



Parks and Recreation Commission Meeting Minutes

September 13, 2023

The Centre at University Park

Attendance: Matt Buie, J.T. Ferstl (Virtual), Cannon Fletcher, Ben France (Virtual), Mike Bernardo, Ron Bara, Samuel Ellis, Summer Campbell

Absent: Lauren Eldridge, Linda Smith, Director Capi Peck, Director Andrea Lewis

City Board of Director Liaison: Director Capi Peck, Director Andrea Lewis

LRPR Staff: Leland Couch, Angela Nelson, Shawanda Craig, Justin Dorsey, JP Rogers, Briana Hatfield, Michael Garrity, Katie Stehle, Chad Fougerousse, City Attorney Beth Carpenter

Welcome: Chairman Buie called the meeting to order and welcomed everyone present.

Roll Call and Approval of Minutes: Katie Stehle called the roll, and Chairman Buie reported that there are now ten (10) commissioners on the board and a quorum in attendance was seven (7) members. Chairman Buie thanked everyone for coming.

Introductions: Chairman Buie welcomed the newest Park Commissioner, Commissioner Summer Campbell. Commissioner Campbell informed the Commission a little bit about herself and why she decided to join.

Citizen Communication: Chairman Buie asked if there was any Citizen Communication from the floor and online. There were none.

Chairman Buie then called for staff reports, giving Director Couch the floor. Director Couch gave Deputy Director Nelson the floor.

Staff Reports:

Administration

Deputy Director of Administration, Angela Nelson, informed the Commission that she is addressing administration policies and HR related issues. They have built quite a few positions this week. As you can see on the list Outdoor Recreation Coordinator, Fitness Specialist, and the Construction and Planning Manager who is here with them today. Deputy Director Dorsey will introduce Construction and Planning Manager shortly. Also on the list are positions for a Custodian, Parks Maintenance Worker and Golf Superintendent. Positions advertising this week or sometime next week, Supervisor I, Maintenance Worker, Community Garden Liaison, Landscape Coordinator, Construction Worker and Assistant Marathon Manager. Deputy Director Nelson commented she knows the list for vacant positions appears to grow each meeting. The

goal of the Department is to promote within, causing them to advertise for those now other vacant positions. The Department is continuing to interview for the Parks Marketing and Social Media Coordinator, and just wrapped up on interviews for the Assistant Tennis Facility Supervisor. Director Couch and Deputy Director Nelson initiated pay increases for part-time staff, effective September 1, 2023. The Department has 3 part-time employees that have been employed with Parks and Recreation for 30-35 years. Deputy Director Nelson explained the breakdown of the pay increases. She emphasized Administration is staying abreast of their goals to improve productivity and efficiency. Deputy Director Nelson continues to monitor the budget and ensuring invoices get processed and PO's are closed, along with conducting internal financial audits. Staff will begin some payroll audits as well. Deputy Director Nelson and staff are also continuing to track and document parks' inventory, which includes equipment, computers, and such. This concludes the Administration report.

Chairman Buie thanked Deputy Director Nelson for her report. Chairman Buie informed the Commission's approval of last month's meeting minutes have not yet been approved.

Chairman Buie then asked for the August 9, 2023 minutes to be approved. The motion passed, and the minutes were approved. Chairman Buie apologized for missing that on the agenda.

Director Couch mentioned next on the agenda is Recreation. Director Couch mentioned he was excited about all the new hires. He reiterated the pay increase for the part-time staff and mentioned talking with a staff member who was affected by the increase.

Director Couch gave Deputy Director Craig the floor.

Recreation

Deputy Director of Recreation Services, Shawanda Craig, greeted the floor by informing all that, just like Director Couch and Deputy Director Nelson, she is excited about the new Outdoor Recreation Coordinator. She mentioned if anyone had ideas of programming that they would like to see implemented, to share the ideas with her. The Community Centers have been busy transitioning to the fall season, working on various things. They are gearing up for the volleyball program that will start on September 25. Centers will also have a cheerleading program where they will learn skills and drills. The cheerleaders will be utilized for the football and basketball seasons. Deputy Director Craig commented on a recent event hosted at the West Central Community Center. The Arkansas Travelers and the Memphis Grizzlies had baseball clinics, with about seventy students. They got a chance to interact with some of the minor league players. Overall about 160 people signed up and 96 attended the event. This is the second year the Center has hosted the event with the Arkansas Travelers and the Memphis Grizzlies, they will be in touch for next year. The Southwest Community Center will have ACT prep training, beginning in April 2024. They will have about 15 participants to train. Deputy Director Craig encouraged all to share this information with anyone that might need assistance. The East Little Rock Community Center is starting a new program called the Trail Blazers Bike Club, starting September 14, 2023. Deputy Director Craig elaborated on the new program. She is hoping the

