



Parks and Recreation Commission Meeting Minutes

July 13, 2022, Minutes

The Centre at University Park

Attendance: Matt Buie, Ashley Martinez (Virtual), Linda Smith, Abby Jennings (Virtual), Samuel Ellis, Robyn Nosari, Ren Bressinck (Virtual)

Absent: Lauren Eldridge, Demetria Murdock, Cannon Fletcher, Dustin Smith, Director Capi Peck

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 March's minutes.

Roll Call and Approval of Minutes: Deputy Director Angela Nelson called the roll and Chairman Buie reported a quorum was seven (7) members (four in person and three virtual) in attendance. Official business will be voted on during the meeting.

Chairman Buie then entertained a motion to approve the June commission meeting minutes.

The June 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 Parks Maintenance Manager J. P. Rogers would cover a few points on maintenance, and stated that he would be covering recreation and operation.

Operations

Director Couch stated that he was still filling in for operations. A big update was that Kanis Park was approved by the board some time ago. He mentioned there was a tentative date for the ground-breaking, the morning of Wednesday. That has been changed to the first of the following week, and he encouraged the entire Commission to come out. He mentioned it was a great addition to the area, and for Parks.

He stated that they are still doing improvements for Rebsamen Golf getting it ready for bigger conference-type tournaments later this year. He mentioned redoing the Pro Shop, with new windows, and new back decks.

With MacArthur's Inclusive Playground, it's coming along great. The new swing set was added along with over an \$100,000 addition. In addition, we are moving into final completion and hope to have everything done by the end of the month, with a ribbon cutting at the first of August.

Administration

Deputy Director of Administration, Angela Nelson, reported no updates.

Recreation

Director Couch filled in for Deputy Director Shawanda Robinson. He mentioned there were a lot of new events, and stated that he wouldn't go through each event due to scheduling, but stated he or another staff could answer any questions.

At Rebsamen Tennis, there have been some great tournaments going on. They had a great Little Rock Open tournament. They are currently looking at doing some improvement to the lights there at Rebsamen, if the millage is able to pass.

Moving on with the Community Centers, there are some different leagues of basketball at Stephens Community Center. There are a lot of things (tee ball, hoops, and baseball, track, and softball practices) going on at Dunbar. There is an active ball tournament going on at West Central. They got rained out the previous night, and due to the storm, there was some damage to the center. The front doors blew off, and there were quite a few trees blown down.

There is a new Facility Supervisor at Southwest, recently promoted Lee Couch. He has already worked with others and had a very successful vaccine clinic, and they are planning to have another one in a few weeks. He is working on getting that facility back up and running.

With golf, there is a new software being introduced at Rebsamen Golf and First Tee. Especially at First Tee, this will help us with the missing numbers with website and how we introduce our course to the public. Our G1 software will hopefully help that, and he mentioned it would be getting started the beginning of the week.

Senior Programs is still running strong in all of our community centers, with bag baseball being their popular sport. Therapeutic had a great summer camp at the Pro Shop at War Memorial, and is still on. With the Summer Playground Program at our community centers, it's wrapping up next week. He mentioned that it was one of the strongest programs that we have. He mentioned that he participated in some of the events where the Police and Fire departments came out, and mentioned that Ricardo was a big help in that.

At Jim Dailey, Couch mentioned that there was a lot of different classes scheduled. Soon, he mentioned that Parks would be working with Community Programs on a Mid-Night Basketball league, but could not confirm a date. The goal with this is to get some kids other activities in the evening hours and come and play ball at some of our community centers.

At this, Director Couch opened the floor to questions. None were asked at the time.

Parks Maintenance

Parks Maintenance Manager, J.P. Rogers opened parks maintenance reports by mentioning that there was a storm the previous night that caused a bunch of trees to fall along the River Trail and Two Rivers. Crews have been out all morning and just about have everything cleared. He mentioned waiting until tomorrow to finish cleaning up everything. Our Trails Coordinator helped to get out and get everything open.

He mentioned that they are finally catching up on mowing, and have a large crew compiled of different departments out at Western Hills and Hindman parks. They are getting the disc golf field ready for use, using a low mow on areas on Hindman as an experience. Rogers stated that he was looking for someone who wanted hay could come and turn it into bales where it had grown up, and asked the Commission if they had any contacts.

