



PARKS AND RECREATION COMMISSION
MINUTES
REGULAR MEETING



May 9, 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 9:00 a.m on May 9, 2014.

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

Commissioners absent were Enrique Serna and Kimberly Marohn.

Staff present: Chris Cawein, Robert Padilla, George Kuck, Kerry Baldwin, Steve Anderson, Joe Barr and Ann Khambholja.

Those present recited the pledge of allegiance.

Consent Agenda

Commissioner Cesare made a motion, seconded by Commissioner Purdon, to approve the March 14, 2014 minutes as presented. The motion passed.

Introduction/Announcement

Mr. Chris Cawein presented Commissioners Purdon and Cesare with mementos bearing the County Seal made at the Philabaum Glass Gallery and Studio.

Commission Discussion/Action Request

1. Proposed improvements and naming of the large dog park at Brandi Fenton: Mr. Scott Brittenham spoke to the commission about his proposal to enter into an agreement with NRPR to construct improvements and name the large dog park at Brandi Fenton Memorial Park after Austin Fitzgerald, a Tucson teenager and a dear friend of Mr. Brittenham's daughter Alex, who died tragically from a rare infection on December 3rd. Austin loved dogs dearly and Mr. Brittenham has created the Austin Fitzgerald Memorial Fund not only to remember him, but to provide a place where all can come to love and enjoy. Mr. Brittenham shared with the commission the concept plans for the dog park and told them about the fund raising efforts being conducted to improve the dog park. The dog park will be constructed in phases. Mr. Brittenham would like to incorporate several designs that are popular at dog parks throughout the country like a splash pad designed for dogs. The County has drafted an agreement wherein the Fund will agree to fund the design and construction of the dog park improvements for a minimum of fifty thousand dollars after which the County will initiate the process to rename the large dog park as the 'Austin Fitzgerald Memorial Dog Park'. Phase 1 improvements are expected to consist of a shade canopy, turf improvements and a seating area. Chair Lundin thanked Mr. Brittenham and commended him on his efforts to give back to the community. Mr. Cawein hoped that the commission would give a vote of approval to allow NRPR to move forward with ratification. Commissioner Cesare made a motion to move forward with this project which was seconded by several commissioners. All were in favor. Mr. Cawein told the commission that the agreement would be signed internally, but it would go to the Board of Supervisors later for the naming process after phase 1 was completed. Commissioner

Chesson asked whether this was a renaming of the dog park and was told that it was called the large dog park, thus this was not a renaming per se.

Commissioner Chesson brought up the fact that proper parliamentary procedure was not carried out, as there was no call for discussion and recommended that the motion be carried out again. Commissioner Kellman made a motion to begin the process to secure the naming rights of the dog park at Brandi Fenton Memorial Park, which was seconded. All commissioners were in favor. Chair Lundin was reminded that discussion was needed, however Commissioner Chesson was satisfied with the procedure.

