



Parks and Recreation Commission Meeting Minutes

March 8, 2023 - Minutes

The Centre at University Park

Attendance: Matt Buie, Lauren Eldridge (Virtual), Dustin Smith, J.T. Ferstl, Ben France, Samuel Ellis, Cannon Fletcher

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

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

LRPR Staff: City Attorney Beth Carpenter, Leland Couch, Angela Nelson, Shawanda Robinson, J.P. Rogers, Briana Hatfield

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 February's minutes.

Roll Call and Approval of Minutes: Briana Hatfield called the roll and Chairman Buie reported a quorum was six (6) members - in attendance. Chairman Buie thanked everyone for coming, and stated for everyone who is virtual to mute themselves, but leave their cameras on in order to be counted as present for the meeting. Chairman Buie then informed the members that both the February minutes, along with the March 8th minutes, would be approved at the April 12th commission meeting.

Citizen Communication: Chairman Buie stated that there was no citizen communication today.

Chairman Buie then called for any staff reports.

Staff Reports: Director Leland Couch asked Deputy Director Nelson to begin staff reports with Resource Administration.

Administration

Deputy Director of Administration, Angela Nelson, reported that Employee Appreciation Week would be held May 8th through the 13th. Additionally, the employee of the year award selection process has begun, and the Parks and Recreation Dept. hopes to have a nominee before March 20. Resource Administration continues to monitor spending, which is currently at 4% compared to January.

We had Revenue Compliance Training so that everyone is performing correctly. We had a Device Inventory meeting (mainly computers, laptops, and phones) with IT, where we developed a link so the administration could be more efficient with monitoring Park equipment.

We had a department Inventory Asset meeting and will have training this week to monitor the overall assets, from office equipment to maintaining equipment and property, to be more accurate and efficient in accounting for what we have.

We are moving forward with maintenance and administrative positions that need to be filled. We are also moving forward with accreditation standards and sections. We are in the process of deciding our administrative team sections and what we can be working on.

Summer requisitions are completed, and we have over 100 positions: lifeguards, maintenance workers, cashiers, operators, and various other jobs. Please pass the word to anyone seeking part-time work. This concludes Resource Administration.

Chairman Buie and Deputy Director Nelson gave the floor to questions. Commissioner asked if the Inventory Asset Training that Resource Administration is conducting is new or annual. Deputy Director Nelson said it occurs yearly and usually undertaken around mid-October, but we wanted to get a head start.

Recreation

Recreation Programs Coordinator Sedric Mayfield is standing in for Deputy Director Shawanda Robinson. He started reports by giving a brief overview of programming for community centers. Current programs include "Latch Key" program, which is an afterschool program—finishing up basketball for youth. Spring and summer programming opportunities include Junior Hoops, a basketball program for junior high and senior high school students. We will also be moving into soccer. In the summer, we will do our swimming, baseball, softball, and t-ball programs.

Other activities we do outside of programming are the Father-Daughter dance, a Mother-Son dance, and Mardi-Gras. The seniors held a Mardi-Gras program at Southwest Community Center. Recreation has picked up much traction from social media.

Departmental training includes Active Shooter training held by Little Rock Police Department and fire extinguisher training held by Little Rock Fire Department.

MacArthur Museum hosts movies and maintains about 40 participants for each film.

For athletics, the ball fields are starting to see more use with kickball, baseball, and softball programs starting up. This concludes Recreation.

Chairman Buie and Recreation Programs Coordinator Mayfield gave the floor to questions. Commissioner Buie raised a question about getting the road into Interstate Park fixed. Director Couch answered that the mayor gave LRPR funding to improve the main road from the front entrance to the back entrance and remove some of the old infrastructure in the area that must be cleaned out. Parks opened a bid and chose Redstone as the contractor and are now waiting on the City Attorney's office to complete the contract. City Attorney Beth Carpenter will check with the lawyer in charge of that contract.

Chairman Matt Buie asked Recreation Programs Coordinator Sedric Mayfield if he had the numbers for the participants in the kickball program. Mayfield stated that he could get that information for Chairman Buie. Director Couch added that for Interstate Park, there are several other things that the staff is looking to improve. They are working with vendors to get proposals for bleachers, picnic tables, and other amenities.