He mentioned that they were starting to catch up on parks, and stated that the rain has helped. Contractors are getting in the groove.

Director Couch opened the floor to 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 new business by mentioning the bond issue. He stated that the upcoming vote on August 9th, which is to have positive impact on Parks revenue. Chairman Buie mentioned that both Director Wright and Director Peck were not present at the moment, with Wright stepping away and Peck being absent. At the last meeting, both directors mentioned how it would benefit Parks if this passes. Director Couch stated that it was very important for this to pass, and we were #5 on the ticket, along with Zoo, and this would be a huge influx of new funds for capital improvements.

The floor was opened to questions, to which Commissioner L. Smith asked about the list. Director Couch stated that there were six (6) different ones to vote on, and you can vote positive or negative on either one. Couch mentioned that Parks went to the public for two weeks and advertise, and if it passed, Parks would go back out to the public and get input.

Chairman Buie thanked Director Couch, and asked for any further questions. No questions were asked.

Next on the list is the introduction of a social event, which was spoken of the previous week, but decided to speak on it under new business.

Last month's presentation was with the museum supervisor of MacArthur Museum, Mr. Stephan McAteer. Chairman Buie then asked for any questions, but none were asked at the time. Buie stated that if any questions arose, to please send them to Mr. McAteer.

Then proceeds to New Business.

New Business: Chairman Buie opens discussion with the attendance of a new commission member, Ms. Robyn Nosari. He then asked her to tell a little bit about herself.

Ms. Nosari mentioned that she was a teacher, and is both a tennis player and avid pickle ball player, so she spent a lot of time at Kanis Park. Nosari stated she was on the Pinnacle Pickle ball Board, and mentioned how hard they worked to get the money for the lights. She mentioned that she was married, and her husband was a director as Dassault Falcon Jet. Buie welcomed Nosari to the Commission, and thanked her for being here. He mentioned that there has been several conversations about the sport.

Moving on to the next item is Sub-Committee Reports, there is a report from both Commissioner Eldridge (who is absent at this meeting), and Commissioner Martinez, who is with Social Media and Outreach.

He then turned the floor over to Commissioner Martinez. Martinez stated that the Social Media and Outreach Committee met with staff on June 15th, and came up a few action steps that they wanted to report to the committee. One of those steps was to increase social media interaction between Parks and Recreation and the public. Some of the ideas they used was with polls and surveys, to attain feedback, developing and implementing a way to drive people to the pages, asking the Commissioner to follow the Parks and Recreation social media pages if they weren't already, as well as like, comment, and share. Another thing she mentioned was to tap in to groups that use Parks and Recreation.

Next, Martinez mentioned they wanted to tackle was develop and implement a social media plan for content. Next, she mentioned that they wanted a written recommendation for future updates to the website. Some examples of this are more detailed maps of parks, and she asked for ideas from Commissioners. Lastly, they mentioned developing and implementing a Friends of the Parks program. This would entail defining the goal and mission of the program, determine the costs of membership to join, and any incentive for members. This would hope to enhance outreach and fundraising for the Commissions. Subsequent meetings we mention how those will be tackled.

At this, Martinez gave the floor to questions, but none were asked at the time.

Commissioner Martinez added every month at the Commission meeting, a schedule would be given of upcoming events. She mentioned Movies at MacArthur July 19th at 6 p.m., and a Mud Run. Director Couch mentioned that the location was to Western Hills on the 27th at 6p.m. Martinez gave the information for the Mud Run.

Chairman Buie asked Commission L. Smith if there was any update, yet none were asked at the time. He stated that Vice-Chairman Bressinck and he need to discuss more about Parks Conservancy. They will be having a presence in the Harvest Fest, in the Hillcrest Neighborhood on October 22nd. There will be a table, where there will discussion on fundraising, as the non-profit for Little Rock Parks and Recreation. Vice-Chairman Bressinck mentioned that it was a good idea, and he would try to join.

With Commission Eldridge not being present, Buie mentioned that he looked forward to hearing her presentation at the next meeting.

