



## Parks and Recreation Commission Meeting Minutes

September 14, 2022 - Minutes

The Centre at University Park

**Attendance:** Matt Buie, Samuel Ellis, Ren Bressinck (Virtual), Lauren Eldridge (Virtual), Dustin Smith (Virtual), James (J.T.) Ferstl (Virtual)

**Absent:** Dustin Smith, Director Capi Peck, Robyn Nosari, Ashley Martinez, Linda Smith, Cannon Fletcher

**City Board of Director Liaison:** Director Doris Wright

**LRPR Staff:** City Attorney Beth Carpenter, Leland Couch, Angela Nelson, Shawanda Robinson, J.P. Rogers, 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 August minutes.

**Roll Call and Approval of Minutes:** Secretary Ricardo Ante called the roll and Chairman Buie reported a quorum was six (6) members - in attendance. Official business will be voted on during the meeting. Attorney Carpenter mentioned that in order to be counted as present for the meeting, the Commissioners would have to be visible on camera, as well as have their audio working. Chairman Buie then entertained a motion to amend the June commission meeting minutes. Commissioner Ferstl moved to approve the minutes for August, and was seconded by Commissioner Bressinck. Chairman Buie asked for any questions, yet none were asked.

The August commission meeting minutes were approved.

**Citizen Communication:** Chairman Buie stated that there were a couple of people in the audience for citizen communication. He then invited the guest to speak.

Chairman Buie thanked McCarty for his comments, and asked for any questions or comments from the Commission, to which none did.

Chairman Buie then called for any staff reports.

**Staff Reports:** Director Leland Couch started staff reports by mentioning Deputy Director Angela Nelson would cover a few points on Administration. Couch stated to try and keep comments to a short time period so to continue through, and he would cover operations.

### Administration

Deputy Director of Administration, Angela Nelson, reported that Resources was very busy as usual. At the moment, budget was the main focus. She stated that they are looking into ways to be cost-efficient and conserve what we have, as well as focus on what we need for 2023. Administration is finalizing candidates for our Senior Parks Planner for the Design Division, Parks Construction Worker II for our Operations Division, and in the near future, Deputy Director of Operations, and an Administrative Assistant I.

This year, Little Rock was the host city for the Arkansas Recreation and Parks Association Conference. On the previous week, staff attended, and had a great turnout of participant. Our department entered seven categories, and successfully brought home awards in five categories. They are as follows: Champion of the Year, Titled Serving from the Heart, and was awarded to Robert Williams, and is centered on volunteerism. The second one is Therapeutic Recreation Program of the Year, which was awarded to Therapeutic Recreation Summer Day Camp. The third award was Festival of the Year, which was awarded for 11+ years to Little Rock Marathon. The fourth award was Indoor Facility of the Year (\$1 million-\$5 million), which was awarded to the West Central Community Center. The fifth award was Natural State Trail of the Year, which was River Mountain.

Nelson thanked everyone who found time to pitch in and help write summaries for those awards.

Executive staff will be traveling to the annual National Recreation and Parks Association Conference, which will be held in Phoenix, Arizona. They will be leaving in the coming week. Nelson stated that it would be a great time to learn, network, and get more ideas for our department.

With that, Deputy Director Nelson closed her statements, and was thanked by Chairman Buie and Director Couch.

### Recreation

Deputy Director Shawanda Robinson started reports by mentioning that she asked Deputy Director Nelson to send everyone a copy of the report, and there were some laying on the table.

Rebsamen Tennis was the first topic. The center has and ATA 55 and older sectional tournament the upcoming weekend, 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup>, and encouraged everyone to go and check things out.

West Central Community Center will have an Open House later on in the evening, and will have light refreshments. She invited the Commission to come out from 6:00 p.m. - 7:30 p.m. There will also be a boxing event on September 28<sup>th</sup> through October 1<sup>st</sup>. The West Central Health Clinic will have a grand opening on September 29<sup>th</sup>, at 3:00 p.m. Robinson stated she would send out an email with more information about this, and encouraged participation from the Commission.

The pool at Southwest Community Center has closed, and there will be an Open House at this facility on September 15, 2022 from 6:00 p.m. to 7:30 p.m.

Rebsamen Golf Course will have the Paul and Mary Lewis Golf Tournament on Friday, September 16<sup>th</sup>. This is an annual tournament that has been around for about 25 years, and it is a two-person scramble (men, women, and seniors). Robinson encouraged and invited everyone out to the tournament, whether they were a golfer, or just wanted to see the event.

