



## Parks and Recreation Commission Meeting Minutes

January 10, 2024

The Centre at University Park

**Attendance:** Matt Buie, Samuel Ellis, James Ferstl, Cannon Fletcher, Ben France, Linda Smith, Mike Bernardo, Ron Bara, Summer Campbell, Chemia Woods

**Absent:** Lauren Eldridge

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

### **LRPR Staff:**

Parks Director-Leland Couch, Deputy Director Administration-Angela Nelson, Deputy Director Recreation Services-Shawanda Robinson, Deputy Director Operations-Justin Dorsey, City Attorney-Beth Carpenter, Safety and Training Coordinator-Courtney Perry, Facility Recreation Supervisor- Susie Matheny, Parks and Recreation Outdoor Coordinator-Michael Simmons, Parks Marketing and Social Media Coordinator-Brittany Nichols, Admin Parks Director-Mahoganey Burkhalter

**Welcome, and Introductions:** Chairman Buie: We're going to attempt to call the meeting to order and complete roll call again. We had to stop due to technical issues. Chairman Buie: I am calling this meeting to order again. Can we please do a Roll call again? Roll Call completed. Chairman Buie: We recognize that with the current members present, there is a Quorum and we're allowed to proceed with business. Asked to go back and do a mic check for Commissioner's France and Ellis. They confirmed they could hear.

**Roll Call and Approval of Minutes:** Chairman Buie: Are there any changes to the December meeting minutes? No? Chairman Buie: Can I get a motion to approve minutes? Commissioner Ferstl made the Motion. Motion 2<sup>nd</sup>, by Commissioner Campbell. No discussion. Motion passed.

**Elections:** Chairman Buie: This is the annual portion of the meeting where new officers, including the Chair and Vice-Chair need to be elected. I'm going to open the floor for nominations. Commissioner Fletcher: I nominate Commissioner France for the Chairman position. Chairman Buie: Can you make a motion Commissioner Fletcher for Commissioner France to be made Chair of the Parks Commission? Commissioner Fletcher made the motion. Motion was 2<sup>nd</sup> by Commissioner Ferstl. Chairman Buie: Are there any further nominations? No Motion passed. Chairman Buie: Commissioner France has been elected as the new Chairman. Chairman Buie: Congratulations and welcome to the new Chairman for the Parks and Recreation Commission. Chairman Buie: Are you ready to preside over the meeting? City Attorney Carpenter: Per the Resolution that the City Board adopted on virtual meetings, the individual presiding over the meeting must be present in person. So, if the new Vice Chair is present and in



person then they could take over but until then he would need you to continue chairing the meeting at this time. Chairman Buie: Alright then we will proceed to the nomination of Vice Chairman. Chairman Buie: Are there any nominations for Vice Chairman? Commissioner Fletcher: I nominate Commissioner Ferstl to be Vice Chairman. Chairman Buie stated that a motion was made to elect Commissioner Ferstl, and asked whether there was a 2<sup>nd</sup>? Commissioner Bernardo: I second (2<sup>nd</sup>) Chairman Buie: No discussion? Motion passed. Chairman Buie: Congratulations to our new Vice Chairman Ferstl. Chairman Buie: City Attorney Carpenter we are now in position to proceed with the official business and conduct the meeting. City Attorney Carpenter: Yes, I agree. Due to the newly elected Vice Chair being here in person, Vice Chairman Ferstl can preside over the meeting. Chairman Buie: Vice Chairman Ferstl are you ready to take over and run the meeting? Vice Chairman Ferstl: Yes, Chairman Buie: Congratulations Vice Chairman Ferstl. City Attorney Carpenter: We do have a new Chair who is unable to be there, but the new Vice Chair is present and can preside when the Chair is not present. Since the Vice Chair is present, he will need to preside over the meeting. Vice Chairman Ferstl took over for Chairman Buie. City Attorney Carpenter: My apologies. I will have to leave this important meeting today due to a court case that I have to attend in Environmental court.