At this, the Parks Guest Mr. Mason Ellis, was invited up to speak more on Rose Creek. He is the brother of Commissioner Samuel Ellis. Director Couch stated that Rose Creek Park is not an actual city park, but Parks has maintained it, and has been working with the neighborhood to raise money for an update to the existing trail system. He mentioned that he asked Mr. Ellis to speak to allow him to give an opportunity to share his work in this location, and at the end of the day, Couch would like to make the park a formal city park. He stated that it was indeed Parks Property, yet it has not been covered on inventory.

Parks Guest

Mr. Mason Ellis stepped to the podium and introduce himself. Mr. Ellis stated that he was very passionate about the subject, and moved to the Stiff Station area about five (5) years ago. Ellis sits at the chair of the Rose Creek Park Initiative. As of last year, they have their 501©3, making them an official non-profit organization. As an organization they have held several events, including clean-ups, tours, and work-days. Next, he showed a map of Rose Creek, and gave its location.

Ellis mentioned that the group has been around since 2010, and he has been involved since 2015. Even before this, there have been conversations about it, and the idea of a park has been around for over 100 years. It was first mentioned in 1912 by John Noland, famous landscaper who went around to different cities and did master plans, and how it could connect to several other places. The next slide shows the outline of the park. Since Ellis' time of the board, about fourteen (14) properties have been donated to the city for the purposes of the park. He stated that all of those properties were in a floodplain, so no home would be built unless a lot of work was done.

Last year at the Keep Little Rock Beautiful clean-up event, they gave out a bunch of blank maps and then what they wanted to see in their neighborhood park. They got a variety of suggestions on this, including playground, Dog Park, disc golf, and train viewing platform.

Earlier in the year, they had their first Rose Creek Pop-Up. The set up things, and even repurposed a goal into a basketball court. Parks and Recreation Re-Creation set up this event, and they got a taste of some of their own ideas. It rained most of the day, yet by noon, a lot of people came out.

The next slide showed how McClellan Engineers were contracted to do a survey of the property, as well as preliminary drawings of what the park could look like. The following slide show one of the key aspects that the group works on, Rose Creek Trail. The goal is to connect with the Arkansas River Trail System. If that happens, Rose Creek will be the only single-family residential neighborhoods with direct access to the Arkansas River Trail System in Little Rock. Everywhere else has to either bike on city streets or load their bike on and go.

The ultimate goal is to connect to both the Arkansas River Trail and the Southwest Trail, which goes to Hot Springs, from Seventh (7th) Street. It also serves as a crucial piece of the Midline, a system that goes from East to West along I-630.

The next slide shows the annual Rose Creek Trail Hike. Every year, the last Saturday in February, the Rose Creek Initiative hosts a hike, starting at Central High School and goes about two (2) miles to the Arkansas River. Another event, the first Saturday in December, they host a Fireworks Watch Party when the Capital shoots off its Christmas fireworks.

The last component that the Rose Creek Initiative is the Rose Creek Watershed. It's a 1500 acre watershed that doesn't flow into Fourche, it flows directly into the Arkansas River. This watershed starts at Knoop Park and rolls through hillcrest, under UAMS, down Plateau St, under I-630, and then follows the rail corridor to the Arkansas River. It encompasses Arkansas Children's Hospital, UAMS, Central Arkansas Water, State Capital Complex, Dillard's, the Episcopal School, and together hopefully they can create a storm water management program, to help decrease litter and increase water quality.

Ellis mentioned that they took a walk with one of the neighbors, who is a biologist, and discovered mussels in the creek. Earlier in the year, they worked alongside Dr. John Vineski and implemented their own trash boon, to decrease the trash that was getting in the park.

In the end, they want to get it to grow, and officially become a city park.

Chairman Buie opened the floor for any discussion. An inaudible comment was given by Commissioner L. Smith. Director Couch then asked the Commission to vote in support of Rose Creek becoming an official city park, and asked Attorney Beth Carpenter if this was appropriate. Carpenter mentioned that the board serves as an advisory commission to the city board and the city manager, and it could vote to show support to Rose Creek Initiative in Rose Creek Park becoming a city park. It was moved by Commission Ellis, and seconded by Commissioner Smith. Chairman asked for any additional comments or questions before the vote took place, to which no one did. A vote was taken, and the ayes had it. A vote was given to take to the City Manager, in support of the Rose Creek Initiative so that Rose Creek Park would become an official city park.