program encourages kids to ride more in their community and understand the safety. The Senior Program has been working with Baptist Health participating in outreach by providing monthly screenings of blood pressure, cholesterol, and diabetes services. Deputy Director Craig mentioned that if you have not had a chance to visit the West Central Community Center, you should. The Center is participating in challenge games against other cities community centers. They are very, very excited about it. Staff attended the Elder Abuse Conference in Hot Springs where they were taught about scams, what is considered abuse and what to look for during our senior programs. The Therapeutic Recreation adult program, Branch Out, is in full swing and they are getting ready to start back with their volunteering services at the Zoo each month. MacArthur Military Museum is hosting movies; upcoming is *Delay, Deny, Hope You Die*. It is a documentary related to the stories behind the thousands of America soldiers who returned from the battlefield of IRAQ and Afghanistan. Movies are hosted every third Tuesday of the month. The museum is having an upcoming offsite event at the Museum of Discovery Tinker Fest. In the Athletics Division, at Interstate Park much needed road improvements are being made. Deputy Director Craig ended with updating the Commission about the new golf carts at First-Tee and Rebsamen Golf Courses.

That concludes Deputy Director Craig's report. Chairman Buie called for questions. Commissioner Bernardo added the Kanis Park Daytime League has started its fall season with forty (40) permanent players and about twenty (20) substitute players.

Chairman Buie called for further questions. There were none.

Director Couch thanked Deputy Director Craig. He reiterated how excited the Department is about the new golf carts. Director Couch further elaborated on the process of leasing the golf carts and the help that City Attorney, Beth Carpenter, was on renewing the lease.

Director Couch also wanted to reiterate on the Trail Blazers program is funded by a grant that the Trail Coordinator, Jordan Mays, received for the Department. The Division will be focused more on that program with the Outdoor Recreation Coordinator as well.

The record reflects; Chairman Buie recognized that Commissioner Fletcher has joined the meeting online.

Director Couch gave Deputy Director Dorsey the floor.

Operations

Deputy Director of Operations, Justin Dorsey, opened with how exciting things are happening. The most exciting is the staffing levels and some of the new positions. Deputy Director Dorsey mentioned at the meeting with him today was the Department's new Planning and Construction Manager, Chad Fougerousse. Deputy Director Dorsey encourage the Commissioners to meet and introduce themselves to Chad after the meeting. He commented on James Shorts promotion to the Planner II position. Deputy Director Dorsey thanked Deputy Director Nelson for her work in

initiating the positions and getting them filled. The current list to be advertised covers all vacant positions. Every single position in the Operations Division will either have been filled or are currently interviewing. On the Maintenance side of things, with the weather being hot and dry, staff has cycled out of mowing season. Crews have switched to more limb and leaf removal, and general cleanup of the parks. The Division has recently purchased a street sweeper through FEMA. Staff is excited to use the new equipment for cleaning the parking lots. The Trails Division is overseeing the Boyle Park Mountain Bike Trail project. Downtown and Landscape Divisions are working on rehabbing flower beds and beautification of the area. President Clinton is getting new trees planted. Deputy Director Dorsey refreshed everyone on the Pop-Up meeting at Kiwanis Park. The Pop-Up community meeting is a chance to interact with citizens to discuss some of the new upgrades and bonds. The River Front Treehouse boardwalk is still ongoing. Deputy Director Dorsey reiterated Deputy Director Craig's statement about the much needed resurfacing of Interstate Park and how it is very exciting. Visitors will still have access to the park, as the Vendor is working in phases. In addition to that, staff is putting together plans and proposals for improving some amenities at Interstate Park. MacArthur Pond improvements have been completed. Cleaning out of debris on the west side and fountain repairs have been made.