Chairman Matt Buie handed the floor over to Operations Deputy Director Justin Dorsey.

Operations

Deputy Director Dorsey started his reports by highlighting a few of the big stories they have dealt with. The operation was a significant contributor to setting up the Marathon that took place this past weekend in downtown Little Rock. Dorsey mentioned the weather and wanted to explain Western Hills and the banana sculpture. He noted that everything was almost finalized except for the dirt work. He said that completing this project component was taking a little longer than usual due to the unpredictability of the weather (having a few sunny days interspersed with heavy rains). They have also started working on the lights at MacArthur, fencing in the Dunbar Gardens sign, and prepping to place the sculpture. Operations are also dealing with many graffiti issues in some parks and trying to stay on top of graffiti removal. Additionally, three full-time positions for trail crew have been posted and advertised.

Chairman Buie and Deputy Director Dorsey opened the floor to questions. Director Couch commented that Dunbar Gardens is a community garden and was selected as a sculpture site. Weather permitting, the sculpture is supposed to be delivered on Friday and installed in the next few weeks. Director Couch invited the entire commission to come to celebrate its installation.

Chairman Buie asked if the funds to combat graffiti come from the Parks and Recreation budget. Director Couch mentioned that they are responsible for the funds if it involves Parks and Recreation. He said that it could be handled either in-house or through the use of contractors. This week, the Mayor assigned a small group of staff to figure out different solutions to handle graffiti and trash cleanup for the City of Little Rock. Currently, the best way to report graffiti is to notify 311; then, the appropriate department can handle it.

Commissioner Fletcher asked what the process was for graffiti removal. Director Couch stated that it depends. He referenced park bathrooms with so much graffiti and vandalism that LRPR hired a contractor or staff to repaint the entire facility. In some cases, changing the color or the tone of the paint discourages graffiti. In other locations, they power wash or soft wash it off.

Commissioner France asked about bid documents with Allsop Park bike trails. He wanted to know if that was a simple improvement of the tracks or if it extended them also. Deputy Director Dorsey said they are now doing walkthroughs and looking at the Park. Director Couch added that the LRPR receives Recreational Program grants from the federal government, managed through the state highway department. LRPR applied for a Boyle Park contract and is waiting for the City Attorney's office to finalize that contract. LRPR is in the process of applying for the contract for Allsop Park. Deputy Director Dorsey is working on finalizing construction documents. Director Couch acknowledges that government contracts take some time to go through. Additionally, he clarified that the scope is not to change much in Allsop; instead, make it loop more and be friendly for mountain bikes and other users.

Chairman Buie gave the floor over to Marathon and Emergency Management Assistant Mike Garrity

Marathon Update

They hosted the 2023 Little Rock Marathon, the 21st annual event. Everything went well. Both Saturday's 5k and 10k races were sold out. Sunday was the half-marathon and the Marathon, and

LRPR was 98% sold out. They were working the way back to pre-covid numbers. I did not meet that, but I got closer.

They had 1000 kids and 400 parents running, including Director Couch. They had a Health and Fitness Expo on Friday, which was a rousing success. The Recreation Department was part of that. Marathon engaged the rest of the Parks department this year; they were essential.

The recreation side set up both days of the Expo and was there during the Athlete's Village, and everyone had a great time and was engaging; and trying to make that part of the experience more interactive.

That portion was exciting and was the first time it had been done. It got a little warm Sunday during the Marathon, so the department had to implement safety protocols. Director Couch got a phone call regarding the issue, and all the public safety officials could execute the plan and were in place for further action if necessary. Thanks to both Little Rock and North Little Rock law enforcement and fire safety officials for their assistance. It was still conducting active cleanup, which should be complete by April.

Chairman Buie called for questions for Mr. Garrity, and Commissioner France thanked Garrity and the department for the help and the resounding success.

The media team got shots of volunteers and support and used these photos for a social media campaign. We had about 1000 volunteers.

Director Couch thanked and specifically named Geneva Lamm, Mike Garrity, and Brandi Dixon, the three full-time Marathon staff.

Chairman Buie asked about the route: is it the same each year, or does it change?

