



Parks and Recreation Commission Meeting Minutes

May 18, 2022

The Centre at University Park

Attendance: Matt Buie, Ashley Martinez, Lauren Eldridge, and Linda Smith (Virtual), Abby Jennings (Virtual), Cannon Fletcher

Absent: Demetria Murdock, Director Doris Wright, Ren Bressinck, Samuel Ellis

City Board of Director Liaison: Director Capi Peck

LRPR Staff: City Attorney Beth Carpenter, Leland Couch, Angela Nelson, Shawanda Robinson, and Ricardo Ante.

Welcome and Introductions: Chairman Buie called the meeting to order and welcomed everyone present. Chairman Buie proceeded with the agenda to the roll call and approval of April's minutes.

Roll Call and Approval of Minutes: Angela Nelson called the roll and Chairman Buie reported a quorum was six (6) members (four in person and two virtual) in attendance. Official business will be voted on during the meeting.

Chairman Buie then entertained a motion to approve the April's commission meeting minutes.

Ashley Martinez mentioned on page one, paragraph one of the April's minutes, which revisions should be made on the quorum statement regarding attendance.

Motion was moved by Commissioner Martinez. Seconded by Commissioner Eldridge.

The April commission meeting minutes were approved.

Citizen Communication: No citizen communication.

Chairman Buie then called for any staff reports.

Staff Reports: Director Leland Couch started staff reports by mentioning that he was filling in for the Deputy Director of Operations, and mentioned that the department had new hires in all those positions. Kanis Park would be getting a new set of basketball courts in a \$1.5 million project. They include three (3) full courts and one (1) half-court, as well as a new entrance and trail systems.

Director Couch mentioned that he was looking for the Board of Directors to approve a new part to the new playground, being built as all-inclusive, in the coming weeks. This will grow the site to over \$1 million.

Regarding maintenance, the department has also attained three (3) new contracts. The look of the parks were brought up and how they weren't being attended to as needed. This is due to staffing contracts expiring in March and they are negotiating these terms to take to the board.

Lastly, the Western Hills playground was mentioned. The \$1.5 million project would start on the playground, pavilion, the parking lot and trails later in the year. This would come from last year's tax campaign. He mentioned several other projects, but not by name due to time constraints.

Director Couch gave way to questions, but none were asked at the time.

Administration

Deputy Director of Administration, Angela Nelson reported no updates.

Recreation

Deputy Director of Recreation Services, Shawanda Robinson opened recreation staff reports by informing the upcoming Summer Playground Program, starting June 6, 2022. She informed the Commission that the Athletics Department is preparing to start the Summer Playground Program on June 6th and will go on until July 21st. Registration for the program started on May 1st. Robinson mentions that numbers are being cut back in this program due to future concerns of Covid-19, with 210 at Dunbar, and 120 at others sites.

Deputy Director Robinson mentioned that Tee-Ball, Junior Hoops and Summer League were starting practices, which is all done at Dunbar Community Center. She mentioned the 30-40 year old league is doing the same, with the culmination of years added up to forty-five (45). She stated how they were getting the program ready so that the children would be happy and have as much fun as possible this summer.

The golf courses was the next topic, with several up coming tournaments.

Therapeutic Recreation Division was the next topic, with their summer camp dates starting on the 6th of June as well. They are at full capacity in the division.

Pool openings were the next topic. Southwest Community Center and Jim Dailey Fitness Centers are getting ready to open. An event has been scheduled, known as \$1 Day on May 28, 2022. Deputy Director Robinson reported that there would be a Fitness in the Park at War Memorial Park; it will be an outside fitness day.

MacArthur Military Museum will be having a Gold Star Family Picnic and Concert on June 12, 2022 at 7:00 p.m. The location will be outside by the pavilion. This concludes the Recreation Division.

Deputy Director Robinson gave room for questions, but none were asked at this time.

With no further reports, Chairman Buie proceeded to move down the agenda to old business.

Old Business: Commissioner Lauren Eldridge gave an update on the 2022 Parks Commission Golf Tournament. Eldridge stated the official day of the Tournament will be the Friday before

Memorial Day, May 27th starting at 8:00 am, Commissioner Eldridge mentioned that help is needed to spread the word and more to register for the event. She mentioned she was on The Buzz radio station earlier that morning, and will be on KARK next week promoting it as well.

Commissioner Eldridge stated that she would need help from around 7:00 a.m. until the event shut down and that much help would be needed with passing out bags and taking payments since most people would be making payments day of the event. Commissioner Eldridge brought flyers for the event to pass along, as well as sending them in a PDF format for those attending virtually.