**Citizen Communication:** Sally Fitts with the Age Friendly Little Rock Commission and they are under the Parks department. She was here about citizen communication. The Commission has been concerned for months due to the interruption of service at Jim Dailey. I haven't been there for some time and don't know if there have been updates or when the plan is to reopen. The swim lessons are great and there's a swim team that practices there. But there are probably 100 or more older people who depend on water exercise to be able to move throughout the day instead of being crippled by arthritis. They are willing to go in the middle of winter. They need a place to go and if the City of Little Rock is going to be an age-friendly city. What are our goals to get that pool open again as soon as possible? Also, and to communicate what progress is. If there have been problems or stalls along the way. We went to the City Director meeting about voting for the HVAC, sometime to install, but has it been purchased yet? Is it stuck on the train somewhere? Nobody knows what is happening. Some would very much appreciate program management, so there's continuity of services. You can't just shut down the pool. There must be an alternate. Any questions or comments and thank you very much for listening to me. Parks Director Leland Couch: Currently all of what you're saying is in the process. I'll just try to get the highlights. Hydco, the company has the work. They're currently under contract to perform the project. They've already started ordering. They've already ordered the HVAC system. They take a couple months to get here, which will be in May and they're responsible for doing the HVAC and the swimming pool and other improvements in that space. They're all online.

### **Staff Reports:**

#### Administration

First, I would like to welcome our new employee who is the assistant to the director administrative assistant Mahoganey Burkhalter. She started December 18<sup>th</sup>. I'm glad to have her



aboard. Resources has been given the task of working with the compensation studies for our department. It was a citywide task. I'm thinking that it is going to be continuous. So, we're progressing on that. Also, the Federal Standard Labor Act forms, we're dealing with that. This is to make sure that we can identify potential areas that are in non-compliance. Hopefully we do not have any in Parks. We're also performing pop-up payroll audits. So that we'll have an accurate record of documents to close out 2023. We're also in the process of collecting revenue reports and finalizing them for 2023. Which also includes our PIT balances. We're updating everyone on this, to let everyone know where they are, and the amount of money that they need to spend. This is so, we can close out 2023. Also, this would include our invoices. Just to make sure that everything is accurate and accounted for. The cut off deadline is January the 31st for those records. Also, we are refocusing on our accreditation efforts. We have new standards. We found this out during our NRPA conference last year, that we had the opportunity to attend. It also allows us to focus on our timeline, as to where we need to be. This will help us maintain and keep track of our progress. We're also going to start with our summer programs process for 2024. I know that sounds a little soon. We will start in May at the time that we have our summer programs. We will start the conversation around this, to see where we will need to be. This normally is the time that we bring on 100 to 200 additional employees for those programs. We would like to get an early start on that right now. The staffing for parks remains at 130 full-time positions. We did well last year. People leave. People come and go. So, that always fluctuates. But, in December we did have a chance to fill eight (8) positions, three (3) of those were promotions. The most recent vacancies that we do have are the three (3) listed. Revenue Compliance Analyst, Parks Construction Worker II, and a Leader Position. Those last two (2) are in maintenance. I had previously mentioned at the last Commission meeting that our intention for this year is to get to 100% capacity and to get all our vacancies filled. This concludes my report for Resources.

### Recreation

**(Picks up at (46:44-14) when Deputy Director Shawanda Craig is giving her report)**  
Deputy Director Shawanda Robinson. About the pool. We have opportunities for our participants at the Jim Dailey Fitness Center to go to UA-Little Rock to utilize their pool for swimming and lap swim. They must be current members of the JDFC, to participate in the utilization of the UALR swimming pool. Staff do have a few rules and regulations that UALR requires of us. So, they do have that information at the JDFC and that concludes my report.

Vice Chairman JT Ferstl: How old do you have to be? Deputy Director Robinson: Sixteen (16)  
Commissioner Smith: This is about the warming center being open. I know we have a week of weather coming up. Do activities continue at those centers? Deputy Director Robinson: Yes, activities do continue to go on. We just have a space set aside for anyone who would like to come in and get out of the cold elements. We have snacks, water, and things for them.