It changed in 2021 due to the I-30 construction, but they try to keep it the same as much as possible. They get the Half-Marathon and the Marathon certified by US Track and Field so that Little Rock Marathon can qualify for the Boston Marathon. You must have a qualifier-certified course to compete in that specific Marathon. The certification is an undertaking to complete every year, so the department decided to change the system for 2021 so we stay within I-30 during their 5-year construction project. Once that project is completed, we will look at going back east because they want to have the race pass by the Clinton Library and the Airport area. Logistically the goal is to keep it the same after it has been set. Plan to change once more post-construction.

Commissioner Ellis mentioned that during the Expo, all he heard was compliments, and that pre-covid atmosphere was back. Saying the route of the Marathon, he wanted to know the best way to get updates on courses and detours for any barricades or crossings for pedestrian and bicycle traffic.

Garrity answered that they currently post public signage up 30 days before events. They also post on social media but are taking suggestions for smoother and more efficient notice.

Recreation Programs Coordinator Sedric Mayfield wanted to tip his hat to Recreation's Deputy Director, Shawanda Robinson for spearheading the Recreational division's engagement in the expo. She is on medical leave.

Chairmen Buie closed questions and moved to Parks Maintenance Manager, J.P. Rogers.

Parks Maintenance

Parks Maintenance Manager J.P. Rogers opened park maintenance reports stating he did not do much. He did notify the commission that they are starting to cut grass. The biggest thing is if you have a 17–18-year-old teenager at home and you want them engaged in a summer activity, Parks Maintenance has a Parks Pioneer program that pays for summer positions. These positions are posted on the City of Little Rock's HR website. Parks Maintenance is looking to hire up to 19 students. Eight have applied so far.

Chairman Buie asked for clarification—the program's name is Park's Pioneers.

Director Couch elaborated that Park's Pioneers is a pre-covid program; this is the first year of it returning.

Parks Manager, Rogers added that students work for 60 days (the summer), are trained, undergo interviews, are drug tested, and have limitations (no chainsaws). They work 40 hours a week, Monday through Friday.

Chairman Buie called for questions. There were none.

Director Couch added that this is the most challenging time of the year to keep up with the grass mowing. Cutting grass in the rain is complex, and the heat makes it unpredictable and possibly dangerous. This concludes Park Maintenance.

Chairmen Buie once again mentioned Parks Pioneers and encouraged applications.

With no further reports, Chairman Buie shifted the agenda to old business.

Old Business

Chairman Buie opened the old business with stating thanks to all commissioners as they had 100% attendance at the specially called meeting last month where the park property was transferred, and there was a unanimous agreeance to that.

The commission heard from Ms. Hatfield about Boyle Park last month. Chairman Buie then proceeds to New Business.

New Business

Chairman Buie begins the next topic: sub-committee reports.

First up is Social Media and Outreach, with Commissioner France is going to coordinate with Mike Garrity to discuss the social media state and go over the meaning they want to convey.

Next up was the Master Plan Committee, with Commissioner Linda Smith, but she was absent, and Director Couch had nothing to discuss.

Finally, the last sub-committee is Parks Conservancy, with Commissioner Lauren Eldridge, and the committee started the campaign for Parks Conservancy the previous month. Now, 5 of 7 commissioners have signed up as sustaining members of Friends of the Park. Encourages the other commissioners to join and share the group with friends and family.

Chairman Buie asked if Commissioner Ferstl was going to add to that.

Commissioner Ferstl mentioned that he signed up during the special meeting last month when it was first brought up and that it only took about 5 minutes and was super easy to do—he also encouraged the two remaining commissioners (Chairman Buie mentioned that he was signing up right then), to sign up as well as everyone watching.

Chairman Buie then gave the floor to Director Couch for an update on projects.

Updates on Projects

Chairman Buie moved on to the next agenda item from Director Couch, who would give updates on Kiwanis Park at the behest of Director Lewis.

Director Couch mentioned in the Master Plan committee regarding updates. Kiwanis was highlighted for community input for improvements completed with the bond money. Little Rocks Parks and Recreation are working with different vendors for the basketball quotes (got one on March 08).