Commissioner Eldridge stated the tournament will be giving out really fun prizes from around the city just to highlight the city. She said that E-Z-Go would be putting a golf cart at a hole, so that if you happen to make a hole-in-one, you win that golf cart. She mentioned that the 3 to 5 year outlook was to increase the awareness of it, and put the city on the map. One of the biggest things to the radio station was free drinks, compared to the PGA's \$18 price tag on drinks.

She mentioned again that the proceeds would be used for the Summer Opportunity and they would try to create a fund the Summer Playground Program could use at the committee's discretion. Plans are still being drawn out.

Commissioner Eldridge requested that any questions regarding this event go to her, and in the case of interested ones, the information was on the flyer, yet she mentioned being emailed since she was putting together a list of those who are signing up.

Chairman Buie thank Commissioner Eldridge for all of her hard work on this event, asked for a reminder when time comes on volunteer assistance for the tournament. He asked to plan to stay out there as long as possible. The Lauren team is partnering with City Parks Conservancy to take electronic payments as well.

Commissioner Eldridge stated that there were two options for payment: check payment sent to Little Rock Parks and Recreation, payment on the day of the tournament, and cash would be accepted.

Chairman Buie asked about word-of-mouth in terms of getting the word out about the event. In the case of getting registries, Commissioner Eldridge emphasized sponsorships are very affordable for this tournament and how the small businesses could put a sign on the course at a particular hole for \$250 or for \$500 a GPS location (logo on the GPS) on the golf cart for thirty (30) days and a sponsorship. It also comes with the possibility of a team registration if someone wants to add a team, with no extra cost if you want to become a \$500 sponsor. She encourages anyone with connections to the local businesses to just reach out to get your name out there and to mention it's for the kids.

Chairman Buie then states that at the last meeting, a vote was taken that Recreation will be the recipient of the funds from the tournament and at the appropriate time once the monies are there, then Shawanda would ask for the money to be delegated to a certain program.

Chairman Buie opened the floor for comments to Commissioner Eldridge, yet none were given at the time. Then restated the need for volunteers at the event with Commissioner Eldridge.

The Appointment of Committees were next on the agenda.

Buie states that appointments will be held during this month's meeting. Chairman Buie restates chairs of each committee: Parks Conservancy Liaison is Commissioner Bressinck, whom being absent, could not appoint anyone to be on the committee. The next is Outreach and Social Media, and Commissioner Martinez reports no updates, but asks for anyone that would like to join to let her know. She mentioned taking volunteers to establish those committees, to with the chairman agreed.

Chairman Buie mentioned how since there were only six (6) of the ten (10) members available, some would have to pull double duty if they decided to sign up for any number of Commissions or sub-committees. He then brings Commissioners Fletcher and Jennings up to speed, and asks if they had gotten a copy of the Commission Bylaws, and informs them to let someone know if they do not have a copy. The purpose of these committees is to have meaningful interaction with the staff on these three points, and to assist staff with furthering those particular initiatives.

The next committee was Master Plan & Vision, chaired by Commissioner L. Smith. She reports no updates. She mentioned reaching out to a couple of others and will have finalized plans by the next meeting. Commissioner Smith stated that Commissioner Dustin Smith was out of the state on vacation, giving that as the reason for his absence, and mentioned that she was happy he became a part of the Commission, yet they are not related.

To that remark, Attorney Carpenter states that the bylaws mention that the chairs of those committees would have to appoint the Commissioners to their committees as members. She states that it would have to be approved by the entire Commission.

The Chairman then asked if any of the committee chairs have reached out to the member. Commissioner Martinez states that she had not because she didn't think that she was allowed to reach out. Attorney Carpenter says, reaching out outside of the meeting is a little (inaudible) you might not want to do that. To this, they make the necessary appointments the members at the meeting. Chairman Buie asks if anyone would like to join these committees, to which there are. Commissioner Eldridge joins Commissioner Martinez on the Outreach & Social Media. Commissioners Jennings, Ellis, and D. Smith join Commissioner L. Smith on Master Plans & Visions. It was mentioned that updates would be given every month to see the progress that these committees have made. Commissioner Martinez moved for the motion to be approved, and Commissioner Eldridge seconded it. The motion was approved by the Commission.

Director Couch asks Attorney Carpenter about meeting with the other committees, to which she stated that the meetings would have to be publicized, and the social media outlets would have to be notified at least 2 hours prior to the scheduled meeting. She mentioned contacting Spencer Watson to notify the media, and Little Rock Parks and Recreation for building usage. She also mentioned using some time before, which previous Commissions did.