Commissioner Smith: How many centers? Deputy Director Robinson: It's 5, East Little Rock, Southwest, Stephens, Dunbar, West Central. Commissioner Smith: I applaud the city for doing



this. I think this is a great use of the facility. I think it helps those that need a place to go to get out of the cold. Thank you all to the staff, to the whole city.

Parks Director Couch, there are the warming centers as Shawanda, and you mentioned. There also is another thing that happens when we have a certain period to work in. We work with, The Van. We'll turn our Dunbar and East Little Rock Community Center into an overnight option for up to three nights. We'll open the gym and, and individuals in need can come and spend time in that facility. I brought that up because we're looking at having this opportunity because of the winter weather that's approaching. We might even need this as early as Sunday. So just wanted to mention that as well. I was informed that our previous Chairperson, Matt Buie, has a conflicting meeting at one (1) and with our time frame, he would like to be excused. I just want to say, I appreciate his effort over the years. Working with you has been a pleasure. I really appreciate it and thank you. Our social media coordinator, Brittany has made a post about you, which is great. If you haven't seen that, it talks a little bit about Matt Buie and all that he's done. So, I appreciate you. I just wanted to say thank you to Ben France and JT Ferstl for taking over and I don't think JT knew that he'd be running the meeting. We appreciate that, and we'll continue. Thank you, Matt, so much. Vice Chairman Ferstl: Thanks, Matt, you really did a heck of a job, and we appreciate it.

### Operations

Deputy Director Justin Dorsey: Good afternoon. So, I'll just highlight off our report. Some things, I'd like to point out that I'm proud of are the Downtown District. This past month we rebuilt and did some work at City Hall around the back courtyard. They took an area that had several maintenance issues and were able to really beautify that area, with rock-work and certain types of plantings. So, if you're on the, the back side of city hall and see that area and how they rebuilt it, it looks good. I know we've already mentioned it, but just briefly JDFC. Hydco received that notice to proceed on 12/15/23. So, that thirty-two-week contract puts that project towards the end of August. As Leland said all the components have been ordered, but with the lead times, it's looking like that won't come in and work won't start on that portion until later in May. But we are scheduling a reconstruction walkthrough with them in the next week or two (2) to line out work and what aspects of that project to go ahead and get started to try to get a jump on the contractors that are excited to get in there. We'll work to get that done prior to the big equipment coming in.

The Interstate Park roadway project is completed. The only thing that it's lacking is the new signage. Which we just received this past week. So, it's on the schedule to be installed and then the new road striping speed bumps and signage will all be there. It's really nice, if you haven't been out there to check that. The restroom at Western Hills, I'd reported last month. That was scheduled to be delivered January 9th yesterday. But due to the weather that we had last week, the ground is soft. They had some dirt work and excavation that still had to happen. The electrician was there, and it was going to be very conflictual with the heavy equipment and the large green they had coming in. So, we had to postpone that. The new date is January 30th. So, we have all the work pretty much completed now. So that will be installed and finalized a little



bit later this month. We're processing through the last bit of our bond funds for Communities. We have several in process and have already issued the PO. So, there's a lot of our parks that we'll be seeing some new amenities coming in soon, this spring. Lastly, I just want to say that we have Courtney Perry here with us today. Safety, we did have a report and I don't see it. So, we'll make sure to get that report emailed out. But we're going to start including a safety report. It's a well-done report that we'll have in your packets that will be emailed. Courtney will be here at the commission meetings and available for any questions or any specifics. So, appreciate all the work he's done. We're working to develop a plan moving forward for this year for getting all our staff trained and all the required training as well. It's just additional safety measures to make sure that we're up to standards on that. That concludes with my report.