Attorney Carpenter mentioned that there may be other steps, once it goes before the City Manager. Director Couch stated that this was a formal representation from this Commission that the Commission supports this concept. He then thanked the Commission, and Ellis for giving his presentation.

Chairman Buie restated that a unanimous vote from the seven members of the Commission moved forward the motion, moved by Commissioner Ellis and seconded by Commissioner Smith, down to the City Manager.

Next on the list is the aforementioned social event. Director Couch stated that this was the continuation of the concept of everyone getting together as a Commission outside of these rooms, and getting to know everyone a little better. He stated that to make Attorney Carpenter be at ease, the event would be publicized and promoted. Hill Station was picked as the location, due to it working in the past. Couch mentioned waiting until October 21st. Chairman Buie asked for any questions regarding the location and date for the event, to which none were asked.

Director Couch mentioned that he would be sending out more information regarding this, and Buie encouraged the other Commissioners to join them if not otherwise previously engaged.

The next item on the agenda is to add items to the next meeting agenda. He mentioned that the agenda was pretty well set, with citizen communication, staff reports, old business, new business (which deals with all aspects of sub-committees). He then stated that there would be a presentation from staff. Buie then asked if there were anything that needed to be added.

Commissioner Jennings asked about the Friends of the Park program, and that she and Commission Smith spoke to Director Couch about that, and stated that she wanted to help in any way possible with this. She wanted to get the information ready by Harvest Fest. Chairman Buie then mentioned considering a partnership regarding this.

Director Couch wanted to add Friends to the Park to the agenda, so that input and presentations could be given. He stated that another one that he would like to add was a presentation on the First Tee Complex, and there were some things that he wanted to address, and they had a new Facility Director there, who can come and introduce himself, as well as give some new ideas to the Commission.

With no further discussion, the Commission turned to Board Liaison Feedback, with Director Wright.

Director Wright started off by mentioning the second tranche of the American Rescue Plan Act. The board came up with the alternative to what was submitted to them, and they came forward with a resolution, but they pulled it back to not confuse the voters. They didn't want people to not vote for something based on the money that was going to them from the Act, and not to interfere with the August 8th millage. Right after the vote, Wright stated that she would be bringing back that resolution, and in it there are two allocation to Parks and Community Centers, and a dedicated Senior Center. To this affect, she stated that she would like the Parks department to begin more structure within the administration of our Parks Department for Senior Programming, and not let it be something that just takes place at community centers, because a dedicated center is going to need someone that understands how to interact and direct a facility, as well as programming for seniors. Wright mentioned that programming dollars are always an issue, due to staffing, so she just wanted to put that on the table, because the Board is going to have a dedicated Senior Center, and the goal is buy the old Carelink building, and to connect it via trails to both the Adult Center and Rebsamen Tennis Center. This would make it a Health and Wellness Center, not just a building. The Age-Friendly Little Rock Commission is working on a plan for that, but had no information on the next date. One of the things that they wanted was a pool for therapeutic use for seniors.

Wright then mentioned that she wanted parks to think along those lines to giving some structure to it. She also mentioned giving updates to each Community Centers, taking care of maintenance and sprucing up the centers. She intends on having it presented to the board by the end of August. She stated that the funds are already in the bank, and it would go into effect immediately.

Chairman Buie thanked Director Wright for the update, and said that when the senior building is complete, Wright can be left in charge of getting Bruno Mars to perform. She stated she would love that, but it would take about three (\$3) million.

Chairman Buie thanked everyone, and mentioned that the time for the next meeting is August 10th, at the Centre at University Park.

Director Couch stated that Parks wanted to have more public input, so they are having more Pop-Ups and Open Houses, and they have started to get that together starting in August. He stated that he would send out more information and invited them to join.

With no further discussion Chairman Buie adjourned the meeting at 12:51 p.m.

The meeting was adjourned.