2. Pima County Horsemen's Association (PCHA) Proposal for Redevelopment of the Rillito Park Soccer Fields & Racetrack (Informational Only): Mr. Mark White of the Pima County Horsemen's Association spoke to the commission about a park design that would allow the shared use of the Rillito Park without one sport being dominated by another. Mr. White told the commissioners that the proposed bond calls for construction of 16 soccer fields at a cost of \$14 million. He mentioned that the facility can accommodate up to 4,500 spectators without exceeding parking capacity, but other efforts like shuttle service have to be implemented for larger events. The plan which was also presented to the Board of Supervisors and County Administration proposed adding three soccer fields without sacrificing parking or existing features. Some of his proposals included re-configuring some soccer fields to add some more, installing a box culvert for drainage that would then allow the area there to be used as a driveway and increase parking and access to all of the park. The Jelks residence could also be remodeled and used as a possible museum or used for arts and crafts. Mr. White asked the commission's help in trying to save the track and allow the site to be used by all. Mr. White also said that there were about 10,300 spectators on the final day of horse racing and that the racetrack generates over \$3 million in revenue during the 16-day season. The PCHA has also invested over \$250,000 in improvements and repairs to the track. He also mentioned that their concept plan does not sacrifice any activity for the sole benefit of another and while he understands that the demand for soccer is increasing, there still would not be sufficient space at Rillito. In addition, the neighborhood could not change sufficiently to allow for more development. He mentioned that Marana has set aside a 500-acre site near the I-10 that would be better suited for a large tournament site and they have informed Tucson Soccer Academy about this. Mr. White also said that the horsemen's association is not against soccer. Commissioner Cesare asked Mr. White about how his concept dovetails with the County's Capital Improvement Plan which is currently under contract. Mr. White said he did not know that the County had any ongoing contract, but that his plan depended on the previous bond that had \$5.2 million leftover which would be used to construct three new soccer fields. Some of that money was to be used to move the 160 barn stalls. He proposed saving the concrete barns which are listed on the National Register and moving other barns which would allow horseracing to go on and provide for another soccer field. The county's proposal would cut down the parking available. Commissioner Cesare also let Mr. White know that her office is located adjoining the track and they now have a parking concession that allows overflow parking in their lot. She said that she had seen surveyors and was concerned that money was being spent and that this project was not to revisit the master plan which was already discussed and documented. She also said that there seemed to be some conflicts going forward to what Mr. White was proposing and what the county was doing. Mr. White replied that they were fighting an uphill battle. He also said that he had only received hand drawn documents and nothing official by an architect and that was all the information he had received. He said that he thinks they are laying out boundaries for further planning, but he hopes the county would incorporate some of the PCHA's ideas into their plan. She also wanted to know whether the horsemen were being incorporated into these early stages of planning or not and was it too late. Commissioner Johnson also agreed

with Commissioner Cesare and felt the PCHA was not knowledgeable and should be advised about where the county is at instead of being kept in the dark. Commissioner Cesare was of the opinion that later it may be too late and that they should be informed now. Mr. White agreed and told her that at first there was no deadline as to when the barns would be torn down, now they have been told that in June the barns would be demolished. He hopes that by getting the information out about another way of doing this would help. Chair Lundin asked whether he had actually presented this plan to the Board of Supervisors. Mr. White affirmed that and said it had been given to Mr. Huckelberry as well. Commissioner Johnson asked whether it was possible to get the director to get the PCHA to work with the county. Chair Lundin asked Mr. Cawein for some clarification. Mr. Cawein told the commission that there were many different parts and that is why Ms. Slusser addressed the commission recently. Part of the plan as pertaining to the old bond funds was moving the barns and adding the soccer fields. The longer-range plan is the new bond project which calls for 16 soccer fields which would wipe out racing but would be subject to Board approval. Mr. Cawein also told the commission that Supervisor Bronson is having a summit meeting to talk about this shortly and it will be held at the Flowing Wells Community Center. Commissioner Cesare said that her first choice would be to accommodate and support both sports as racing is very valuable and she recognizes the need for more soccer fields. She realizes for this scenario, something would have to give which in this case would be the world-class soccer tournament center at this site which in her opinion is not the best site for this. Commissioner Johnson said that it was her understanding that when Ms. Slusser presented the project they proposed auxiliary fields within a five-mile radius and was that still being considered. Mr. Cawein explained that the 16-field proposal was dependent on the bond moving forward and that was somewhat viable. This would wipe out racing but he sees an opportunity for some input. There are other sites that could be considered, along I-10 in Marana and the Stardust site near Kino which is an opportunity to shape the process to what the public wants. Regarding the short-term proposal, of building the three fields and moving the barns, that project will move forward. Chair Lundin said that he believed the Board of Supervisors had approved the use of the bond funds for this project. Commissioner Purdon said that it would be a shame to lose the multi-use purpose facility before voters decide to approve the bond and destroy the multi-use facility and racing. Chair Lundin said that the funds from the 2004 bond will be used to build three fields and will not affect racing at the facility. Commissioner Johnson asked about tearing down the barns. Chair Lundin said that he believed the barns were condemned, but Mr. White said that they had not been condemned but did not have the roof. One of the barns was repaired at a cost of \$25,000 by PCHA. Structurally the concrete is good and the barn could be rebuilt. Chair Lundin thanked Mr. White.