### Old Business

Webex discussion Item. Parks Director Couch: Those are all old business items. So, I mean, if there's no discussion. Commissioner Smith: I'd like to discuss that Item. Vice Chairman Ferstl: Okay, obviously it's, it's an issue. They all have issues on all the platforms. I don't know enough to know which one's better. Commissioner Smith: I have a comment. This was tabled at the last meeting, and it is reflected in the minutes that we tabled it pending some additional information. I asked Beth Carpenter for a copy of the resolution, and she sent that to me. Matt got a copy. Leland got a copy. I think others and it does require that if you are attending a meeting virtually as a commissioner that you be located within the corporate limits of Little Rock. So I can't be in DC, call in for meeting, and be counted as present. There is some discussion that may come up again for the city board. I just wondered if we knew if there were any plans to bring that up or not? This would affect my vote on the issue of Webex availability for attendance. I know there's several of us that are up for reappointment. I wanted to understand this issue a little bit more as we start moving into 2024. I don't think it was the question of using Webex or Zoom or whatever. It was a question of whether we would even allow virtual attendance. Okay, so I guess maybe if any of our board members have an update.

City Director Capi Peck: This was brought towards the end of last year. But it's convenient for some people. It's my understanding that they're going to disallow using it in the next couple of months. Do you remember that discussion Director Lewis? City Director Andrea Lewis: Not about disallowing and I'll apologize. I don't recall seeing the resolution. I do remember in that meeting; it was stated that we would get it. I think the position that I was in is because I was in Conway coming back from a meeting and was on Webex. When it came up, I just thought well, if I didn't tell you, I was in Conway you wouldn't have known where I was. I just feel like that could be a hindrance if people are able to attend, but just not physically. But if we're going to do away with Webex totally and this is my understanding that this is temporary. Then I guess we don't need to discuss Webex. But I do stand on if we continue Webex, I think your location should not be an issue. Parks Director Couch, If I can help clarify this. I think there's a few different things going on. So, the resolution which Linda asked for was a resolution that was passed that had nothing to do with this. It said if you're on a commission or a board and you're on a Webex, you had to be there. I mean you had to be within this city limits. I think Linda's point is relative in the fact that if you're not around, you could still participate by being on Webex. So



currently because of the resolution, it says that we can't do that. To change that. I mean, obviously that would be completely not within this commission and nor really myself. It would be a board matter. So, I'll leave it at that. If the board decides not to do Webex anymore for that board, does that extend to the commissions and boards as a whole? Okay, because I think I just started the conversation in December as, just asking is Webex still an asset to this commission. Not starting this, this other conversation. But at this point, it seems like we should wait until we understand what the city board is going to do. Since we're on the subject I apologize to everybody again for the delays with the Webex, we had three (3), IT professionals here and we saw had challenges. I'm going to have a mock set up before next meeting and understand how to do it Myself. I've been working through this for two (2) years. So, we just must figure out a way to make Webex work. I don't know what the challenge in this location is, but we'll, we'll get there. I'm optimistic. Commission Bernardo: I wasn't here for the conversation last week. About whether a commissioner joined from outside. I think the Webex is useful for posting the meetings online for the public to see. So, I don't know if we got rid. Webex. I assume that means that would go away as well, which is a nice feature online.

Parks Director Couch, Yeah, this is when we need Beth here. But according to our bylaws, we post all that on our website, and that's a requirement in our minutes, our recordings and all that. So, I mean, in theory, if something went away, we would still be recording everything and posting everything. Commissioner Fletcher: That would be an audio recording. I think that's what we had to do for the master planning committee, like last year. Just a quick comment to our board ladies. I think it's honestly, an awful idea to get rid of Webex for the Commissions this period. There are too many people that are not retired or do not have time for every meeting. And for us, if we only meet twelve times a year, if you're sick, like Ben is, then you have two (2) other times that you're out or something comes up. You're off the commission. It's out of your hands. Parks Director Couch: it's a total of four (4). Commissioner Fletcher: It's short sighted to get rid of it for commissions just putting that out there, not directed at you all. But if you all would carry that to your meeting. I mean, being a working parent too. I think the discussion it's just something that only happened during that time. I think it's very helpful because if it's audio only, no one's going to go back and listen to the recording. To Mike's point, it's nice to be able to watch a video, fast forward through it, get to the part you want. With audio, you have no reference for what you're looking for. Commissioner Bernardo: When was that ordinance passed? Commissioner Fletcher: It was during Covid. Commissioner Smith: April 2020 Commissioner Bernardo: As far as being within the corporate area? Vice Chairman Ferstl: Next item we covered and third item in old business. I don't see that Mike is here. He's not here, so we can't do that. Parks Director Leland: We're transitioning. So, Mike is no longer involved in our social media. Brittany is our Coordinator of social media and Marketing now. She's on new business and will give us a quick report.