First Tee will have its Open House on September 28. They will showcase their facility and will have games and refreshments.

Therapeutic Recreation Division will do an East End “I Can” Arts and Resource Volunteer Clean-Up on September 22<sup>nd</sup>. Therapeutic will also start their volunteer services, in conjunction with the Little Rock Zoo monthly on September 27<sup>th</sup>. The Adult Annual Camping Trip will be held on September 28<sup>th</sup> through 30<sup>th</sup> at Camp Aldersgate. They will also do a Weekend Warriors program starting on September 23<sup>rd</sup>.

MacArthur Museum will have a songwriting retreat for veterans and their families, hosted by The Freedom Sign USA. A two-day music workshop presentation, and live performance on August 25<sup>th</sup> and 26<sup>th</sup>. Robinson invited everyone to come out and join the facility. Their Open House will also be on September 26<sup>th</sup>.

This concludes Recreation. Director Couch and Chairman Buie thanked Robinson for her report.

### Operations

Director Couch stated that he was still filling in for Operations until the position is filled for Deputy Director. Current projects are continuing, and he will share exciting news. For the money that has recently been passed for improvements for Little Rock Parks and Recreation department, starting off the vote for the bond was successful. With this, Parks will receive over \$24 million in bond improvement money. Parks is currently going out to the public and having public meetings, and Couch invited all to participate and shared that he would give out the information to those who wanted it. The meetings are for input on those funds.

The Board also passed last week, utilizing some American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) funds, money totaling \$2 million for community center improvements. Couch invited the Commission to give input on ideas for community centers. Also, there was another \$3 million for seniors. This money goes towards a senior center, which is not located, nor are there any plans, but Couch hoped that one of the City Directors would be present to carry on the conversation.

There is another \$1 million for the West Central Ballfield Complex. Parks is currently working on visualizing what those improvements would look like. This is the first time since the sales tax over ten (10) years ago, that this much money has gone into Parks for improvements.

Couch then welcomed Director Wright, and thanked her for assisting with getting money for Parks.

This concludes Operations. Director Couch and Chairman Buie gave the floor to questions but none were asked at the time.

### Parks Maintenance

Parks Maintenance Manager, J.P. Rogers opened parks maintenance reports by stating that they were mowing grass and praying for the first frost. Mr. Rogers told the Commission that everything is moving along and he hopes to see some improvements; Crews and contractors are moving along good, and he is in the process of getting budget requests together.

This concludes Maintenance. Rogers gave the floor for questions but none were asked at the time.

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

### Old Business

Chairman Buie opened up old business by mentioning the subjects of the last meeting, stating that he did not feel the need for a discussion on those topics.

Then proceeds to New Business.

### New Business

Chairman Buie opens discussion with stating that he wanted to acknowledge a new commission member, Mr. J.T. Ferstl. The Commission met Mr. Ferstl at the previous meeting, which he attended virtually. Due to technical issues, he could not tell about himself.

Mr. Ferstl started off by stating that he had a real estate valuation and consulting business in Little Rock. He was born and raised in Little Rock, and was a graduate of Catholic High. He went to school in Fayetteville, and law school here in Little Rock. He has had numerous opportunity to serve the community and the city, and looks forward to continuing that with the Parks.

In terms of his passion for him, Ferstl stated that he believes in youth sports. He thinks that it is a big thing that is missing in terms of facilities, and there has been a lot of studies done on children that play organized sports read more, their brains function on a higher level, and their less likely to get into trouble. For him, it is his driving force and anything that he can do on that front is what he plans on doing.

Chairman Buie thanked him, and Director Wright stated she had a question. She asked his name, and said that she wants to work with him. She mentioned that youth sports is her heartbeat, sports for youth and keeping kids out of trouble.

The next topic is sub-committee reports. Two committee chairs were absent, both for Master Plan and Social Media. Chairman Buie asked if there were anything given to Director Couch about this, and there were none.

Chairman Buie mention that for the record, the Commission has three standing sub-committees, with two being listed on the agenda, and one needing to be added. They are Master Plan, Social Media and Outreach, and Parks Conservancy Liaison. With two sub-committee chairs being absent, he turned to the Parks Conservancy Liaison committee, Commissioner Ren Bressinck.