Commissioner Martinez asked about the taking of minutes during those meetings, to which Attorney stated that since the meetings were open, minutes must be taken. It was stated that meetings must be recorded, either in video or audio format.

Then proceeds to New Business.

New Business: Chairman Buie opens discussion on the three (3) new Commission Members: Abby Jennings, Cannon Fletcher, and Dustin Smith.

Chairman Buie gave the floor over to Commissioner Fletcher for him to tell about himself. Next, Commissioner Jennings was given the floor to tell about herself.

The chairman mentioned that with the addition of three new members, there was still room for one or two more.

With no further discussion, Chairman Buie opened the floor to Karen Sykes, for a presentation.

Presentation

Karen Sykes, The Park Ranger/Volunteer Programs Coordinator, introduced herself informing the Commission she has been in her position for a total of seven (7) years.

First on the list was a past event, the MacArthur 5K race, where her team won the Corporate Cup, and she came in for her age division.

The next event was Music in the Park, 4:00 pm - 7:30 pm which is taking place on June 3rd. Sykes mentioned there is a need for volunteers. There is also an event on October 6th at Allsopp Park at 5:00 pm as a two-part series. This event coincides with Hillcrest Day, which is on the first (1st) Thursday of each month.

Sykes mentioned her programs are not part of the general budget so she has created fundraisers like Music in the Park. While doing this, she has increased the number of parks adopted, as well as the number of volunteerism for the city which has increased by 44% . This means providing funds for volunteers to make the parks beautiful; purchasing tools, flowers, grabbers and including water and snacks if possible. She also mentioned bringing back the banquet for volunteers in the fall, if permitted.

Next, Karen states Music in the Park is a field of festivals with vendors. It is food trucks, beer vendors, and it is two bands on one stage (The On-Call band and Sad Daddy band). She mentioned there is a special outreach to non-profits to connect and grow memberships, grow volunteerism and branding and help each other. The deadline for the thirty-five (35) vendors was May 19th with all payments due May 25th. There will be a VIP tent with food and beverages. She informed the Commission that the event is free to the public as well.

With no further discussion, Chairman Buie opened the floor for agenda items for next month's meeting.

City Director, Capi Peck made a recommendation to talk about an effort to promote the bond issue passed at the Board meeting last night, to the agenda.

Parks Director, Leland Couch mentioned adding two (2) updates. First, is introducing a social event during the year at half year for the Commission that will be more casual where we can get together to know each other better, as well as understand. We can bring up and finalize a date/ time and organize it. Second, introducing new Parks and Recreation staff for presentations. However, this will not need a vote and it will be a standing agenda item.

Chairman Buie yielded the floor to Director Peck for City Liaison feedback, who reinforced the need to fill any vacancies on the committee, and mentioned that all local city boards and commissions are struggling right now and for no one to become discouraged because lack of attendance, because of the pandemic and the option to attend virtual. We are not the only ones. It's city wide, so don't feel like we are not loved and important. It's happening everywhere. City Director Peck stated she is anxious to get an energized group back and welcomed Commissioner Martinez to her second meeting. She also congratulated Parks Director, Leland Couch on becoming the Director. Peck asked about about vacancies which Commissioner Buie mentioned there may be one or two vacancies, but will need to reference attendance.

Director Peck mentioned the bond issue and put forth some facts about it; it helps to get more money for infrastructure, for trails and for parks. The Board approved to be on the ballot August 9th. She would like to see the 3/8th tax back on the ballot; It is critical we fund our Parks system. If we get it on the ballot, people will support it. She mentioned we all need to become cheerleaders to make sure that passes on August 9th.

It was suggested by Director Couch, a letter from the Commission needs to be voted upon to send regarding this to the Board of Directors for the City of Little Rock. Deputy Director Shawanda Robinson mentioned through AARP each Commissioner sent a letter to the Board. City Attorney Beth Carpenter agreed that is an option as well.

Also, Director Peck encouraged Commissioner Eldridge to give a report at a Board Meeting about the Golf Tournament and where the funds are being distributed.

Commissioner Fletcher mentioned adding Tennis Centric (Arkansas Tennis Pro). It started May 30th at Rebsamen Tennis. It is minor tennis leagues and the only tournament of this size and an unique opportunity for a city of this size. He recommended everyone to attend.

Commissioner Buie then asked and stated this was just a notification and not for an agenda item and thank him for the information.

With no further discussion, Chairman Buie adjourned the meeting at 1:07 p.m.

The meeting was adjourned.