March 12, 2021
Natural Resources, Parks and Recreation Department
3500 West River Road, Tucson, Arizona

Quorum having been established, Chair Lundin called the meeting to order at 9:31 a.m. on March 12, 2021.

Commissioners present were Michael Lundin, Enrique Serna, Carol Kovalik, Anita Kellman Ted Schmidt and Richard Barker. Damion Alexander attended virtually. Jan Johnson, Victor Rivera and Robert Owens were absent.
Staff present were Chris Cawein, Robert Padilla, Joe Barr, Karen Simms, Robin Hadden and Ann Kambholja. Ron Odell, Stephen Daigle, Neil Stitzer and Patrick McNamara attended virtually.

Those present recited the pledge of allegiance.

Consent Agenda

A motion was made and seconded to approve the November 13, 2020 minutes. The motion passed.

COMMISSION DISCUSSION/ACTION REQUEST

1. Update on Agua Caliente: Ms. Simms informed the commission the Agua Caliente restoration project was now complete. She informed them that that over the years the pond had grown more shallow due to accumulation of silt and NRPR was using millions of gallons of water to keep it filled. Ms. Simms informed them that the pond liner they intended to use was not found to be suitable due to the high clay content. Commissioner Kovalik asked whether the pond was lined and she was told that a chemical liner was used. Commissioner Kovalik also asked whether the project came in on time and within budget. Ms. Simms informed her that it was on budget, but the project was completed a little later than expected due to unforeseen issues like getting the pond dried out, and the spring running due to the 2019 winter rains. Commissioner Kovalik asked Ms. Simms if she could give advice to others, from state parks for example, and she said she could. There were no further questions.

2. Update from the NRPRAC Loop Sub-committee and (#3) update on e-bikes: Commissioner Alexander informed the commission that he had had a recent conversation with Commissioner Kovalik that changed what he wanted to present. Commissioner Kovalik told him that another sub-committee meeting was necessary to
re-assess the problem with new information available. The items will be combined and addressed at the next meeting. Ms. Kovalik informed the commission that at this time she cannot support or go forward with any recommendations to the Board of Supervisors regarding e-bikes on the Chuck Huckelberry Loop. She said that there ought to be more public input before deciding whether signage needs to be removed or changed around the Loop.

3. Update on Rillito Racing: Mr. Cawein informed the commission that there was limited racing in 2020 due to COVID-19 and none in 2021. NRPR was asked by Rillito Racing about extending the contract and it has been extended for two years, pending Board approval with all other conditions of the contract remaining the same. Mr. Cawein also informed them that the racing association wants a fall racing season, but that it is under consideration as there are many other users of the park. Commissioner Schmidt said that the issue of fall racing would be a major problem for soccer and would like to be kept informed on any discussions regarding this matter. Mr. Cawein informed them that the contract currently defines the racing season to be between January 1st through April 5th and that has been retained in the amendment. He informed them that this is a separate request that has been brought forth. Commissioner Kovalik asked whether there was circuit racing where the horses and jockeys could be at a different racetrack and could not come. Mr. Cawein said it was very possible, but that there was a lot of uncertainty at this point. From NRPR’s point of view, Rillito Park is a multi-use park and there has to be a balance between all the entities. Mr. Cawein also mentioned that the contract was previously managed by the Attractions & Tourism office and that along with the Fair Horse Racing Commission (FHRC) has now been moved to NRPR. Commissioner Kovalik asked whether the FHRC would be a subcommittee and Chair Lundin advised her that the FHRC was not dissolved, but would continue to function under NRPR. Chair Lundin asked if NRPR could fit horse racing in given that Rillito Park is a multi-use park, while acknowledging it should not be at the cost of other parties using the park as there are many youth in the area who have not been able to play all these months.

Commissioner Kovalik asked whether the Foundation had paid the $300,000 they owed and whether it had now increased. Mr. Cawein informed her that it was more than that now. Chair Lundin said that that was understandable since there had been no revenue from racing. There were no more questions.

