



MEMORANDUM

Date: May 28, 2014

To: The Honorable Chair and Members
Pima County Board of Supervisors

From: C.H. Huckelberry
County Administrator 

Re: **River Park Maintenance through the Regional Flood Control District Property Tax Rate Increase**

At Tentative Budget Adoption, the Board requested information related to the portion of the Regional Flood Control District (RFCD) property tax rate increase that would be dedicated to river park maintenance and the impacts associated with not providing this funding from RFCD. Below is an analysis of this matter.

River Park Maintenance is a Legal Obligation of the Regional Flood Control District

In order to install major flood control protective features such as cement bank stabilization, the County is required to obtain a Clean Water Act (CWA) Section 404 permit from the US Army Corps of Engineers. The Board should be familiar with this permit, as it is now a point of major issue in the final permitting of the proposed Rosemont Copper Mine. Constructing river parks adjacent to major river system flood protective works is a legal obligation of the County for receipt of a CWA Section 404 permit for these flood protective works. The river parks must be maintained in perpetuity by the RFCD for this reason.

River Parks are our Most Popular Parks

The river park system now extends in one form or another to 100 miles of river bank on the Santa Cruz and Rillito Rivers, the Cañada del Oro and Pantano Washes, and the Julian Wash Greenway. In total, 120 miles are functionally available in paved and unpaved pathway connections. Some portions of the river park system are more developed than others, with completed landscaping and other amenities. The total mileage of the river park system once complete will be 214 miles.

Utilization surveys are conducted on segments of the river park system, and these surveys show over 3,400 users on a typical Saturday. In essence, our river park systems are the most utilized public parks in Pima County over and above any other city, County, or town public park in the number of users in a specific time period.

The bicycling facilities installed on the river park system provide for 100 miles of car-free paths. Bicycling is now a major tourism attracter. Visit Tucson staff regularly report

The Honorable Chair and Members, Pima County Board of Supervisors
Re: **River Park Maintenance through the Regional Flood Control District Property Tax Rate Increase**
May 28, 2014
Page 2

inquiries are made from tourists who choose Tucson as a destination due to the extensive river park systems that provides car-free bicycling, walking, jogging and other outdoor activities. It is providing our residents with a beautiful, healthful exercise alternative. Businesses looking to relocate to southern Arizona list quality of life amenities, such as parks and bicycle infrastructure, as one of the top attractors.

Mid-year Adjustment to Increase Natural Resources, Parks, and Recreation Budget

Last year, certain midyear funding was provided by the Natural Resources, Parks, and Recreation (NRPR) budget for park maintenance. This proposal will provide the funds for river park maintenance from RFCD and allow NRPR to utilize the funds previously used for river park maintenance to bolster their maintenance activities at other public parks within the system. This includes natural open space maintenance.

As indicated in our Tentative Budget discussion, I would not count parks and park maintenance as core County services. Our funds are spent primarily in the area of justice and law enforcement. Our parks system is a service to provide to the average citizen (who does not utilize to any great extent our justice and law enforcement services) with some value for property taxes paid to the County. Hence, I will always support appropriate funding increases to our NRPR Department to maintain the system of parks that includes the regional river park system, as well as natural open space conservation system.

Impacts if River Park Maintenance Continues to be Required to be Funded by NRPR

Attached is a May 12, 2014 memorandum from the NRPR Director indicating if RFCD funding for river park maintenance does not materialize, he will be forced to make approximately \$1.5 million in reductions in the Fiscal Year 2014/15 budget. This will close a number of parks and pools, as well as reduce hours of operation at other parks. The memorandum summarizes seven specific adverse impacts from not funding this action.

Recommendation

I continue to recommend that a portion of the RFCD property tax rate increase be allocated to river park maintenance and provide critical additional funding to our NRPR Department.

CHH/anc
Attachment

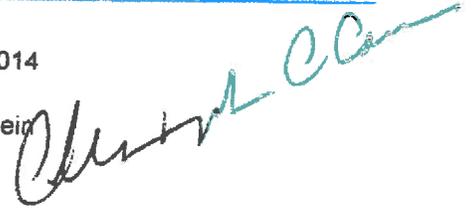
- c: Hank Atha, Deputy County Administrator for Community and Economic Development
- John Bernal, Deputy County Administrator for Public Works
- Jan Leshner, Deputy County Administrator for Medical and Health Services
- Nanette Slusser, Assistant County Administrator for Public Works Policy
- Chris Cawein, Director, Natural Resources, Parks, and Recreation
- Suzanne Shields, Director, Regional Flood Control District

MEMORANDUM

To: CH Huckelberry
County Administrator

Date: May 12, 2014

From: Chris Cawein
Director



Subject: Response to Your May 6, 2014 Memorandum Regarding NRPR Proposed Budget Cuts for Fiscal Year 2014/15

In response to your memorandum dated May 6, 2014, the cost to operate and maintain the river park system was specifically excluded from my memorandum dated April 30. This was, as you state, based on the assumption that the Regional Flood Control District would begin funding operations and maintenance in FY 2014/15 for the majority of the system that has a nexus to flood control infrastructure.

Operations and Maintenance (O&M) funding for FY 2013-14 for the River Park System, as described in a joint memo from the RFCD Director Suzanne Shields and me dated November 20, 2013, is currently provided by NRPR via the General Fund (87%) with a limited amount (13%) provided by RFCD. The significant recent expansion in river park mileage, along with river park system aesthetic and safety enhancements in the past year, necessitates O&M funding totaling \$2,640,000 for FY 2014/15. Based on discussions with RFCD, it was tentatively agreed that the relative contribution of river park system O&M funding would transition from the present breakdown with RFCD providing limited funding to a system where RFCD would provide majority funding for the system in FY 2014/15. As stated in the November 20, 2013 joint memorandum, as well as a Memorandum of Understanding between the Director of RFCD and me, this transition is contingent on RFCD having sufficient funding through a tax levy increase.