3. Budget Update: Mr. Robert Padilla addressed the commission to update them on the 2014/15 budget. Before doing this, he spoke about the 2013/14 budget wherein 83% of the fiscal year has elapsed and 81 1/2% of the budget has been spent. However, Mr. Padilla reminded the commission that NRPR is entering its busy season with pools opening adding an influx of temporary help. He also said that earlier in the fiscal year, NRPR expected to go over budget by approximately \$415,000, but now expects to go over budget by less than half that amount. This has been achieved by using Flood Control funding for maintenance of the river parks, and common sense measures like eliminating travel, unnecessary training, holding vacant positions open longer than necessary, and being mindful of our spending. Regarding revenues, the actual collected revenues have exceeded what was budgeted by 12% or \$100,000 over budget. For the 2014/15 budget, NRPR's proposed expenditure budget is \$90,000 over the current fiscal year. This is mainly because the county is changing how motor pool costs are calculated and the county is moving to electronic timekeeping via ADP effective July, which required NRPR to purchase equipment that could be used by staff in the field, as

there is no internet connectivity in those parks. Mr. Padilla reminded the commission about the report he gave the commission in January regarding the 2014/15 budget where it was anticipated that all river parks would be maintained with funding provided by RFCD. However, this was with the understanding that the Board of Supervisors' would approve of a 3-cent increase in the Flood Control tax levy. Mr. Padilla also told them that on April 28, 2014, Mr. Huckelberry submitted his recommended budget to the Board of Supervisors where he is recommending a 28-cent increase to the primary property tax. In his secondary property tax recommendation which covers the library district, debt service and the flood control district he is asking that debt service be reduced by 8 cents, and the library and flood control districts increased by 6 cents and 4 cents respectively. Of the 4 cents for RFCD, 3 of those cents would fund the river park maintenance. Mr. Padilla asked for the commissioners' support in speaking with their supervisors and letting them know the RFCD tax levy increase should be approved. If the 28 cents does not get approved by the Board, parks would not be immune to cuts as it is not a mandated service department. Mr. Padilla referred them to the memo of April 15, 2014 from Mr. Huckelberry asking for an analysis of the impacts to the department if revenues were to be reduced by \$1.5 million. Mr. Padilla reminded them that if the tax rate was not increased, as parks is not a mandated service department, parks would have to undergo certain cuts. Commissioner Cesare said that she was glad to see Mr. Cawein's comments providing various options that could be availed off. She also mentioned that maintenance costs were really the big-ticket items. She also mentioned that when thinking of the dog park, it was a good idea, but what about the ongoing maintenance that it would take and could the maintenance of it be endowed. She also said that previously Flood Control provided funding for the river park maintenance and wanted to know now whether they would only provide the funding or take staff and the function would be removed from Parks. Mr. Padilla thanked Commissioner Cesare for bringing up operations and maintenance costs. This issue is also being looked at the Bond Commission meetings. Regarding the dog park, Parks is in discussion to have the fund responsible for maintenance. Mr. Padilla also informed the commission that many years ago RFCD funded the river park maintenance but of late that function and funding has been taken up by Parks. Under a current MOU, RFCD provided NRPR with \$260,000 for river park maintenance. In actuality, it costs NRPR \$2 million to maintain the river parks. He also mentioned that transferring the river parks back to RFCD would free up funds for the department. Mr. Padilla also reminded the commission that in previous years this department has been asked to absorb additional expenses like the additional 20-30 miles of river park maintenance and several other parks, like Canoa Preserve Park, without any funding. Chair Lundin also mentioned that Parks has had to absorb several budget cuts over the past few years due to no raises in property taxes which combined with lower valuations have hit parks especially hard. Commissioner Cesare mentioned that this helps inform the group. Mr. Cawein agreed that NRPR is severely underfunded and if compared to other jurisdictions like the City of Tucson which is funded at approximately \$95 per resident, or Scottsdale at \$147, the County is only funded at \$48 per resident. Making it harder for Parks is that the system is rapidly expanding with no corresponding increase in funding, and operations and maintenance costs are critical factors. Receiving funding from RFCD would help the Parks budget immensely. Commissioner Cesare asked whether the staff would stay with Parks or move. She was advised that RFCD would provide the funding and the staff would stay. Commissioner Johnson asked whether the dog park contract would be used for other projects. She was advised that this would work as a model for other contracts with further development. This would be a public-private partnership and given the present financial situation, Parks would like to encourage this. She also asked whether operations and maintenance costs would be written into agreements in future. Mr. Padilla said they would be. Mr. Cawein mentioned that this agreement was also to help secure the naming rights, and that if

