this. She also said that she had spoken to Mr. Huckelberry and Ms. Carla Blackwell when the annex was being considered for addition to the preserve and showed them that there was no space for any additional parking on this road. She also gave them a little history of the area before the preserve was created. The road in this wildcat subdivision followed the wash and went through private land as well. The county purchased the land but does not maintain the road. The 13 homeowners who use that road pay for its upkeep privately. Ms. Meyer said that when the trail crew was planning the trails they gave them assurances that no parking would be allowed, except for the crews working on the trails, but she was upset because those promises were not kept. Mr. Anderson said that no promises were made. She also said she was told that only the Board of Supervisors could do what was necessary, thus she asked the commissioners to send this matter up to the BOS so it can be attended to. She also mentioned that at spots in the road it is impossible to see cars coming through even though they have posted signage. She urged the agency to do their best to keep their promises like putting up 'No Parking' signs, etc. She also complained about bicyclists who ride through private property to reach the preserve. Mr. Anderson informed her that there was no trailhead at that site, and that DOT was the only agency who could put up no parking signage. Ms. Meyers asked if NRPR could ask DOT to consider that. Chair Lundin informed her that since it was not a county maintained road, DOT probably did not have the right to put up signage. Mr. Baldwin informed the commission that the road was in bad condition and not stable and would need significant repairs. He also pointed out that the road was not on their easement, but on county property. Mr. Baldwin suggested that the easement be adjusted so it is on the road, and that the neighborhood work with the county to find a solution. Chair Lundin said that it looked like there were a number of county departments involved in this matter. Mr. Cawein clarified that it was a private easement and not a road and that it is a common occurrence throughout the county. Mr. Cawein said that typically they try to adjust the easement to match the existing path if it is sustainable. Mr. Cawein asked if it is an access to the preserve and Mr. Anderson informed him that it is a boundary access point, but only for walk in access, not cars. Ms. Meyer said that all that they were asking for was a 'No Parking' sign there. Commissioner Cesare asked if it were a no-access easement and what would have been done if the county had not purchased the land. She asked whether they would continue to have access if it were sold to private owners. Ms. Meyer said that would have been the case. Mr. Baldwin said that they could look at appropriately posting signage at the corner that notes this is neighborhood access only, and no public access to the park from this point forward. Mr. Baldwin also suggested posting a sign at the intersection of Sweetwater and Camino de Oeste stating no public access to the park at that point. Commissioner Johnson asked if there were any laws allowing that and Mr. Baldwin said that NRPR had the authority to post 'No Trespass' signage as part of NRPR's park rules. Mr. Anderson said that there would have to be public access or no access at all, thus Ms. Meyer and her neighbors would not have access as well. Chair Lundin asked whether only 'No Parking' signs could

be posted instead. Commissioner Cesare suggesting parking further away from the preserve. Chair Lundin suggested that they would probably need to have a separate meeting regarding this issue as there are many options available, one being the county taking over and taking control of Camino de Oeste after it crosses Sweetwater or giving it to the neighborhood. Commissioner Serna inquired whether it was their main access and was informed that it was the only access they had. Commissioner Johnson asked why they could not use their legal easement and make it usable. Mr. Baldwin informed her that the easement has eroded away to the point that no road could be put at the original easement. Commissioner Chesson made a motion that county staff look into putting no parking signs and look into the issue of how the easement could be formally changed so it is appropriate to the road that exists. Commissioner Serna seconded the motion. All were in favor.