Should RFCD be unable to provide the anticipated funding to operate and maintain the river park system, the cost of maintaining the entire River Park system (\$2,380,000), except for the \$260,000 base funding in FY 2013/14 RFCD contribution which would continue in FY 2014/15, would be borne by NRPR. As you are well aware, the river park system has significantly increased its reach over the past several years, nearly tripling from approximately 32 miles in FY 2007/08 to the 94 miles in FY 2014/15. However during the same period, the NRPR base budget has not increased proportionately. In fact, the adopted NRPR budget in FY 2007/08 was \$17.20M, essentially the same proposed for FY 2014/15 (\$17.14M). NRPR has continued to absorb the increasing cost of maintenance of the system due to the fact that neither general fund allocations nor partner funding have paralleled the increase in linear park infrastructure requiring maintenance. This has necessitated the diversion of staff and funding from other amenities operated by NRPR such as parks, community centers, pools, and natural resource sites and programs. Just in the past year, the river park mileage required to be maintained by the County has increased from 71 miles to 94 miles, without a concomitant increase in base fund allocation for maintenance. Therefore, the agreement with RFCD to assume the majority of O&M funding for the river park system is deemed absolutely critical to ensuring a safe and well-maintained linear park system. Should that funding shift not proceed as planned, the NRPR budget would need to be significantly reconfigured to cut costs by 9%, and thereby free up budget capacity to cover required river park O&M.

Given the limited base fund allocation for NRPR, coupled with the fact that we have continued to absorb additional facilities and infrastructure without obtaining an increase in general fund allocation, budget trimming would be wholly insufficient to achieve a sufficient level of cuts to meet the expected \$1.5 Million in budget capacity that would be needed to provide required O&M for the river park system; rather, facility closure will be necessary. As I stated previously in my April 30 memorandum, achieving \$1.5M in cuts could be accomplished in many ways by assembling a package of facilities and programs to close or significantly reduce. It was also noted that any program designed to achieve these cuts in our already stretched base budget would have devastating and potentially long-lasting impacts to the community. Obviously any program involving such significant program or facility closures or suspensions would need to be developed based on a thorough analysis of many factors and would require Board approval before execution.

In the interim, your follow-up memo of May 6 has requested more specificity in developing a possible package of closures and cuts that would achieve the required \$1.5M reduction that would be necessary if the Regional Flood Control District is unable to assume majority of the O&M funding for the operation and maintenance of the linear park system in FY 2014/15. Logically the package of cuts would center on closure of recreational elements (i.e., park facilities) in order to replace the recreational elements provided by the river park system. However, that level of internal reallocation taken solely from the urban park system budget would require massive cuts (37%) that would result in the closure of many (6 to 10) of our urban parks and some of those impacted sites would be far from the river park system and would disproportionately impact youth. Therefore, a package of cuts was preliminarily conceived that would involve fewer, yet larger sites including urban parks, swimming pools, natural resource parks and programs, as well as contracted partnerships. Attempts were made to limit the overall impact on youth sports programs and economically stressed portions of the community. Additionally, consideration was given to the location of other proximate recreational facilities either operated by the County or another government agency. No Community Center cuts were considered given their relative low cost and high value to the community.

This list of closures and reductions of facilities and programs (and the estimated cost savings) that would achieve the required \$1.5M cuts consists of the following:

1. Brandi Fenton Park (\$295,000): Close park to the public
2. Northwest Community Park (\$300,000): Close park to the public
3. Agua Caliente Park (\$337,000): Close park to the public and stop pumping groundwater
4. NW YMCA Pool (\$212,000): Close or reduce operation to seasonal only (coupled with partial item 7 reduction)
5. Mike Jacob Sportspark (\$175,000): Terminate contract and close
6. Environmental Education Program (\$207,500): Reduce by half
7. Canoa Ranch historic buildings restoration and tours (\$222,000): Eliminate or reduce by half for FY 2014/15 (coupled with partial item 4 reduction)

CH Huckelberry

Response to Your May 6, 2014 Memorandum Regarding NRPR Proposed Budget Cuts for Fiscal Year 2014/15

May 12, 2014

Page 3 of 3

Obviously none of these cuts are without significant impacts to the community and it would be highly preferable to not even have to consider any of these cuts. As described in my last memorandum, Pima County expenditures for parks per capita already rank extremely low when compared with other communities in Arizona and around the nation. Our per capita expenditures are approximately one third of what Scottsdale spends and half of what the City of Tucson spends based on recent surveys. The budget reduction program presented in this memo illustrates the breadth and depth of closures and reductions that would have to occur to achieve the specified \$1.5M cuts in FY 2014/15 if RFCD is unable to provide sufficient O&M funding for the river park system. An estimated 23 positions within the Department would be eliminated based on these cuts. Pima County would continue to descend in parks per capita spending below some of the failing communities around the nation and would further impact our ability to attract businesses to this community who are interested in high quality recreational activities for their employees and their families.

Please do not hesitate to contact me should you have any questions or desire additional analysis to configure other programs that could meet the target \$1.5M in cuts.

Xc: John Bernal, Deputy County Administrator
Robert Padilla, Deputy Director