



Parks and Recreation Commission Meeting Minutes

August 10, 2022 Minutes

The Centre at University Park

Attendance: Matt Buie, Ashley Martinez (Virtual), Linda Smith, Samuel Ellis, Robyn Nosari, Ren Bressinck (Virtual), Cannon Fletcher, James Ferstl (Virtual)

Absent: Lauren Eldridge, Dustin Smith,

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 July'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 - in attendance. Official business will be voted on during the meeting. Attorney Carpenter mentioned that in order to be counted as present for the meeting, the Commissioners would have to be visible on camera, as well as have their audio working. After some technical issues, the meeting went on. Commissioner Martinez stated that on Welcome and Introductions, the month was incorrect. After acknowledging, Chairman Buie moved on.

Chairman Buie then entertained a motion to amend the July commission meeting minutes.

The amended July commission meeting minutes were approved.

Citizen Communication: Chairman Buie stated that citizen communication allows any citizen to share comments and asks questions, yet questions may not be always be answered during the meeting. Each citizen is allotted three (3) minutes. He then invited the guest to speak.

John McCarty thanked the Commission, then stated that he had come before the Commission a couple of times before. McCarty stated that he was present that the previous meeting and made sure to be at this meeting because there was some issues that needed to be discussed, to which his comments would prove timely on.

He went on to mention that since 2007, there had been three studies on what to do with War Memorial Park. The first one was done by John Cole and his group, the second was under Strategic Analysis Public Golf in 2019, and the one of discussion by Lose Design Group under

Master Parks Plan 2020. He asked for a correct pronunciation of the name, and Director Couch told him.

McCarty said with the closure of the two golf courses in 2019, it left only two (Rebsamen and First Tee) open. Part of the Master Park Plan that the board approved, is to expand First Tee to an additional nine (9) holes. At this point, the golf course at War Memorial sits unused, since 2019. He mentioned that there was an election coming up, and one of the candidates for mayor has the desire to open War Memorial Golf Course. If the Commission is looking at expanding First Tee, he wishes that someone would comment on the preexisting course, which is eighteen (18) holes in the middle of the city.

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

Chairman Buie then called for any staff reports.

Staff Reports: Director Leland Couch started staff reports by mentioning Deputy Director Angela Nelson would cover a few points on Administration.

Administration

Deputy Director of Administration, Angela Nelson, reported that Resources was busy performing day-to-day operations, which include invoices, processing, financial reporting and payroll, and other human resources-related issues. We are continuing to hire full-time positions. Currently, there are five (5) maintenance positions filled, including our urban forestry division. Administration has three onboarding on the fifteenth (15th), which will be for recreation and golf. We are currently interviewing for our Deputy Director of Operations, and two other positions that will be advertised soon.

Resources are continuing to update our job descriptions, monitoring certification requirements for our staff, which is important to knowing who is required to have licenses, CDL certifications, CPR certifications, etc. The purpose of this is to see who is in good standing, and is working to achieve that goal within a given timeframe.

The department is also working on our six (6)-month employee evaluation reviews, and update for supervisors to let their staff know how they are performing in their duties from January to June. Hopefully nothing is too painful and is going over well with everyone.

Parks has reintroduced LRSTATs, now called PARKSTATs, to measure how we are doing in different divisions within the department as a whole. All of the areas come together and give a presentation, taking a look at how we are progressing. We had our first meeting, and will have another meeting in September at the Centre on September 16th.

The department is also in the process of allowing people to have flexible work schedules, being implemented through our HR department. This will allow staff to possibly come in earlier or work later, or even have a day off. However, everyone will still be required to work a full forty (40) hour work week. This is being done on a trial basis. This concludes the report.

Chairman Buie stated that there was some feedback from one of the virtual participants, and mentioned to please mute the audio if they were not speaking.

Recreation

Deputy Director Shawanda Robinson started reports by mentioning that recreation will have Open Houses at all of our locations on various dates on Wednesdays and Thursdays. She stated that she would send out the dates, so all could come out and support. This is an opportunity for the community to come back into our spaces, and see what type of programs and activities we have for them to do, and to give us feedback on what they would like to see in our locations.

Also, we will be doing pop-up events around the city. This is for us to go into the community and meet people where they are. This is so that they can know what Little Rock Parks and Recreation does, and so that we can have fun activities with them. She then named some of the activities that were available at the event. Robinson stated that she would also send out flyers for that one as well.