4. Update on FY 21/22 Budget: Mr. Padilla handed out a snapshot of what NRPR’s budget had been like in the past few years. In 2019/2020, pre-COVID, the budget was intact and the total was $19.2 million. Mr. Padilla informed them that for the Department, the budget process begins in October and the budget is submitted in January. In January 2020, Mr. Padilla submitted the budget for $19.9 million for this fiscal year. After COVID began in March/April 2020, the County Administrator mandated every department cut their budgets by 8%. Thus NRPR’s budget was reduced from $19.9 million to $18 million. Mr. Padilla informed them that he submitted the budget for 2021/2022 in January and the proposed budget is $19.9 million, basically restoring the budget. Mr. Padilla informed them that the state has not reimbursed the County for COVID testing and with the situation of migrants coming in to Ajo, the County has to cover those unbudgeted costs as well. So there is a possibility of the County Administrator asking for cuts if the situation is not rectified. Mr. Padilla reminded them that this is NRPR’s proposed budget but he is not certain that given these circumstance, it would be a repeat of the last budget. Chair Lundin reminded the commission that it is part of their
duties to be liaisons between their supervisors and NRPR, and hoped they would make recommendations to their supervisors especially considering there was heavy usage of parks and trails during this time. Commissioner Kovalik asked Mr. Padilla if the budget included funding for pools and splash-pads that was cut from this fiscal year's budget and Mr. Padilla informed her that it was restored. Commissioner Kovalik asked when this would go to the BOS for approval and was informed that that happens later in May. He also informed her that the Finance Department is putting together the budget books for the County Administrator's review to determine whether there are enough funds available. The County Administrator has to consider if Pima County is going to get reimbursed for the unbudgeted expenses of approximately $50 million and if not, mandate that departments cut costs. Commissioner Kovalik said that parks are so important during this time considering that people needed to get out. Commissioner Serna concurred with her. Chair Lundin mentioned that many organized sports were cancelled as well, resulting in loss of revenue. There were no more questions.

Commissioner Alexander welcomed Mr. Ted Schmidt, the new commissioner for District 3 along with the rest of the commission.

CALL TO THE PUBLIC:

Evan Piling (Sonoran Desert Mountain Bicyclists) spoke regarding promotion of trail etiquette and support for the Shemwell Trail segment.
Carol Kovalik spoke regarding a meeting with NRPR Staff and the public at McDonald Park on January 21, 2021. Commissioner Kellman asked why the District 4 commissioner was involved and was told that Commissioner Kovalik was invited by a friend who lived in the neighborhood. Mr. Cawein informed them that NRPR receives many complaints and this particular one regarding vegetation in McDonald Park received plenty of pro and con comments. Normally for complaints there are no public meetings.

FUTURE AGENDA ITEM(S):
Complaint resolution and public meetings
Parklands Foundation update
Update from the NRPRAC Loop Sub-committee regarding e-bike recommendations

ADJOURNMENT: As there was no further business to come before the commission, duly motioned and seconded, the meeting adjourned at 10:30 a.m.
AGUA CALIENTE PARK

POND 1 RESTORATION PROJECT
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GOALS:

1. Water Conservation – reduce groundwater pumping
2. Wildlife Habitat – manage water depths & vegetation
3. Public Recreation – enhance enjoyment of park
4. Restore Historic Views – open water views
5. Native wildlife conservation – stock native fish
POND 1 RESTORATION PROJECT VIDEO

Chemical liner settled

May 1, 2020
POND 1 PROJECT WAS COMPLETED IN 2020

Pond 1 pre-restoration  Pond 1 conceptual post-restoration  Pond 1 actual post-restoration
GOAL 1: WATER CONSERVATION

Gallons Pumped - January

Gallons Pumped - August
GOAL 2: WILDLIFE HABITAT ENHANCEMENT

Installed Wildlife Island

Created Cienega Habitat
GOAL 3: ENHANCE PUBLIC RECREATION
GOAL 4: RESTORE HISTORIC VIEWS
GOAL 5: RESTORE NATIVE AQUATIC WILDLIFE

Gila topminnow, longfin dace, and Gila chub were introduced in Pond 1 during 2020

Gila topminnow and desert pupfish were introduced in Pond 2 during 2020
GOAL 5: RESTORE RARE NATIVE PLANTS

Huachuca Water Umbel – Endangered

Arizona Eryngo – proposed Endangered
COMING NEXT: FURTHER POND 2 ENHANCEMENTS
Special Thanks to the **Regional Flood Control District** for major project funding and project management,

to the **Friends of Agua Caliente Park** for bridge funding support, project outreach and documentation,

and to the **Parklands Foundation** for additional bridge funding support

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Dz0DyiRrL2A