Commission Bressinck started off by thanking Chairman Buie. Bressinck stated that he knows that from the Social Media and Outreach front, there was a lot of energy put into coming up with a membership drive plan. He felt as if this was something that was certainly needed. The intent would be that it would be something that fell under the Parks Conservancy, and no much under the Commission. They are continuing to build on it.

In the past, prior to Bressinck getting on the Commission, the Conservancy was doing those activities. They had a Facebook page, and other aspects. He hopes to restart this and get back together with the other sub-committees. There will be more updates as things progress.

This concludes the Committee Reports. Next topic is the presentation of our Parks guest, and Buie turned the floor over to Couch.

#### Parks Guest

Director Couch stated that our special presentations are another staff presentation to inform the Commission on what we do in Little Rock Parks and what great employees and staff we have. With this, he welcomed Jordan Mays, who is the Trails Coordinator. He has all of the trails in the department to maintain and look after. He was particularly hired to maintain our River Mountain Trail system and mountain biking trail. At this, he invited Mays to speak

Mr. Mays thanked the Commission for being present, and stated he has the pleasure of serving as the trails coordinator for the Parks and Recreation department. He states that he will talk about some trails projects and current inventory.

For projects, Mays that he has been with the city for seven month and for the first season, they were gaging the maintenance needs of the trail system. He hopes to create an appropriate action plan to manage the trails better.

The second project is River Mountain Park. They are currently constructing a trail hub or landing pad at the bottom of Gravity Trails for mountain biking. This new improvement will be much safer and user-friendly for both users and pedestrians, and he is excited about that.

The next project is coming up after the first of the year, and it is Boyle Park Multiuse Mountain Trails. With this, he is excited to announce he is working with a local contractor to build the trails.

The last project is the Data Collection phase. This is an ongoing project which will help to develop a maintenance plan for maintaining trails. Updated maps will be provided to the public via the website platform. Pinpointing areas for maintenance, so information can be relayed both quickly and efficiently. Finally, he mentioned the Trail Inventory for the department. Mays said that it is good to have something on paper.

This leads to inventory. All of these efforts GIS measured, and he tries to insure accuracy. Parks has been busy compiling that information on all of the trails, and so far, there is spatial data on twenty-four (24) parks, with 16.29 miles of paved trails, 15.16 miles of natural surfaced trails, and 9.86 of paved trails that is not within the park system. Next is a 4.5 mile water trail that extend from Benny Craig to Interstate Park that was obtained on the GIS system. Last, they also

collected 8.45 miles of mountain biking and multiuse trail information on River Mountain trail, which is one of his favorite and was the recipient of the ARPA Natural Surface Trail of the Year.

In its totality, we have 54.26 miles collectively, and there is still more work to do. Mays stated that he is happy to say that this project is almost complete. Riverfront, MacArthur, Western Hills and Hindman are still left to be completed. He is hopeful to be finished by the end of the fall season.

This concludes Mays' presentation, and he thanked the Commission for the opportunity to work. He opened the floor to questions, but none were asked.

Chairman Buie asked for any questions or comments, to which Director Couch raised his hand. He thanks Mays for the work he has done and stated that he had another special guest: Michael Garrity from Marathon. Couch stated that Garrity had a quick press announcement on the previous day and stated that he would love for Garrity to give a few updates on the Little Rock Marathon.

Mr. Garrity thanked the Commission and stated that they were in their twenty-first (21<sup>st</sup>) year. They always take place in the first weekend in March, so March 4<sup>th</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> this year is race weekend. Generally, they expect between ten and fifteen thousand (10,000-15,000) participants and a total more than twenty to twenty-five thousand (20,000-25,000) people with their families and friends. Garrity stated that the Marathon brings in people from all fifty (50) states, and fourteen (14) different countries.

The race is known for its medal, which was revealed the previous day. Garrity stated that the medals were all over social media and the television. He stated that registration is open, and there is a free training program that is year-round and invited the Commission to attend. With the program, there are two volunteers who have been with Marathon since day one, and they plan out a training plan for whatever distance you want to run. He told how to sign up and stated that it was free.

Every year they have a kids' race. The children run their first twenty-five (25) miles during the school year, and it is generally a school-based program, or any group that gets the kids out and running. During race weekend, they run their final mile, and get the chance to run and cross the big finish line like every other race. Garrity states that is it a great program that is all over the state. This year, he expects eighteen hundred (1,800) kids, kind of getting back to pre-Covid numbers on the kids race.

