



Parks and Recreation Commission Meeting Minutes

October 14, 2022, Minutes

The Centre at University Park

Attendance: Matt Buie, Ren Bressinck (Virtual), Dustin Smith (Virtual), J.T. Ferstl (Virtual), Linda Smith (Virtual), Ashely Martinez (Virtual), Cannon Fletcher, Robyn Nosari

Absent: Lauren Eldridge, Samuel Ellis

City Board of Director Liaison: Director Doris Wright, Director Capi Peck

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 Septembers' minutes.

Roll Call and Approval of Minutes: Ricardo Ante called the roll and Chairman Buie reported a quorum was eight (8) members - in attendance. Official business will be voted on during the meeting. 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. To start with the approval of the meeting minutes, he stated that those were provided to the Commission via email. He asked for any questions, but none were asked.

The September commission meeting minutes were approved.

Citizen Communication: Chairman Buie stated that there was no one present for citizen communication. Buie asked Director Couch if he expected anyone, and he did not.

Chairman Buie then called for any staff reports.

Staff Reports: Director Leland Couch started staff reports by stating that Administration division does not have a report, so they would start off with Recreation. He then gave the floor to Deputy Director Robinson.

Administration

Deputy Director of Administration, Angela Nelson, reported no updates at this time.

Recreation

Deputy Director Shawanda Robinson started reports by mentioning that her report was sent out to everyone, and that she would go over some of the main points.

The ATA Combo State Championship will be held on the 21st-23rd at 8:00 a.m., and encouraged all to come out if they were not busy to Rebsamen Tennis Center.

Stephens Community Center, Dunbar Community Center, and Southwest Community Center will host a *Lights on Afterschool* program, which will be held on Thursday, October 20th, and they have various times. Stephens's time is 6-8, Southwest is 6:00-8:00 p.m., and Dunbar is 3:00-4:00 p.m. This is a program where the Latchkey program displays various talents during the national *Lights on Afterschool* program. Also, at the same locations there will be a *Trunk or Treat* event that will be held on October 31st, and the location for this will be announced at a later date. That event is normally combined.

Deputy Director Robinson thanked everyone for coming out to the West Central Community Center on the 29th for the opening of the clinic. Unfortunately, Robinson was out due to being sick, but knows it was a great event. She stated she would allow Director Wright the opportunity to speak more about it in her report. Also, West Central Community Center will host a Simmons Bank Financial Literacy class on the 20th from 6:00-8:00 p.m. Also, coming up on the 20th, there will be another boxing event from 7:00-11:00 p.m., and she stated she would let Wright speak on that as well.

Southwest Community Center hired a Recreation Programmer Senior, Ray Kimbrough Jr., and he just started on the 10th. The division is very excited to have him aboard. Kimbrough will be over the swimming pool, and assisting with various programming and activities at the center.

MacArthur Museum had its grand opening for the playground, and Robinson stated she would let Director Couch speak on that topic. Also, the Art in the Face war movies will be shown on the 18th, from 6:00-8:00 p.m., and she invited all to come out. They will be played on the third Tuesday of every month. Also, the Museum will be hosting the 10th Annual Arkansas Paranormal Expo on the 29th and 30th, and invited the Commission to attend.

There are two (2) other Pop-Ups, at Union Park on Saturday, October 29th, and Brodie Creek Park on Saturday, November 5th. Robinson invited all to come out and support. Director Wright asked the time of the event, and it is 11:00 a.m., ending at 2:00 p.m.

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

Chairman Buie and Deputy Director Robinson gave the floor over to questions, but none were asked at the time.

Operations

Director Couch stated that he was still filling in for Operations until they fill the position for Deputy Director of Operations. Couch stated that the previous week was a great week in terms of major projects. There was a ribbon cutting for MacArthur Unlimited Playground, and it was a great turnout. He stated that he took his family there over the weekend, and saw a lot of families attending.

A new project coming is the Interstate Roadway. There was a successful bid, and Couch presented it to the Board of Directors the night before. As long as it passes, they will get on the project as soon as possible. It will be a great improvement for Interstate Park.

Another small project is a small sculpture project in the sculpture garden at Riverfront Park. It is the Daisy Bates sculpture project, being built in-house, and invited everyone to go see the garden if they had not been in a while. The project should be completed within the next few weeks. This shows how great the Parks team is at doing both small and large projects.