Chairman Buie thanked Deputy Director Dorsey and called for questions. Commissioner Bernardo had a question if there were any handouts for the Pop-Up meeting at Kiwanis. Deputy Director Dorsey commented he did not have handouts at the moment but could email them later.

Chairman Buie had a few questions about when the bids for the Allsopp Trail and moving forward. Deputy Director Dorsey commented there are requirements on the bid, one being a three (3) week turnaround. He is expecting between three (3) weeks and one (1) month.

Chairman Buie inquired about the Boyle Park Playground. Deputy Director Dorsey commented the actual playground and equipment have all been ordered. Expected arrival of equipment is late spring or summer of 2024. Staff is currently in the design phase, working on coordinating the site layout and site plan with the mountain bike trail.

Chairman Buie also inquired about the boulders on War Memorial's north lawn he saw recently. He commented that the project is a partnership with the Little Rock Garden Club and the City Parks Conservancy. Deputy Director Dorsey informed the Commission that staff is working on the next steps; installing a plaque, landscaping and installing a horseshoe off Monroe Street. Deputy Director Dorsey did note that a boulder or two might have to be replaced. Staff was rushed at initial install due to the Razorback game.

Director Couch had a few things to add. Director Couch thanked and mentioned he appreciated all the work staff has done at War Memorial Park. Staff worked on cleanup and raising the tree canopy to ensure the area looked good for when everyone came to visit the city of the Razorback game. Director Couch reiterated other projects the Department has been working on. Dunbar Community Center has new sport lights at their tennis facility. With the use of ARPA and Covid

Funds, Junior Deputy will be getting their lights replaced starting in November of this year. Staff is planning to replace the lights at Rebsamen Tennis as well.

Chairman Buie echoed Director Couch's thanks and appreciation for all the hard work staff has been doing to keep the parks looking good. Chairman Buie added that it is a very exciting time to be with Parks and Recreation, from the administration to recreation to operations, staff is doing an outstanding job and he appreciates all the work they are doing.

Chairman Buie welcomed the Department's new Planning and Construction Manager, Chad Fougerousse.

Commissioner France had a question for Chairman Buie. Commissioner France inquired if there were any updates with Kanis Park, and specifically the basketball courts at Kanis Park. Deputy Director Dorsey answered by stating Kanis Park is still a work in progress. They are progressing on the project as a whole. He mentioned there was a portion of the project was not done according to specifications and staff is currently waiting on proposals and figuring out the next steps in a timely manner that will be acceptable and beneficial to the City.

Commissioner Fletcher inquired if the portion of the project in regards to the surfacing of the basketball courts or something else. Deputy Director Dorsey commented the issue was with the concrete bleachers and a seating wall. Commissioner Fletcher mentioned if he could be of any help to let him know.

Chairman Buie called for any more questions. There were none.

Old Business

Chairman Buie referred to the agenda, mentioning the next item of discussion; the Golf Tournament. This item falls under the purview of Commissioner Eldridge who is absent from today's meeting. Item has been skipped.

Chairman Buie moved to the next item of business; Safety and Security in Parks. Director Couch commented there is no further update. However, if the Commission wanted, Courtney Perry could come back and provide them with further information. Director Couch mentioned that he has been working with the Little Rock Police Department on installing new cameras and devices at some of the departments locations. The biggest challenge is the cost. LRPD has been working with people to get access to their existing cameras to be able to have bigger views across the city. One example is, LRPD has access to our West Central Community Center camera systems, so they can actually tie into those and see the video if something was to happen there. Right now staff is working to try to increase that at all of our facilities.

Chariman Buie thanked Director Couch and noted sales tax is listed under new business as well as old business. Conversation on the sales tax will be discussed when the meeting reaches new business.