### New Business

Vice Chairman Ferstl: Bond project updates. Parks Director Couch, I'm going to let Justin take care of that. He'll just give us a quick update on those three (3) major projects from bond. I think some of that's for Director Lewis. Deputy Director Dorsey: Boyle Park bond project's a new playground. Really large playground and other pavilions. It's been ordered, approved, everything's good. It'll be coming in April or May. So, we'll be prepping for the demo of the old playground. They're around Pavilion three (3) and getting ready to install. That will be spring when that one's coming. City Director Lewis: Is that by the zipline? Like that area right there? Deputy Director Dorsey: Crafton Tull have got a design and have the renderings of that playground. I think that's been posted and that project's all online. We're just waiting a little bit closer to delivery. It'll be April to May in that time frame, they usually will email us once fabrication is complete. We get about thirty-day kind of lead time of a specific date, and that's when we'll go in and start doing our groundwork and getting our crews ready.

Pankey Park is the same. The playground and pavilion and basketball courts. Some sidewalk works are all going to be redone there as part of that project. The design looks nice. The playground, pavilion, and everything's been ordered that's all been approved and done in PO's. It's being constructed again. That timeline, we're pushing through as quickly as we can. The delivery date came back between April and May. Intuitively right now those two may hit to the same time. So, we'll have to get all of our staff on board to get those installed.

Kiwanis, I'm really excited about it. We've got the scope. We're doing the walking trail, new playgrounds, new security lighting. We're really revamping that park. We did have an opportunity with the playground. I hope to have renderings for you all at the next commission meeting. We were the first in the state and may have the first and the nation to get this new playground that was just released. The design has a lot of new patents by landscape structures on this new playground. The playability, play features, and the design of this is cool. It's going to be a real feature piece. I'm proud to bring that into Arkansas. It's so new that they don't even have it all in their systems to give us renderings until after the 12<sup>th</sup>. So, this week we should be getting renderings of colors. We've seen it on the model but, to do an official order rendering, we've got our name on the list to have that ordered. That's been approved. I got confirmation from Cameron, our rep, that he thinks we can have it in April or May. So, our staff will have some challenges coordinating the installation of all those. But I am excited to have that in early spring as soon as possible for the citizens to enjoy those three (3) new parks and playgrounds. I can include the renderings if you all haven't seen them in the next packet.

Commissioner Fletcher: I have a random question about Pankey. Is there any way and I'm guessing the answers. No, is there any way to connect it with Connor Park in any way? They're virtually across the street from each other. They're both great areas with totally different things to do. Parks Director Couch: I can address that quickly. The highway department manages Highway Ten (10), which is the barrier between the two (2). They currently have a plan to renovate that area and enlarge the highway similar, what's farther east. They just completed. There were many discussions where I asked about sidewalks and different connections in Pankey Park itself. I was going to say take some of the land, but it's not really taking any acres. They're just changing some different access points. So, they're working any house that has an individual



driveway onto the highway. They're trying to remove those and have them access from the back. Because of the different negotiations. I worked with them to try to build a sidewall from the park up to the sidewalks that are on the highway. Now granted, you're walking along a highway, but there will be some better connections like that. But in terms of a bridge or a tunnel or something like that. You're right, there's not any feasibility in that, but you would have to go down to the nearest intersection, which is Sam Peck, and cross over and go back. Great question, though. Thanks. Brittany, if can just give us a quick highlight on events and, and what's going on in social media.

