



Parks and Recreation Commission Meeting Minutes

April 12, 2023

The Centre at University Park

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

Absent: Director Peck

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

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

Welcome, and Introductions: Chairman Buie called the meeting to order and welcomed everyone present. Chairman Buie proceeded with the agenda to the roll call and approval of February's minutes.

Roll Call and Approval of Minutes: Angela Nelson called the roll, and Chairman Buie reported that a quorum in attendance was six (6) members. Chairman Buie thanked everyone for coming; Chairman Buie then asked for the February minutes and March 8th minutes to be approved. The motion passed, and the minutes were approved.

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

Chairman Buie then called for any staff reports.

Staff Reports: Director Leland Couch asked all staff to go down the list with their reports. Chairman Buie then handed the floor to Deputy Director Angela Nelson to begin staff reports with Resource Administration.

Administration

Deputy Director of Administration, Angela Nelson, thanked Data/Special Projects Coordinator Briana Hatfield for preparing the February and March commission meeting minutes. Deputy Director Nelson then reviewed the first quarterly Parks & Recreation ParkStat meeting. The next meeting will be in July. The Parks and Recreation department is also hiring a Social Media & Marketing Coordinator. There was a similar position approximately four years ago, and it will be revamped from that, focusing on planning and implementing marketing strategies and ensuring that we have a consistent brand and integrity throughout the department.

Regarding the payroll area, we have been challenged with coding or trying to capture all the work time related to tornado relief efforts, including volunteering. In our revenue compliance area, we provide staff support regarding cash control procedures to ensure that everyone knows how to do what is required of them. We are also providing training for reconciling credit card purchases, and we have trained this week. Also, in this area, we will be performing weekly unannounced site and petty cash audits to make sure everyone is following the procedures that we have in place. Also, a new challenge that has come up because of the storm regards the Asset Inventory. This week a group of us will meet to account for all the damage we have in our parks. We have had some areas affected that Mr. Couch will elaborate on during his time with the floor. Lastly, we are continuing to monitor our spending. That concludes my report on resources.

Chairman Buie thanked Deputy Director Nelson for her report and then called for questions. There were none, so Chairman Buie gave Deputy Director Robinson the floor.

Recreation

Recreation Programs Deputy Director Shawanda Robinson greeted the floor by mentioning the vacancies Recreation is trying to fill. There is a vacancy for an Assistant Facility Supervisor at the Tennis facility and two Recreation Programmer positions at Stephens and Southwest Community Centers. We started reports by giving a brief overview of programming for community centers. The department has wrapped up interviews for those two positions. However, they have to return to the drawing board on one of them to re-advertise. The other we are going through the hiring process. There is also a Fitness Specialist position at Jim Dailey Fitness Center. That position is in equity review.

Next, we have Community Centers, we have Stephens, Dunbar, West Central, Southwest, and East Little Rock. The youth basketball program has ended, and they are now registering for youth sports in baseball, T-ball, softball, soccer, and Rally Cats (a tennis program). Jr. Hoops is also coming up, and it will be in 3 different age groups: middle school, 6th grade through 8th grade, and high school, 9th through 12th. Update about West Central. The Community Center has been closed due to the tornado relief and FEMA offering assistance to the citizens of Little Rock. Mike Garrity will speak more on that. The Southwest Community Center has a youth

choir and dance program on Wednesdays from 7 p.m. - 9 p.m. Saturdays from 11:30 a.m. - 1 p.m. The Therapeutic Recreation Division will host their 21st Annual Therapeutic Recreation Arts Festival on May 5th. If you have not had an opportunity to attend this event, please go and check it out; they have many vendors and different activities for the kids to do. The main feature is always a dance contest, and it's enjoyable. They also sell T-shirts so you can capture the moment of this 21st year.

Therapeutic Recreation's Youth Summer Camp registration started on April 10th. It will be at the War Memorial Clubhouse from June 12th to July 21st.

The MacArthur Museum is preparing for two traveling exhibits in the next few months. *Manufacturing Victory* is one of them from the National World War II Museum. It will be out from May 19th through April 4th; the other is *The Color of Freedom*. This exhibit comes from the Military Women's Memorial in Arlington, Virginia, and will be on display from June 17th through August 26th. They also have a 5k run on May 5th.

The Athletic Division is preparing for the Summer Playground Program. Registration begins May 1st, and the program will go from June 12th to July 27th. We have the following sites: J.A. Fair, Baseline Academy, Washington Elementary, Dunbar Community Center, Stephens Community Center, and East Little Rock Community Centers.

Rebsamen Tennis Facility is very busy right now due to golf and tornado. We have encouraged several participants from the North Little Rock area to come and play golf with us and utilize our tennis facilities. The Jr. Tournament is scheduled for April 22nd through the 24th.