Rebsamen Tennis has some tournaments coming up. On August 20th-21st, they will have a Razorback Classic. On September 3rd-4th, they will have the ATU Tri-Level State Tournament will take place. Their Open House will be on September 8th. Rebsamen will also have another tournament of September 10th-11th, called the Access School Tennis Tournament Fundraiser, and the ATA will be there on September 16th-17th and it's a 55+ year old tournament. Robinson encouraged everyone to attend.

Stephens Community Center has their cheer clinic this weekend, as well as a volleyball clinic from 10 a.m. to 12 p.m. The dates are August 6th and 13th. Our Latchkey Program will start at all of our Community Centers (Stephens, Dunbar, and Southwest) on August 22nd, from 2:30 p.m. to 6:30 p.m.

West Central Community Center's 21st Century Program will start on August 22nd, and will be from 3:00 p.m. to 6:00 p.m. The Community Center will have a Back-To-School Bash and Youth Comic-Con for Literacy on August 13th, and they will provide free food and admission. Robinson stated that this will be a really big event, in collaboration with the Martin Luther King Jr. Commission, and encouraged all to come out and support the kids. Also, they will have a boxing event on September 28th, 29th, and 30th. She encouraged everyone to attend if they had not, and stated that it was a lot of fun. People come out from all over the country to this event. The Open House for West Central Community Center will be on September 14th.

Southwest Community Center will host its first annual Summer Hoop Fest. This is a five on five (5 on 5) tournament, and will cost \$15 to participate. It is an eight (8) minute non-stop game, and various trophies will be rewarded. The admission is \$1 and all of the proceeds will go back to Southwest for their game room. On August 20th, the Community Center will have Southwest Fest, and a Love Walk, walking down the street to the post office, and promoting love, and wishing children off to a safe school year.

Rebsamen Golf has a Paul and Mary Lewis Tournament on September 16th, and this is an annual tournament that is about twenty-five (25) years old. This event is a two (2)-person scramble. It is a senior tournament, and there will be sponsorship opportunities.

First Tee and Rebsamen Golf will go live with their new G1 software, and more information is to come in the presentation.

MacArthur Museum will have a War Dog Movie on August 16th from 6:30 p.m. to 8:30 p.m. Movies will be shown every Tuesday of each month, and Robinson encouraged everyone to come out.

On August 13th and 27th, Jim Dailey Fitness Center will have Movies at the Pool. She invited everyone to come out and watch a movie and splash in the pool. The cost is \$5.

This concludes Recreation, and asked for any questions to be directed to her. Chairman Buie then stated that he failed to ask if anyone had any question for Deputy Director Nelson, or Deputy Director Robinson.

Operations

Director Couch stated that he was still filling in for operations until they filled the position for Deputy Director. A big update was that MacArthur's Inclusive Playground is nearing completion, and they are looking at doing some kind of ribbon cutting around September. Kanis basketball has taken off and construction has started. Interstate roadway will be coming out for bid later in the month. This entails redoing all of the roadways in Interstate Park, which was needed a couple of years ago. Southside Park is getting new lights, and Couch mentioned he was thankful to the board and to ARPA for assisting with this.

Our staff is currently building an Outdoor Learning Garden Center at West Central, and it was an in-house project. Also at West Central, design staff is looking at renovating the current ballpark, while looking at the total costs of the project.

Staff in-house have been making some major improvements at Rebsamen Golf. They just finished renovating the entire back deck, with a new patio, as well as some other much needed aesthetic improvements around the clubhouse. There is more to come in the near future.

Another little tidbit for the mountain bikers, they are planning on a new trailhead for River Mountain, and making some improvements there, with the help of volunteers. This is to keep us up to par.

We have a new sculpture named Anna, and will come to the Arkansas River Trail soon. We are putting together a project for a sculpture at Dunbar Gardens. We will be working with CALS and Dunbar Garden, as well as the Community Center.

Lastly, the Bill Clark Wetland has had a lot of issues because of the flooding, and they've lost a lot of ground there. They are working with a new company to put some new decking down, as well as fix some of the landscaping, and are working with EDG Consultants to make the needed improvements.