the donors could secure \$50,000 for the initial phase, it would be a reasonable amount to secure the naming rights. Commissioner Johnson also wanted to complement Mr. Cawein for his great response to Mr. Huckelberry's memo. Mr. Catino told the commission that he will continue to pursue separate funding of parks through the Legislature and that he would have more information within six months.

4. **Content and frequency of NRPR's Division Reports:** Mr. Cawein asked the commission if they would prefer to change the reporting strategies given that some of the reports are fairly routine and some divisions do not have reports on occasion. For example, there could be alternating reports with some divisions reporting in some months and the rest in others. Chair Lundin said he liked the current structure and that if there is nothing to report, that could just be stated. He also felt that some things come up during the month and they would lose the opportunity to hear about it. Commissioner Johnson agreed with him stating that since they only attend once a month, they have no way of knowing what goes on and would not be doing their job, thus the monthly reports help keep them informed. Commissioner Chesson had no preference. Chair Lundin also mentioned that staff should know it is okay not to have a report. Commissioner Cesare also agreed that monthly reports were preferred compared with quarterly reports that are too removed. Commissioner Barker also agreed that monthly reports were better at keeping up with relationships. Mr. Barr mentioned to the commission that in the past, oftentimes at the end of the meeting staff reports were disregarded, thus staff appreciates the enthusiasm that the commissioners show in staffs' work.

5. **Adjustment to the Pima Regional Trails System Master Plan to change the Pantano River Park (Houghton Road to Colossal Cave segment) from a single path to a Divided Urban Pathway:** Mr. Anderson gave a status update on the Pantano River Park from Houghton Road to Colossal Cave. He explained that when The Loop formally came into being in 2009, the Pantano River Park was taken down in status beyond the Loop to a single path from Houghton Road to Colossal Cave Road. Now it has been decided that it would be better to go with the Divided Urban Pathway (DUP) for the entire route. Mr. Anderson has talked with the assistant county administrator about this decision and she concurs. In addition, there is a new subdivision project just getting underway just north of Cienega High School, so there is a great opportunity to do the Pantano River Park at the DUP standard. Therefore, the Commission is being asked to approve this slight adjustment to the Pima Regional Trail System Master Plan, and to return the River Park from path status to DUP status from Houghton Road to Colossal Cave Road. Commissioner Cesare asked about the linear distance and was told it was about five miles. She also inquired if the Rincon Knolls project is okay with the path and would it be done on both banks. Mr. Anderson said the path would be on both sides of the Pantano. Commissioner Chesson asked about what type of traffic would be on the path and was told it could accommodate horses, wheel chairs, and all types of traffic. It would be an 8' dirt pathway and a 12' to 16' paved pathway with vegetation and at least 8' between them. Commissioner Cesare made a motion to approve this upgrade, seconded by Commissioner Kellman. All were in favor.

DIVISION UPDATE REPORTS:

1. **Natural Resources (Kerry Baldwin):** Mr. Baldwin asked if there were any questions regarding his report. Commissioner Chesson asked about the black tail prairie dog reintroduction. Mr. Baldwin told him the present population of prairie dogs is in the Las Cienegas National Conservation Area within a few miles of where the county would relocate them and that they are an endangered species being reintroduced in Southern Arizona. There are presently two towns established and in the long term they are looking at 10,000 – 15,000 acres. This is the County's first project involving the reintroduction of an endangered species other than protecting habitat.