Removed the playground with the intent to replace it, but lost money for the replacement and had been unable to complete it. It will be replaced as part of that bond package as well. Those are the improvements on the list currently.

Director Couch is aware of the request from the community for splash pads and more parking. Those are still to be considered, but it depends on the amount of funding left over from the projects already allocated. It is located between Holt and Foster Street. Also working with the Kiwanis Club to help raise support. The schedules conflict, but they will be figured out and worked through.

Director Couch opened the floor for questions on Kiwanis or other parks, and the Commissioner Fletcher asked about the parking lots and whether the barriers should be up or down. He mentioned that Kiwanis Park's community asked for a gate because it was requested to be closed at night and open in the mornings. It had been defuncted for some time, so now it's closed.

Commissioner Fletcher mentioned that at Burns Park, the police lock the Park at night, and LRPR staff open parks in the morning. Director Couch said that opening or closing over 70 different parks location was not feasible in the long run.

Chairman Buie asked if any of the commissioners had a park they wanted to be highlighted by LRPR staff. He mentioned that it didn't have to be now but just email Director Couch.

Commissioner France was asking if Ward 1 had been done yet.

Director Couch mentioned that most work was done in Ward 6 - Kiwanis and Boyle. He said that an East Little Rock report would be able to give much information as many things are being done.

Commissioner France asked for Ward 1. Director Couch acquiesced.

Golf tournament

Chairman Buie returned the floor to Commissioner Eldridge to discuss the upcoming golf tournament.

Commissioner Eldridge mentioned that there was not much to report on the golf tournament and that she did have flyers ready but wanted to make sure that the website for registration and sponsors was good to go before pushing those out. She mentions that she has a flyer for the sponsors ready to go. She estimated 1-2 weeks to check and verify the websites, and then she will start distributing them.

She asked Commissioners if they could come up with a list of businesses or friends that own or are connected to local businesses to try and approach them with these sponsorship requests. All the information will be on the flyer; you can ask her for any additional information. I will talk to Mike Garrity about the registration portal and approach Matt for sponsorship payment options on the Park Conservancy front. The golf tournament will be on May 19, 2023.

Chairman Buie asked for questions for Commissioner Eldridge.

Commissioner France asked if she would reach out to them or if she wanted to split those duties up. She responded that she was unsure if she had sent that out yet, but she does have a list she needs to put on her computer and then send it out, and if anyone knows or would like to reach out to specific companies on the list, she would appreciate it.

Commissioner Eldridge mentions that in the past, it's been hit-or-miss. There have been a few returning sponsors, but they often have to find new sponsors each year.

Director Couch queried if Commissioner Eldridge had a flyer for the golf tournament that we could put on social media.

[see the screen for a glimpse of the ad]

Director Eldridge wants to verify whether the URL that is currently on the flyer is the one that corresponds to the registration portals before sending the flyer out.

City Attorney Carpenter requested that there be a gatekeeper and that all verifications and comments be sent first to Director Couch from Commissioners to be in keeping with the Commission bylaws, and chairman Buie affirmed.

Chairman Buie also mentioned adding Parks Conservancy to the golf tournament flyer. Commissioner Eldridge mentioned that she had planned to add it. Chairman Buie also noted a QR Code; Eldridge said she would work on that.

Chairman Buie mentioned being on the lookout for an email from Director Couch regarding a social event.

Buie thanked everyone for their reports and gave the floor to questions. None were asked.

Discussion Items for Next Meeting

This concludes the Committee Reports. The next topic is the agenda for the next meeting.

Chairman Buie mentioned that an in-depth analysis of Ward 1 would be discussed at the next meeting.

Director Couch requested to discuss the social media aspect of the Friends group. I want to discuss getting social media about it through Parks and Recreation.

Chairman Buie mentioned that there would be a meeting with Mike Garrity presenting a joint social media account presenting the Friends group to the masses. Commissioner France asked to be included.

This conclude the Wednesday March 8, 2023 Park Commission Meeting.

The next meeting will be Wednesday, April 12, 2023, at The Centre at University Park at 12:00 p.m. Buie encouraged all who could attend the following events in person.

Chairman Buie thanked everyone for their reports.

Meeting Adjourned.