Participation is not back up to pre-Covid numbers with the other races. They are not trying to be too aggressive, due to ordering medals and supply chain issues. Garrity stated that medals must be designed and ordered by May, so they were already out to order to get them by race day. The number of medals determines the number of participants allowed in the race. That is how they look at setting capacity for the race.

There are several other races and events throughout the year. On October 22<sup>nd</sup>, they are having a Creep N' Crawl, a half marathon and 5K that happens at Two Rivers Park. It is all along Mr. Mays' trail system. On December 17<sup>th</sup>, there will be an Ugly Sweater Race. During the Ugly

Sweater Race, you are encouraged to wear an ugly sweater, while during the Creep N' Crawl, you are encouraged to wear your Halloween costume.

Marathon has a robust social media presence. They make many crazy videos and things, which is their niche. Garrity called Marathon the fun and games part of the Parks department, along with everything that Deputy Director Robinsons' department does. He stated that he truly couldn't do it without the rest of the department, during race week. The race is truly a department-wide event, with recreation, administration, and maintenance all pitching in to help.

This concludes Garrity's presentation. Director Couch and Chairman Buie thanked Garrity for his presentation and opened the floor to questions. Commissioner Eldridge raised her hand.

Eldridge stated she had a question and asked if the marathon route is going to be the same. Garrity stated that it would be. Changing the course for the marathon is a long and exhaustive process, and it requires a lot. If it does not require changing, it will not change. The course was changed in 2020, due to I-30 construction. Now, there is no plan to change it until after all the construction is done, because runners used to run over and under I-30 several times during the weekend of racing. When the construction process started, there was one big change, and there is no race going east of I-30 at this point. Once all that construction is complete, there is the possibility of moving the course back east to by the Airport.

Chairman Buie asked for questions, and none were asked. Buie thanked both speakers for their information.

Next up was discussion items for next meeting.

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Chairman Buie stated that under the line for subcommittee reports, adding a line for the Parks Conservancy, making sure that Commissioner Bressinck ample time to speak.

Buie asked for any additional comments for the next meeting. He stated that he wanted to add something for the social, as a reminder to talk about. It will be held on Friday, October 21<sup>st</sup> at Hill's Station, and Buie told all to put it on their calendars.

Director Couch stated he would like to put a couple of point on the agenda. First, he would like to have an ongoing status update on projects, for the ARPA funding and the bond funding. This is to get both an update on where the staff is on these projects and director, and to gather input from the Commission.

Chairman Buie thanked Director Couch for his points.

Next up on the agenda is Board Liaison Feedback, with Director Doris Wright.

#### *Board Liaison Feedback*

Director Wright stated she had a lot to discuss. She stated that due to personal obligations, she missed the first part of the meeting. Wright invited the Commission out to the ribbon cutting on

the 29<sup>th</sup>, which is a Thursday, at 2:30 p.m. at the West Central Community Center, for the health clinic. The Healthy Connections Community Health Network wants to turn into a fall fest, so Wright asked Deputy Director Robinson to get some vendors for the event. She also asked Director Couch to get an ice cream truck, which he stated that it was something they would discuss. Wright stated she is trying to get the mobile arcade truck, but not if it had guns on it, due to an increase in gun violence in the city. Robinson stated something about bouncy houses, and Wright mentioned that she would give her the event planners information to correlate a plan together.

She stated that some may not have ever been to the Community Center, and that now it is an award-winning community center, and stated that she did not know if Director Couch mentioned it. Couch mentioned that it was already said. Wright stated that they needed to see the ball fields, because she allocated \$1 million for that, and she feels as if they can leverage that to get the business community involved.

September 30<sup>th</sup>, there will be a reception for a boxing club coming from Ireland. They will be boxing at the West Central Community Center gym on that Saturday at 7:00 p.m. Trio's will be hosting a reception on that Friday at 7:00 p.m. and invited everyone to come out. They are staying in Memphis, but due to cancellations, they will be boxing Little Rock. This has been in the works for about six (6) months. We have the state Golden Gloves for March 2023. She excitedly asked for everyone to come out.