The Jim Dailey Fitness & Aquatic Center is offering a new program called the "Pre-qualification Lifeguard" course, which is very new. It's a course to prepare students for the Lifeguard prerequisite test. That test consists of them learning to swim 300 yards, tread water, and pick up a 10 pound brick from the bottom of the pool. They have to complete all of these skills to become a lifeguard. They must also meet the Red Cross training to be certified as a lifeguard. Once they have completed all of these requirements, the City can hire them as a lifeguard.

On the Rebsamen golf course, on April 28th, they will have an outing with the NUSA organization. Then, they will have the Ladies Golf Tournament in the following two days.

The First Tee Golf course hosted a Tournament of Masters. We will be sharing pictures later. They had many kids there, and one kid was celebrating his birthday, and they dressed him up as a caddy, he and his grandfather. Participating in those golf activities was a great day for him to enjoy his birthday there.

Deputy Director Robinson concluded her report, and Chairman Matt Buie called for questions. Chairman Buie asked Deputy Director Robinson how long FEMA plans to be at the West

Central Sports Complex. She answered that it could be 1 to 2 months more. With no more questions, Chairman Matt Buie handed the floor over to Operations Deputy Director Justin Dorsey.

Operations

Deputy Director Dorsey started his reports by mentioning that he would go through Maintenance and Operations with his presentation. The Maintenance side of things is hectic, as they are gearing up for the Spring and trying to get flower beds and splash pads up and going. They are also un-winterizing restroom facilities, getting RPZs, and stuff that goes along with the Spring. In addition to that, our other staff was dealing with the tornado here a week and a half ago, and we all got pulled trying to handle both those things. The guys did an excellent job, still keeping up with those duties, albeit slightly slower. We're getting everything ready to run for the season.

Design is excited about one of the positions we have vacant and has interviews scheduled for this Friday for a Park Planner. This will be a massive help to our design team to get that up and running. This interview that we've got is a promising candidate. Hopefully, everything will pan out shortly with at least a candidate.

Dunbar Gardens is almost complete. If you can drive by and check that out, we've got the fence, the gate, and the new signs installed. We're just waiting on the sculpture, which should come later this Spring. It should be here between May 11th and 12th. Director Couch commented that we have sent out invitations for the dedication on the 12th.

Deputy Director Dorsey continued that they had been working a lot on pools and splash pads, getting them up and running, and completing all the maintenance things that have to happen.

The last thing that the departments have been working on is MacArthur Park, getting ready for the grand opening of the Museum of Fine Arts that is coming up on April 22nd. We are just trying to ensure that MacArthur is up to par. We are doing some lighting and improvements there. We are going the extra mile to make sure everything looks nice. We have installed new benches, and trashcan receptacles and have made many sidewalk improvements, little things like that. We are excited about that opening.

Chairman Buie and Deputy Director Dorsey opened the floor to questions. Chairman Buie asked what was going to happen with all the debris being collected and deposited in Reservoir Park. Deputy Director Dorsey answered that the Park is being used city-wide, separated by housing and construction debris versus tree and organic waste. It is a staging area we are using, and it will be hauled or grounded. All that is being done on-site. Reservoir Park will require extensive work,

but we are just really early on because we don't have a good grasp on the time frame that process will take.

With no further reports, Chairman Buie thanked the staff for all they have done and are doing before shifting the agenda to old business.

Old Business

Chairman Buie opened the old business by stating there were highlights about Kiwanis Park, and an update from Commissioner Eldridge about the golf tournament. Also, he had a quick update on the kayaking social event.

Chairman Buie called for questions regarding Old Business. Director Lewis asked for more information about the Kiwanis Park update, and Director Couch said he would be happy to discuss it. He mentioned that regarding the presentation from last month, we are working with the neighborhood Kiwanis Club. We are currently looking at improving the basketball court and a new playground. Director Couch acknowledged that the neighborhood wants splash pads, parking lots, pavilions, and so on, but it would be beneficial for the department to have a neighborhood meeting on site, a pop-up event. We also sent maintenance out there recently, and they did some maintenance around the basketball court. Director Lewis asked if any date had been set, and Director Couch responded no, that it is still very early in the conceptual phase. He continued that it was Deputy Director Dorsey's project to look at designs for a playground. There are also some concepts that they have been working on. Director Lewis thanked Director Couch, and Chairman Buie moved on to New Business and turned the floor over to Director Couch and Marathon and Emergency Management Assistant, Mike Garrity.