Social media & Marketing Coordinator, Brittany Nichols: I'm sure some of you are following the page already. If you're not, please like it, follow on Instagram. Our handles have been changed to LR Parks Rec, so you can find them on all the usual platforms. As far as events coming up, we're working on the Little Rock Marathon and Total Eclipse of the rock. Which is expecting tens of thousands of visitors to the capital city for the eclipse in April. Other than that. Martin Luther King Jr Day of service, there will highlight some volunteers that are out in our parks cleaning and bettering our community. So, follow us, like us, share us, and all those things. Parks Director Couch: Awesome, I have one event to add to that. If everybody has not heard February eighth (2/8/24) will be the State of the City address by the mayor. It starts at six (6) at the American Museum of Fine Arts. So please participate, if you are available, thank you. Vice Chairman Ferstl: Subcommittee reports: No report, social media, and outreach. Let's ask about that one. Park Conservancy, anything on that? I think Lauren was the Chair. Parks Director Couch: I would like to suggest to the Commission, for the next meeting, a new item for agenda to review our subcommittees and potentially put some new Leaders for those groups. Vice Chairman Ferstl: That's a great idea next time. So that'd be a new business item. Then that leads into item number eight (8) agenda items for next meeting. Subcommittees, a great one. Anything else anyone wants to talk about?

Commissioner Fletcher: What Park or Area can you highlight or is that too much? Parks Director Couch: No that's never too much. I'd be happy too. There's plenty to highlight. ARPA projects are one (1). Our Community Centers. Our Senior Centers. Those are all moving forward. Those are great projects to review. The ones that we just did for our bond projects. Different projects will be discussed for our sales tax initiative. Yeah, absolutely it's with the interest of what the commission would like for us to report out on. Vice Chairman Ferstl: Any Suggestions? Or part? Well, if you think of it email us and we'll get it done, right? Parks Director Couch: Absolutely, so on the agenda that I set a new goal this year to finalize the agenda in this meeting. So, staff will finalize it, they're going to start trying to post it the Monday after, so that it's not last minute. So, people can comment on that. But anything that we can do to get the new agenda items now would be beneficial. I'm trying to increase the turnaround time on those things. Vice Chairman Ferstl: I think, I would be fine if everybody else is on board with maybe skipping the park update next time. We're going to spend what I'm hoping is a, a good amount of time on the subcommittees. I think that is important. I'm glad you brought that up. So, maybe we will focus on that next time. Then move back into the kind of routine that we've had with following. Is that okay with everybody? All right. Liaison feedback?



City Director Lewis: I don't have anything. Merry Christmas. Happy New Year. It's good to be back. Parks Director Couch: I have a comment. I just want to say thank you all for helping the Parks department get a little extra money for their budget. We received some extra funds in our maintenance area. So that will go a long way and we'll be able to use some of that for contractual maintenance and different projects that we're looking forward to in 2024. So, thank you. I appreciate it.

Commissioner Smith: I have two other comments along with the parks budget, maybe just in our packet next time. We could have a copy of Parks 2024 budget attached. I tried to look for it online. I know it's probably buried in the five hundred pages at the city, but if we all have the park budget in our packets. Parks Director Couch: What kind of detail level would you want to go down to. Because we need every line item? I don't know if there's a summary but maybe a summary by division or something. Commissioner Smith: Okay, and then the second item. I appreciated the reminder. There are seven (7) positions open on this Commission right now posted on the city. Those of us that are up for renewal, and there's a lot of us. We expire at the end of this month. So, I don't know if we'll be reappointed or not, but there will be seven (7) people available for change at the next meeting. I'm looking to you JT and Ben. Just know that you may have a lot of new faces. Vice Chairman Ferstl: Okay, yeah, that's fair.

Parks Director Couch: Can our Board Liaison speak to that? Did y'all recently go through any Voting? I'll check with the City Clerk as well. City Director Lewis: Will there be any posting on social media? Commissioner Smith: It had a deadline to apply last Friday.

Parks Director Couch: Its concerning to me that there's seven (7). I mean, there wouldn't be a little bit more separation in the time frames. Vice Chairman Ferstl: I think of the majority of those were people that filled unexpired terms. It was an inordinate number of unexpired terms, I think. Vice Chairman Ferstl: Is there anything else? No? Ok, meeting Adjourned.

Meeting Adjourned at 1:10 pm