Another project is the Outdoor Learning Center. It is also being done in-house, at the West Central Community Center. It was a new and is a small construction project with cargo containers being used for a green garden project, starting in the spring of 2023.

Another larger project is the playground at Western Hills. Park staff is involved, but they do have a contractor. Parks received the Legacy funding, a total of \$600,000, so they will be putting out a bid to create a mile-long trail system that will eventually attach to the Tri-Greenway Trail System. Western Hills is finally picking up, and expect it to be completed by the end of the year and finish up next year.

Another big event that was just completed was Music in the Park at Allsopp Park. Attendance was a little bit lower, but there was some other events competing with it. It was held on the previous Thursday night. However, the event went very smoothly.

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

Director Wright commended Couch for bringing forward the Roadway for Interstate Park. She stated that she always thought it was a shame that the city let that sports complex fall into that type of condition, and that numerous people have reached out to her over the years wanting to bring the big softball tournament. Once the roadway is fixed, she thinks that it is closer to that. Wright suggests that the Adult Softball League needs to join the Softball Association, so that it can be a part of a circuit, and be more in line to have tournaments at Interstate Park. One such tournament was Busch Classics, and it was huge. They would like to return to Little Rock, and have come down to the Board and speak about the improvements that are needed in order of them to consider it.

Director Couch thanked Director Wright, and stated that she was aware that one of the goals of the department which is to work on the maintenance of the fields, and improve them, and it causes changes in the budget. Parks is also looking to smaller maintenance options, smaller improvements that they can do, during the duration of that project. This is to bring Interstate Park back bigger and of better quality starting next year.

Director Couch gave the floor over to JP Rogers, Parks Maintenance Manager.

Parks Maintenance

Parks Maintenance Manager, J.P. Rogers opened parks maintenance reports by stating that they were starting to make the transition from cutting grass to the Fall Maintenance Cycle, which is

mulching leaves. There is a new graffiti artist in Kanis Park, and it has been a battle. They are using a case of paint to paint the bathrooms, and maintenance is going over it. If there are any complaints about it, please let Rogers know. They try to get it painted within twenty-four (24) hours. They've been out every day working on it.

Overall, Rogers says that they are in pretty great shape. Since the grass hasn't grown, they are moving into areas that they didn't get a chance to. They are touching those up, and making sure that the areas that are clean, including the parking lots. There is not a slow time for maintenance.

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

Buie then mentioned that there are sixty-three (63) parks in our system, so the work that maintenance does is monumental, and they certainly deserves our respect and applause.

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. He asked for any questions, but none were asked.

Then proceeds to New Business.

New Business

Chairman Buie opens discussion with stating that he wanted to acknowledge a new commission member, Mr. Ben France. Buie thanked him for attending, and then asked him to tell a little about himself.

Mr. France started off by thanking the Commission for allowing him to become a part of the group. He stated that both he and his wife grew up in Little Rock, and they have one (1) son. Prior to the current employment, France worked in accounting development with the State for eight (8) years, at Arkansas Account Limit Commission, and served as Vice-President of the Arkansas Regional Chamber. He knows how when you are improving businesses, the quality of life and parks matter, and look forward to doing whatever he can to build up the parks and bring more people to Little Rock.

Chairman Buie thanked him.

The next topic is sub-committee reports.

First up is Social Media and Outreach, with Commissioner Ashley Martinez. She stated that she did not have any new information to present. Commissioner L. Smith and Martinez are working on setting up another meeting to reconvene on Friends of the Park.

Attorney Carpenter asked Chairman Buie if he would like to update the Commission on the Friends of the Park, and that is not going to be worked through the Parks Conservancy at this point. Buie thanked her, and stated that he would defer that to Commissioner Bressinck when he

mentions the Parks Conservancy. Commissioners Martinez and Smith were not present at the previous meeting, when it was announced.

Next up was the Master Plan Committee, with Commissioner Linda Smith. Smith stated that she did not have a report at this time, but she is glad to see movement on Friends of the Park and its moving over to the Parks Conservancy. The committee will start convening more to look into the Master Plan.

Buie thanked Smith and Martinez for their leadership with this, and mentioned how appreciated they are.