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

Parks Maintenance

Parks Maintenance Manager, J.P. Rogers opened parks maintenance reports by mentioning that they were starting to catch up on parks. The next big goal was to set up a ballpark crew, since there was no one dedicated to sports field, and you could tell by looking at them. They are in the process of moving some internal personnel, and are expecting to have this within the next month or so.

Rogers stated that he would be asking the board for some specialized equipment, and mentioned the if you want something to look a certain way, then you have to the right tools, and he did not have those tools. They are working with Fleet Services to get this done. He hopes that everyone will see a change by next year.

Rogers opened the floor to questions, and Director Peck made a comment. She asked that Rogers share that information with both Director Wright and herself before bringing to the board so that they will be prepared to help.

Director Wright stated she had a question. She asked if Operations had anything to do with the Outdoor Learning Center, to which Director Peck told her she just missed it. Director Couch stated that he did cover West Central, and from his understanding, they were forming the base pad for that, and then in-house building all the metal fabrication, and then ordering all the wood. The dump truck driver broke his foot, so that has slowed down progress. Director Wright stated that she has tried to work this in house for five (5) years, and she finally got it done. She stated that we must keep utmost in our mind that this is a partnership with AT&T, and it has drug on for too long, and she was embarrassed to look at them. She mentioned she wanted to be able to give them an update.

Wright stated she wanted to go back because the call she stepped out for confirmed something else. She mentioned that Deputy Director Robinson stated the dates regarding the boxing event, but the actual boxing event is October 1st, and it was clear. Wright stated that on October 22nd, it is a Mid-West versus South Boxing Invitational, where clubs are coming from all over the Mid-West.

Regarding the Back-To-School Bash at West Central, Wright stated that she was told that the special guests are phenomenal, and stated that she did not know very much about YouTube and influencers. She mentioned that once someone was into the two (2) million followers, they were huge, and those kids are coming from Atlanta, and will be helping to promote literacy. They are called the Wicker Twins. Wright says she was told that they would bring out a lot of kids, and although she didn't know much about that aspect, she stated she was excited about the event. Director Wright says that they are reaching kids where they are, through the comic book movies, which are all blockbusters. She says that she wants to keep it basic, so that children will know that they don't have to do a lot to learn. Wright encouraged all to come out and take a picture.

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 introduction of a new Commission member, Ms. Robyn Nosari, and stated she was glad to see her back.

Regarding sub-committee reports, Buie asked for updates on Social Media and Outreach with Commissioner Martinez on New Business.

On last month, Mr. Mason Ellis spoke regarding the Rose Creek Initiative, and Buie thanked him for speaking.

Director Couch then mentioned that for the social, Hill's Station on October 21st, was the confirmed date and time.

Then proceeds to New Business.

New Business: Chairman Buie opens discussion with the attendance of a new commission member, Mr. J.T. Ferstl. He then asked her to tell a little bit about himself, yet audio technicalities caused Buie to ask that he talk next month. Ferstl stated that he would be in person next month.

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 for upcoming events, she thinks Deputy Director Robinson did a fantastic job telling of all the events, and encouraged the Commissioners to attend all events. In terms of the Committee reports, they have actually been working with the Master Plan Committee to focus on the Friends of the Park Initiative. Martinez yield the rest of her time to Commissioner L. Smith

Chairman Buie asked Commission L. Smith if there was any update. She stated that the Master plan did meet in conjunction with Social Media and Outreach, and the only topic was the Friends of the Park Initiative. They decided not to take any action, so this is just an update on an idea, which has been around for several years. She then told ways someone can volunteer with the Parks. She stated the idea behind Friends of the Park(s), for a minor fee, someone could get a window sticker and be more involved with volunteering, donating, and supporting the parks. There are still some technical details that are being worked out about where the funds would go. Smith hopes to be able to come back in the coming months with a concrete game plan. She then opened the floor to questions.

Chairman Buie thanked Commissioner Smith, and again asked if there were any questions. Commissioner Fletcher then asked if Friends of the Parks was currently operating, to which Smith stated that it was not. He then asked about Parks Conservancy, and Smith mentioned there was a separate non-profit group that was created several years ago, called the City Parks Conservancy, and they have funding, a Board of Directors, and a Facebook, and it's mission is to support Little Rock Parks. Smith states that she hope Friends of the Park can become part of that group.