Wright wants to let everyone know that the Comic-Con for Literacy had an outstanding event. It was the first Comic-Con in a Community Center in Little Rock. It had a fantastic turnout, with actors dressed up as superheroes, such as Thor, Spiderman, Alvin and the Chipmunks, the woman from Suicide Squad. The children came dressed in costumes and won awards for best costume. Central Arkansas Library System (CALS) was a sponsor and brought three hundred (300) books in to give to the children. By the end of the event, all the books were gone. There was a panel discussion with a local comic book author and graphic artist, and the gentleman that coordinates the Comic Con at the Statehouse. The purpose is to make it an annual event, to encourage reading.

Due to the success of the event, CALS stated that they would be stocking the Little Free Library, and Parks would not have too anymore.

Also, the Memphis Grizzlies are on the 27<sup>th</sup>, doing a clinic for basketball. The Arkansas Travelers did it for the baseball. She mentioned to Mr. Ferstl that she wanted to work with him, partnership with both Arkansas Travelers and Memphis Grizzlies with 21<sup>st</sup> Century children. The details are being worked out.

Commissioner Ferstl mentioned that if he could meet Ja Morant, he was all in. Wright stated that the Grizzlies were trying to expand their brand into Arkansas, and they enjoyed the environment of the facility. When walking into the center, the first picture that you see is a Memphis Grizzly. Wright stated that she does a lot of things that she doesn't fully understand, but knows it needs to get done. They want to turn it into an outreach program, being something like an ambassador program, to get the kids off the streets and into the center. She stated that she did not understand

the game but did not mind watching it because kids love it. She stated that it could turn into a pilot program to be assessed at the end of the season and do the same thing with baseball.

Ferstl stated that he thinks that it would be an awesome idea, and he has said for years that there is a NBA team across the bridge, and it is not hardly utilized. Wright stated that Director Couch said he was on board, and Couch is on board. He was waiting on the final scope of the project.

Wright stated she wanted to tie it into a Simmons Bank Foundation grant. She stated that they wanted to do a CRA project with a financial literacy project. She stated that she told them that a financial literacy project would need to have an incentive to have parents start. She stated she wanted to have it start with the 21<sup>st</sup> Century program, due to being in its fifth (5<sup>th</sup>) year and anticipating another five (5) year funding. This would be tied with the family engagement piece that is required by the state grant. The parents have to get involved, in order to qualify for the grant. The other component is a CRA (Community Reinvestment Act) aspect. All financial institutions have to be in compliance with that, and in Ward 6, there are fourteen (14) lots that there are going to be single-family homes on, and the Housing department is closing on another sixteen (16) lots. In its totality, there will be thirty-one (31) lots available, and she requested five hundred thousand dollars (\$500,000) in CRA effort, to be able to help buy down the loan for the buyer. There is also a down payment and closing cost assistance through the city, making that home one hundred fifty thousand dollars (\$150,000) or less, and financed by Simmons. In totality, thirty-one homes, with down payment and closing costs assistance and financed by Simmons.

Also, Wright asked for a rehab program for owner occupied housing where the homeowner could qualify for replacement of plumbing or roofing regardless of credit. If sixty-two (62) years or older, they could qualify for additional funds for more extensive work from the City's Homeowner Rehab program. That goes back to Director Couch's wanting the homes to connect to the trail system and the community center. Malloy Street is where the sixteen (16) lots sit, and 46<sup>th</sup> would be a direct path to the center, right down the street from Kiwanis. She stated that you would notice a crossing light in front of the community center. The others are near Zion Street, Walker Street, and Union Park. It would be connected to the community center so that the poor kids Wright wants to reach will have access. Rock Region Metro has a transit system called Metro Connect, which is an affordable method to get around in Ward 6. The purpose is to put together a package that is specifically for West Central for the sports programs, so parents know that there is transportation, programming, education, and recreation, fitness center and radio, with all aspects. There is also a health clinic with behavioral health specialist. The approach is a holistic approach, everything being centered around the West Central Community Center. Wright stated that her firm belief is that a Community Center needs to serve the community where it is located, it needs to be an assessment of what's going on within the community and provides the outreach to that community in a place where they all feel comfortable coming to.

With, she stated that she wants engagement from the Commission, since Ferstl stated he was in youth sports, and she had a great communication with the business community, and they have stated that they will support a fundraiser for the ballfields. One of the fields would be named after Dixon Flake and getting his family involved.

With this, she stated that was her report and acknowledged that Director Peck could not come due to personal obligations.

Chairman Buie thanked her for her report.

The next meeting will be Wednesday October 12, 2022, at The Centre at University Park at 12:00 p.m.

**Meeting Adjourned.**