Finally, the last sub-committee is Parks Conservancy, with Commissioner Ren Bressinck. Bressinck stated that Parks Conservancy is building out the program over the next several months, with help from other Commission members. The committee is also working on membership management, and how they are going to work through it. They are still laying the foundation on how the Conservancy will operate, and it will be a two-prong approach (fundraising and park engagement). An example is the Eagle Scout project happening in Allsopp Park north, which is in conjunction with Parks and the Conservancy. It is about community engagement and outreach to groups.

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

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 purpose for doing this was to keep the Commission informed about what we do as a department. With this, he welcomed Michael Harris, Fitness Supervisor for Jim Dailey Fitness and Aquatic Center.

Michael Harris started off by stating that he had been at Jim Dailey for a little over a year. The purpose of this was trying to give Jim Dailey a mission and vision. The mission of Jim Dailey is to provide an array of innovative, affordable and universally accessible health and wellness programs and class to the citizens and visitors of Little Rock, improving the lives of individuals, families and communities. The vision of Jim Dailey is to be the premier fitness and aquatic center for the city of Little Rock based on the excellence of our people and access to our health and wellness programs.

One thing that Harris noticed when first coming to Jim Dailey was that there was not a variety of health and wellness programs and classes for families, young adults, and youth. His goal is to expand to make it accessible for anyone that comes into the facility. He stated that there is more family oriented lessons and activities, such as family swim, parent-child swim, etc. In the past this was not available.

In the near future, Harris wants to adopt adaptive aquatics program and class for participants, and he hope to have them by next year. The following page shows the fitness schedule showing the variety of programs and classes. When Harris first started in the position, he did a survey about

what participants would like to see, and they stated more classes. He then provided more classes throughout the day.

The next page talks about upcoming event during the coming month. Harris stated that he started new training classes with Sterling, one of the new instructors. He is popular, so they are trying to expand his times. On the 28th, there is going to be a *Pink-Out Day* in honor of Breast Cancer Awareness Month. He is encouraging all participants to come dressed in pink, and have information on breast cancer awareness. Also, later that evening, Jim Dailey will have *Boo at the Pool*, a family event that will be showing the Addams Family 2. Doors open at 7:00 p.m., and food will be provided. On November 12th, there will be a triathlon, which includes a mile-run, mile-bike, and a mile-swim. The cost is \$25.

There is a new Facebook page, and everyone was encouraged to follow it and like the posts. It shows daily information.

Chairman Buie asked for questions, and none were asked. He stated that there was a PDF available, and invited everyone to use all of the information presented. Director Couch stated that he had a couple of questions. He then stated that he thought it would be interesting if Harris could talk about the attendance.

Harris stated that they have 1,971 active members that purchased active memberships. That is a big increase from when he first started. There was about 400 at his start. Due to the pandemic, he assumes that the numbers will steadily increase. For a typical month, there is an average attendance of 10,000 to 15,000 participants, and Harris feels as if the attendance is going to get better over the next few months. Couch asked Harris if he felt as if his goal would be 100,000 attendants by the end of the year, and the answer was yes. He mentions that his membership goal is 2,000, and that he is 29 off from his goal.

Couch stated that there was a couple of things that they have looked at for the facility. They are focusing on outdoor rentals for the pool during the summer, adding some things for next year. They are in the process of adding fiber to the facility, in the use of technology. Also, the outdoor pool is in disarray due to age and maintenance, so they are looking into some upgrades for that pool to make it more exciting. For the indoor pool, there is a loss of air quality, and they are looking forward to making some improvements.

Commissioner Buie thanked Harris for his information, and gave the floor over to questions. None were asked. Buie asked about zombies at the Halloween party, to which Harris said no.

Next up was Updates on Projects. Director Couch was given the floor.

Updates on Projects

Director Couch started my mentioning that this was something that was really important for the department. This is special because the Parks department does not always have the capital funding to do such projects, and he really appreciated the Board of Directors. Couch stated that he wanted to give the layout of the funding.

There are two different groups of funding, the ARPA (American Rescue Plan Act), and Parks received over \$6 million in funding, \$1 million for the West Central Sports Complex, \$2 million for community centers at large, and \$3 million for a senior center and improvements. Outside of that, the citizens of Little Rock voted for Parks to receive over \$24 million in bond funding. Couch stated that he had gone out to the public, and that Parks will go out again in November to get more input and ideas.