Commissioner Johnson asked whether there was an article out on this. Mr. Baldwin told her that Arizona Game and Fish and the Bureau of Land Management have been working on this for many years and there have been several press releases and magazine articles on this subject.

Commissioner Cesare asked about Agua Caliente pond and spring and wanted to know the impact if this project was not funded and pushed back for a few years. Mr. Baldwin told her that the spring system has been failing for the past decade. In 2000 the spring produced about 140 gallons per minute which has not been seen in the past years. About 1/10" of water is lost daily from the bottom of the pond and even using full water rights cannot keep the pond filled any more. Thus, the ultimate impact would be the pond going dry. If that happens, vegetation and the lush look could be lost along with this iconic and extremely popular place. As an example, Mr. Baldwin told the commissioners that for Easter, people had to register to enter the park and hundreds were turned away. If the bond issue does not move forward, there would have to be other alternatives like only filling a portion of the pond using dikes which would mean losing some vegetation. Another option would be moving more water rights and pumping more but this could be problematic with a declining aquifer. Mr. Baldwin said that this was a complex problem and in his opinion, we could not afford to do nothing. The deep-water aquifer seems pretty stable but the problem is with the surface artesian springheads. It has also probably been impacted because of the past eleven years of drought. Commissioner Cesare also mentioned that this project could be in the crosshairs between Pima County's sustainability program and the park which is immensely popular. She thought it could be a lesson in what happens with climate change. Mr. Baldwin said that they are providing interpretative signs about what was happening. He also told her that in 2002, the Corp of Engineers considered redesigning it to make more of it a marsh and there was a tremendous public outcry against it. The public felt that letting it dry was not an option. Commissioner Johnson asked about Colossal Cave. She was told that the Board of Supervisors requested a performance audit which is in progress. There has been a consultant hired to look at it from an attractions perspective; how it could be improved; and what would be needed to be done to make it a more sustainable business model. The draft report should be done by summer and the final report could be ready by August or September. Commissioner Johnson wanted to know whether this is because of the lack of attendance and was told there were several factors, visitation is down 40-50%, several million dollars in capital improvements are needed to bring the park up to basic standard. Due to the downturn the park manager has not been able to maintain it properly and since some of it was built in the 1930's by the CCC, it is not ADA compliant and there are water problems. Commissioner Kellman wanted to know how the buffelgrass volunteers are thanked for their service. Mr. Baldwin said that at the next commission meeting there will be a presentation by the Sonoran Weedwackers and the buffelgrass volunteer coordinator, Marilyn Hanson, to learn more about the program. He also said that volunteer recognition was very important but due to county policy not allowing volunteer recognition, donations from the Parklands Foundation are used to buy doughnuts and coffee for the volunteers. Commissioner Kellman asked approximately how much money was needed for this recognition. Mr. Baldwin said that a couple of thousand dollars would be required for all the programs' volunteers.

2. Operations Division (George Kuck): Commissioner Cesare asked whether the Pantano and Santa Cruz river parks which are being transferred to the county from the City of Tucson would receive funding from the city. Mr. Kuck told her that there was no funding from the City but it would be funded through RFCD. Commissioner Barker asked whether some trees from El Paseo de los Arboles that look diseased could be removed. Mr. Kuck told him that all memorial trees in this park are mandated to be

replaced. He also said that additional tree planting is to be done under the canopy enhancement project.

CALL TO THE PUBLIC: Mr. Chuck Catino told the commission that the BAJA organization has donated 11,000 hours/year for the past 12 years which is over \$100,000 worth of service annually at \$10 per hour.

FUTURE AGENDA ITEM(S): Buffelgrass presentation
 Future Bond overview

ADJOURNMENT: As there was no further business to come before the commission, duly motioned and seconded, the meeting adjourned at 10:46 a.m.