Director Wright asked Director Couch, that sense the Conservancy had been around at least twenty (20) years, and that was how they received donations, will the initiative do that? Director Couch stated that since it was still in talks and not concrete, there still some things that need to be talked about. He stated that he wanted to get it active, and that he was working with the Conservancy to get it activated. It was not something that had been formally introduced to the Commission. Wright then asked that if the Conservancy's role was to support the Parks, why the Initiative is needed.

Couch then stated that this is something that he had dreamed of, and it was just something like a membership, and if certain provision are met, then there were rewards for it. There would be an emailing list so that one's could get information regarding events. It is something that they would like the Parks Conservancy to help with, but he wants it done. Wright then stated that she did not have a problem with it, and that she had a draft of the very same thing, just with Friends of West Central. She stated that she has a Board of people willing to do everything that Couch has said. She mentioned that this was done to generate dollars for West Central to support the programs at the center. Wright then told Couch that she would show it to him, and that he would recognize a number of names on there that have decided to become the board members, and its exactly the same thing. She then stated that she just wanted to know what would happen the Parks Conservancy, because taking in donations was what they did. She just did not want it to leave Parks, and go into the general fund, and wanted ones to assured of that. Director Couch agreed with her and thanked her for her input.

Chairman Buie stated that it was only seven minutes left, and they had not yet came to their speaker. He then called up Mr. Eric Bowden, Facility Supervisor of First Tee Golf Course.

Parks Guest

Mr. Eric Bowden, Facility Supervisor of First Tee Golf Course, stated that he worked for the City for twenty-two (22) years, and spent seventeen (17) years as the Assistant Facility Supervisor at Rebsamen Golf. He stated that he loved working for the City, and serving the community with the game of golf. Bowden then thanked everyone for inviting him to speak.

A couple of things he wanted to mention is that he was new, and things were different. He stated that First Tee was a junior facility, and was built in 2001 by the Jack Stephens Youth Golf Academy. The staff of First Tee do a great jobs, and he mentions that Director Blake does a great job with her staff and PGA Pro, and Brad Martin, the Director of Events, does a wonderful job as well. He is looking forward to working hand-in-hand with the staff from this point out, and bringing the community in, and showing them more with golf.

Bowden mentions that one of his goals, being a Facility Supervisor, is to do different events. He mentions golf leagues, and doing clinics on the driving range. Bowden mentions that everyone knows that kids like other sports, yet the parents are not really involved with their competition. Golf is a little bit different, and gets the parent more involved, and this is something that he wants to bring to First Tee. He hopes that children can teach others, and move up to competitive golf.

Another thing that he would like to do are birthday party rentals, similar to bowling and skating rinks. He mentioned putting together a package deal, where they could use a room, and then be provided balls and go straight to the driving range and hit some balls. Bowden mentioned bringing in one of the staff to show them how to putt.

In unison, both Deputy Director Robinson and Bowden stated they had an Open House Event coming up on September 28th and he has asked First Tee to be involved with it, setting up some booths. To this, he invited everyone to attend and see what's going on. The U.S. Kids Golf Tournament is coming up on Saturday September 24th. The Foundation is a nationwide foundation with over 2300 kids in all 50 states, and they chose First Tee to play at. He then thanked everyone again.

Chairman Buie thanks Mr. Bowden for his time, and then asked for any questions. None were asked.

Next up was discussion items for next meeting. Chairman Buie stated that we have our standard events, and asked if there were any special items that needed to be added for next month's agenda.

Commission L Smith asked that due to making hasty notes, if they could getting a written list and mentioned covering only a few, so that she could put them on her calendar. Chairman Buie stated that it would be something to consider.

Next up on the agenda is Board Liaison Feedback, with Directors Peck and Wright.

Director Peck started by stating she we happy with how the election turned out, and Wright agreed. Director Couch said that he wanted to mention it, but decided to let them. Peck stated that it turned out the way they wanted it to, and that Parks staff would be hammered with questions about how the money would be spent.

Wright congratulated Couch, and told him that he has some money to play with. She stated that she told him that she would help, and she did. She stated that like Director Peck stated that the turnout was low, but it went the way we wanted.

The next meeting will be Wednesday September 14, 2022 at The Centre at University Park at 12:00 p.m.

Meeting Adjourned.