His reason for bringing it on the Agenda is that it is very important to get input from the Parks Commission on the direction of where the funding should go. Right now, staff is putting all of the information received from citizens in a database, so they will have that information. If the Commission has any information, he would like for them to bring it up.

Buie thanked Couch for the information, and gave the floor for questions. Director Peck asked if he could share on any specific or general projects that he might be considering. Couch stated that they were still compiling information, and there are a lot of ideas, but until he is able to sit down and put everything together, he does not.

Buie asked if the correct amount was \$24 million for the bond. The city manager has discussed going out on 3 different deliveries of funding, totaling \$150 million across 6 different areas. The recipient must spend 85% of it through the first 3 years. The goal is to spend this money across the department on many projects. So the goal is to have a certain amount spent, as well as the ARPA money that must be spent immediately.

Chairman Buie asked if the money was to be available for the entire Parks system, including all 63 parks, was it marked for just new construction or for maintenance and upgrades? Couch stated the City Board of Directors put in the language that it was not for new, but for upgrades and renovations.

Buie asked for any questions, and Director Wright stated that she could expound further. Wright stated that the Board did not want to create any new parks, due to struggling with the current inventory. This money is to upgrade and hopefully get programming into those parks, once people get comfortable in using it. Now if people wanted to adopt one, but not creating a new park.

Regarding the ARPA money, Wright stated that the Age-Friendly Little Rock Commission expressed an interest in helping the City decide which way to go with the Senior Center. She stated that they are very interested in the Care Link building, and they want to move with all due speed. She wanted them to have a say, since they were brought in to advise the Board on issues related to seniors. Since it will be a part of the Parks department, this Commission needs to know that senior-related issues and programming will be a huge priority. Wright stated that we are living in a city where the population is aging, and although there are quite a few young people, the seniors have been neglected. This money goes a long way towards showing them that we care.

Chairman Buie thanked Wright for her comment, and asked for any questions. Commissioner France asked if ARPA money was COVID-relief money, to which everyone replied that it was.

Commissioner Fletcher asked if there was a cheat sheet where the percentages of allocations of money on Parks. Couch stated that he started to start a conversation, and he gave somewhat of a breakdown to initiate a conversation, but it is all based on public input. It is very important to see what that input was, and go from there. He doesn't have the data, but that, along with the input of the Commission will drive the allocations.

Chairman Buie thanked Fletcher, and asked Couch if he would have that information by the next meeting. Couch stated that he would. His goal is to have everything wrapped up by November.

Commissioner Fletcher stated that he read the entire Master Plan, and he was wondering if it would get redefined by the Master Plan group, or if it was the terminology that was concrete. Couch stated that the current Master Plan does state those definitions, and he brought hard copies, as well as uploading it to the website, and he would use it. The last thing was about cost estimates. While some were spot on, some were so inflated, and the earnings would be under-classified, he wondered if there was someone who would look into this. Couch stated that there was always opportunity for cost estimates, and at a certain point, Parks would work with the Procurement Office to put out bids. Parks would professionally engineer them, then get bids. That whole process is based on Procurement rules and regulations.

Director Wright asked if anyone else could understand what was said, and stated that Commissioner Fletcher should be on camera if he wanted to be counted as present. Fletcher stated that he was in South Texas and did not have any data. Attorney Carpenter stated that in order to be counted as present he would have to have his camera turned on. Chairman Buie asked Wright if she had any additional comments, to which she stated that all she wanted was to understand what was said, but she would take Director Couch's statement and try to understand. Couch stated that in order to ask a question, the video needed to be on. Attorney Carpenter stated that in order to be held present, they would have to have their cameras on for the duration of the meeting. Wright stated that she could not see him, and Buie replied that he was blurry. Buie thanked him for his questions, and thanked Couch for his answers.

Discussion Items for Next Meeting

Chairman Buie started by mentioning the upcoming social event on Friday, October 21st at 6:00 p.m. at Hill's Station. Commissioner Buie asked who all was planning to attend. He asked everyone to raise their hand to count who all would be in attendance. Attorney Carpenter stated Commissioner Fletcher needed to turn his camera on.