New Business

Chairman Buie moved on to the next item on the agenda; Upcoming Events. Chairman Buie reiterated what Deputy Director Dorsey mentioned earlier about Kiwanis Park. Director Couch called on Mike Garrity, Marathon and Emergency Management Assistant, if he could provide the commission a few updates on the events; Creep and Crawl on October 21, at Two Rivers Park. Mr. Garrity informed the Commission about the Departments upcoming marathons. He mentioned staff is hosting a series of special event classes that focus on the security side of events. It is a free class that anybody is welcome to take part if they put on any kind of events, even a meeting like this Commission meeting. Little Rock is partnering with University of Central Arkansas in Conway who have previously hosted the series of classes. The first class Little Rock is putting on is in October 10 and 11. Classes are completely free. The ones here in Little Rock will be hosted at our Emergency Operation Center, 7000 Murray. Mr. Garrity will share detailed information with the registration link to the Commission later via email. Mr. Garrity informed the Commission about an email he received recently. The 911 Memorial Commission selects different cities around the country each year to send a tree sapling. The sapling is from a tree that was found at ground zero that survived. The 911 Memorial Commission nursed the tree back to health and they send out seedlings from that tree to different cities in the country. Selection is based on resiliency and coming back after some kind of tragedy. Little Rock was selected because of the tornado on March 31, 2023. Staff is still working out the details of where the sapling will be placed.

Chairman Buie thanked Mr. Garrity for the information and called for any questions. There were none. Chairman Buie moved on to the next order of business; Sales Tax. Chairman Buie mentioned that the sales tax has been deferred until next year, 2024, by the Mayor and Board of Directors. There are no City Directors present at this meeting to provide us any additional context this month. Chairman Buie is sure there will be further discussion in the upcoming months.

Director Couch appreciated all that were involved in the community meetings and their support for the sales tax. He commented on the input received from the citizens of Little Rock. Director Couch further stated that this is a great opportunity for all to look over the proposed sales tax, specifically the quality of life for the Parks and continue the conversation. Director Couch wants the Commission to have a deeper dive into the projects, in terms of the value that the Commissioners think of each project, as well as potential other projects that may have not made the list. Director Couch mentioned he will work on gathering details and information to provide to the citizens. He further mentioned this group's involvement early on would be a huge and would appreciate that continue feedback on each proposed project.

Commissioner France inquired about written feedback from citizens that can be provided to the Commission. Director Couch answered that he was informed the Executive Administration was keeping some form of documentation and he would look into providing that information to the Commission.

Commissioner France and Chairman Buie thanked Director Couch for the information. Chairman Buie commented that believed, and hoped all the Commissioners in attendance today, will be supportive in continuing the conversation and not let things linger until November 2024.

Before moving on, Chairman Buie mentioned a quick word on the sub-committees from their chairs. Commissioner Smith, for the master plan is not present for an update. Chairman Buie called on Commissioner France, if he had anything to mention from the social media and outreach sub-committee. Commissioner France noted he is waiting for the Social Media Coordinator to be hired. He has some ideas, but does not want to start anything until that position has been filled. Commissioner France is excited to meet with that person once they are hired. In the meantime, Commissioner France has been following other cities social media and email campaigns, and has some ideas.

Director Couch noted the process has been extended due to Human Resources adding a video interview to the process. Staff is narrowing down the candidate.

Commissioner France noted he did not want the Commission to feel like he was dodging providing a report. He will put together some written information to share with the Social Media Coordinator. Chairman Buie thanked Commissioner France.

Chairman Buie informed the Commission about the Parks Conservancy's recent inaugural gathering for their initial friends. The inaugural gathering drew around forty-five (45) people. The learned more about the Park's Conservancy, is the non-profit charitable arm for Little Rock Parks and Recreation. Chairman Buie commented the Parks Conservancy is to create some new programs that are beneficial for both the citizens, and the business and corporate communities.

Chairman Buie then moved on to the next item of business: October Commission Meeting. Chairman Buie informed the floor that Director Couch and some staff will be out of state during the next meetings scheduled date, October 11. Director Couch confirmed and added him and staff will be attending the National Parks and Recreation Conference in Dallas, TX. City Attorney Beth Carpenter informed the floor of what the Commission has done in the past. The floor was opened for discussion.

Chairman Buie then asked for the meeting to be moved from Wednesday October 11, 2023 to Wednesday October 18, 2023 to be approved. The motion passed, and the new October meeting date of October 18 was approved.

Chairman Buie noted that there were no City Board of Directors present at the meeting and there would be no Board Liaison Feedback.

Chairman Buie asked for any further comments or questions. There were none. Chairman Buie thanked Commissioners and others for joining.

This concludes the Wednesday, September 13, 2023, Park Commission Meeting. The next meeting will be Wednesday, October 18, 2023, at **Centre at University Park** at noon. Chairman Buie thanked everyone for their reports.

Meeting Adjourned.