3. Informational update on the Bond Election (Chris Cawein): Mr. Cawein informed the commission that since the Bond Election failed, it was back to the drawing board. Commissioner Johnson asked what the percentages were and was informed that they were bad. Chair Lundin asked whether he knew of what the plan going forward was and Mr. Cawein said that the county may probably create a smaller, more direct package and bring it up in the next couple of years.
4. Informational update on the Rillito Racetrack contract (Chris Cawein): Mr. Cawein informed the commissioners that it is still a draft agreement and still under discussion. Rillito Foundation is requesting a five-year agreement. County has provided its comments and the matter is now with the Rillito Foundation for their consideration. Mr. Cawein informed them they probably will move forward shortly with a new agreement.
5. Informational update on ActiveNet (Robert Padilla): Mr. Padilla informed the commission that NRPR had rolled out an online registration system called ActiveNet, on August 13, 2015. Prior to that, people would call in and we would take reservations, via paper and pencil, mail out or email them their permits, all of which was very labor intensive. Mr. Padilla gave them a demonstration on how ActiveNet works. He informed them that people do not have to register to browse the activities offered, but once they need to make a reservation, they have to register and create an account. For people having difficulty in registering, a FAQ section has been added. At the moment most people are using the site to reserve ramadas. NRPR currently offers ramada reservations, antique fair booths, environmental education classes, archery passes, a membership module which allows you to sign up for unlimited bird walks for the year. Effective December 7, 2015, registration will be open for NRPR's winter art and leisure classes. This was not offered in fall because the window for the August go-live date was missed. Mr. Padilla walked them through the process of how a ramada could be reserved. Since the customer has provided NRPR with their email address, a copy of their receipt is emailed to them along with their permit number. If a customer loses their receipt or permit they can go into their account and retrieve another copy. Chair Lundin asked whether the number of ramada rentals had increased, and Mr. Padilla said he thought it was about the same. Mr. Padilla mentioned that staff had assisted some people who either could not or did not know how to use the system by helping them create accounts and make reservations. Mr. Padilla demonstrated how it was possible to reserve booths for the Antique Fair. Commissioner Chesson asked whether there was already a physical structure there and was informed that they had to bring their own canopies and tables. This event is held in the commons area at Brandi Fenton Memorial Park. Another item added was memberships. Mr. Padilla explained that some constituents were not pleased that NRPR had started charging a fee for the guided tours and walks thus annual memberships were introduced. He also informed the commission that this helps staff with programming the events. Commissioner Chesson inquired whether people with annual membership passes still had to register for the hike or bird walk so NRPR knows how many would be present. Mr. Padilla said that this was the case, but they did not have to make any payments. Commissioner Johnson asked whether this was the case for all trails

and was informed that this was only for classes and guided walks. Chair Lundin asked about plans to grow this and was informed that yes, like the lifeguard classes. Eventually the Gilbert Ray Campground will also be included. Mr. Padilla also informed them that when people come in to make reservations with cash or checks, that entails handling the cash, depositing it and entering it in to the system, thus he wants to steer all transactions online.

DIVISION UPDATE REPORTS:

1. Operations Division (George Kuck): Mr. Kuck informed the commission that the Arthur Park trail renovations will begin in the second week of December. Commissioner Johnson asked Mr. Kuck for the highlights of his division and he informed her that the new playground and shade structure at Thomas Jay Park would be completed in about three months, replacing the former 18-year old structure. The new soccer fields at Rillito Park, which are lighted, are complete and staff is working on assignments for the new fields. At Rillito Vista Park, a new swing set is being ordered and will be relocated once the old recreation center is demolished. There will also be a shade canopy with picnic tables. The community center will remain closed. Mr. Kuck explained that there is not much demand in the neighborhood any more, there are many vacant houses and very few children. Commissioner Chesson inquired as to what was involved in constructing the soccer fields at Rillito. Mr. Kuck explained that the old wooden barns had to be demolished and the metal barns dismantled and moved to the east of the clubhouse. NRPR is working with the Rillito Foundation to get as many of them installed east of the track. Commissioner Serna asked how it was possible to get around vandalism at playground and how it effects purchase. Mr. Kuck told him that the parks do suffer from vandalism and graffiti and they try to minimize it. For example there were many problems with tube slides where kids burnt holes in them with lighters. Now they are being replaced by open slides. There has been lots of problems with poured-in-place rubberized matting, so now he is looking at going back to engineered wood fiber. Mr. Kuck informed the commission there is no way of not ever preventing vandalism completely, but replacing and repairing structures in a timely manner helps. Mr. Cawein said that in the most extreme cases, where there is significant and repeated vandalism, instead of installing like-for-like structures, NRPR is downgrading to structures like swing sets that are cheaper and still provide recreational value.

FUTURE AGENDA ITEM(S) :

ADJOURNMENT: As there was no further business to come before the commission, duly motioned and seconded, the meeting adjourned at 11:05 a.m.