Chairman Buie stated that Commissioners Nosari, L. Smith, France (maybe) were planning on attending. Director Couch asked Carpenter if there was a way that they could send out an RSVP, to which Carpenter stated no, and that any type of Commission activity would need to be a public meeting, not through email. Since the date was set, and some already stated they would be in attendance, they would hold that date. Director Couch mentioned he looked forward to scheduling another social in the coming months.

Director Wright also asked about sending an RSVP, but Attorney Carpenter stated that the public would need to know about it, because Parks Commission information could be discussed at the social. Wright stated not by her.

Director Couch then changed topics and mentioned that he would bring to the table some property zoning questions to present to the Board.

Chairman Buie thanked Director Couch for his points.

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

Board Liaison Feedback

Director Peck started off by letting Director Wright go first on the condition that she would leave her three (3) minutes. Wright stated she had five (5) things.

First off, Director Kumpuris wants a formal dedication for the sculpture in front of West Central. It turned out to be a \$160,000 project, because she got an award of over \$60,000, but by the end of everything, it was over \$100,000. Director Wright mentioned there needs to be a bronze plaque with the information. She would like the Commission to schedule the date, and allow them to host the dedication. Kumpuris wanted it done the second week in October, but there was a lot of things going on, with the boxing event. She asked if there was a possibility on the 29th or even November 5th. Director Couch suggested sending him the information for the plaque, and that would give us the timeframe.

Second, the Simmons Bank Workshop was the next topic. Earlier that morning, Director Wright forwarded an email sent to her to the executive staff, to offer a college savings account program. Initially, it was thought of for the children of the 21st Century Program, however, those kids have access to that through their school. Simmons wanted to know if they could do it at a Community Center as a pilot program, just to see if this would be a unique benefit to getting children into programs at West Central. Simmons wants to donate money to the savings account, but she wants to let them know so that they can do a press release for it. She stated they could take that part out. Couch stated that in order to get the Commission's input, someone would need to do a presentation on the details. She stated that she would tell them to take that part out, so that they can go ahead with the release, and they want to do a mini job fair. Couch asked if the Commission would want to vote on it.

Attorney Carpenter stated that Commissioner Fletcher was blurred, so a vote would be difficult. Wright stated to let Couch and Robinson discuss it, and go from there.

Third, Wright thanked everyone who came out to the West Central Health Clinic. It was a big event, and Healthy Connections did an outstanding job. One of the things they wanted to bring out, as long as the sign was out there, they did not know that there was a health clinic there. She thinks there needs to be a better use of the electronic sign, where the graphics are changing.

Director Wright spoke with Top Golf and mentioned that they would like to help West Central, and she'll speak more on that at the next meeting.

On October 1st, West Central hosted a boxing team from Ireland, and Wright thanked Director Peck for catering the reception. The team was blown away. Most of those boxers had never been on an airplane. They would like to come back and make this a big deal, and it was historic. On the 22nd, there will be host teams from the Midwest, called Southern Smoke. They will be coming, and stay in the hotels at Shackleford Crossing, bringing community-based tourism dollars to the area. Wright stated that this was her goal all along, to build up the hotels and restaurants.

Director Peck stated she had been getting a lot of reports regarding car break-ins at Two Rivers and Big Dam Bridge. She stated she made that mistake once. Peck asked if the LRPD needed to get involved and if someone goes there, to leave your car open with nothing in it, so they can get involved.

Peck thanked them for Kiwanis, since they had a lot of staff around the area, and the resurrection. She mentioned about the gateway to River Mountain, one of the most popular parks, there was a lot of contesting. Bale Chevrolet was looking into moving their lot there. Peck stated that there was a lot of public outcry for this to not happen. She stated it had zero chance at the board level, but she did not want it to even come up at the planning level. Peck mentioned there were many reasons why it should not go there. There is another development, with four or five drive-thru restaurants, coming to the board on the following Tuesday. She has issues with it, and the community is coming out in force. With a lot of other issues, she asked the Commission to speak about it with their city director.

Chairman Buie thanked them for their reports.

The next meeting will be Wednesday November 9, 2022, at The Centre at University Park at 12:00 p.m. Buie encouraged all who could, to come in-person to the following events.

Meeting Adjourned.