New Business

Director Couch began by asking if anyone in the room was personally affected by the tornado. Director Couch then explained that Parks and Recreation had three majorly damaged parks: Rock Creek Park in West Little Rock—there's a trail system out there, and we had some significant infrastructure damage. We haven't been able to review it 100% because it's so extensive in terms of its location and the fact that it's hard to get to because of so many downed trees. The aerial slide accompanying the presentation is a before and after interactive map showing previous and after conditions due to the tornado. You can slide a bar across the screen that displays. Reservoir Park was also damaged by the Jackson Reservoir on Highway 10. The tornado went from end to end of the park and was completely destroyed. We lost essentially every asset in the park, a pavilion, the disc-golf course, a playground, and the tennis and ballfields were affected. The biggest thing that we lost was all the tree cover. We lost thousands of pine trees. We are currently working through how to salvage some of those trees and process

all the damage in the park. Reservoir Park is being used as a dumping site for the city of Little Rock, so residents can go and dump their debris there. We are working with Public Works in terms of the whole operation. It is very substantial and includes house debris. We will grind and remove all of that. Reservoir Park will be completely renovated, but it will be a closed park for at least a year, if not two, due to the extent of the damage. You can see the ground on the left, which indicates the damage. The only standing area is between the ball field and the residents. Those are the only trees left. The other park that Director Couch mentioned was Murray Park. The tornado crossed Murray Park and damaged Rebsamen Park Road and everything on the south side of Rebsamen Park Road. It went straight through a swampy area, missing our pavilions, but it caused damage to our Fit Lot, our sand volleyball courts, significant tree damage, and then the dog park had extensive damage. Our Urban Forestry and Maintenance staff have done a great job clearing the debris, and there is soccer practice tonight. Code enforcement was able to help, and volunteers have been great at helping pick up. There are still issues at Murray, which will be for many months. We do not want to advertise it as being open, but certain areas will slowly be reopened to the citizens as we get them safe and transparent for public use. The next big area we are trying to open is the dog park, which staff has reported that hopefully, it should be open by this weekend. We did mention that FEMA is utilizing West Central, which will be ongoing, they don't know their exact time frame, but the Recreation staff moved everything out of there. That was a big lift, but we have been able to work with everyone on all the reservations and all the displacements, but Director Couch believes that it has all been worked out. Hopefully, we can provide a better schedule to the citizens of when that will be back available to the public, but we don't know that now. Director Couch then opened the floor up to questions after praising Marathon and Emergency Management Assistant, Mike Garrity for taking charge at the EOC, which is down on 7000 Murray Street, the Emergency Command Center. Director Couch then gave the floor to Mike Garrity to answer questions or add information. Chairman Buie opened the floor for questions. Commissioner Ellis asked if the bike trails would be open at some point shortly so that he could tell people when they can expect to be able to utilize them again. Director Couch asked if he was referring to the Arkansas River Trail. Director Couch mentioned that staff might be able to answer that. The department has narrowed it down to a small closed section that is, by some major debris still needs to be removed—at the entrance by the playground. Director Couch thinks it will be finalized in the next week. Additionally, most people can and are detouring around that.

Chairman Buie asked how is all the extra cost from the storm being covered by the Parks and Recreation Dept. Director Couch explained that they met with an insurance adjuster because the department has insurance on most of its structures. Many things like the trees, the labor, the cleanup, the grass, the parking lots, the fencing, and certain things need to be covered, and hopefully, some of those will be covered under FEMA reimbursements. That process is one Mr. Garrity could cover well, because if there were any detailed questions, he was the one to help with the big flood in 2019 and managed all of our reimbursements on a lot of that. Everything that we have seen so far is in a process. It's just trying to figure out whether it is a repair or a

replacement and if it just takes time to do all that. So we haven't even started on any repairs yet; we have only been focused on cleanup efforts and assessing what is damaged. When we went to Murray Park, we couldn't get in for the first three or four days because of the high power voltage lines down, and we looked from afar and looked at the pavilions and found all eight pavilions were all good; it looked like the roofs were intact. Until J.P. walked around the backside and saw all the pavilions' backside roofs were damaged. I don't know how that happened because the tornado was going across the river, but the backwind effort destroyed them. So they will have to be rebuilt or the roofs replaced. There's always something new that we find every time we go out, so we do a lot of that. We do have staff putting up caution tape and signs. We ask citizens to stay off anything affected by the tornado because we don't know realistically the full extent of the damage until we review it. Chairman Buie and Director Couch then opened the floor to questions. Commissioner Fletcher asked if the statue was ok. Director Couch responded that the banana is doing great.

Chairman Buie asked if, considering the efforts to clean up and the future repairs, there was anything that Director Couch was looking forward to accomplishing this year from a new project perspective. Are things put on hold indefinitely? Or are you already going to push something out or is it too early to say? Director Couch responded that we have to step up our game even more. Parks and Recreation was focused on a lot of ARPA projects, Bond projects; all of those got put on hold for a few days, but realistically we can't stop that process. We have to keep pushing forward, so all of that is still going on, we have another more significant more extensive project. I look forward to making all the damaged things better, and moving forward, Reservoir Park will be completely different, but I am optimistic we will create something better at the end of the day.

Chairman Buie thanked Director Couch and all the staff for the effort they were putting in. Director Couch then thanked everyone who volunteered and donated to the residents that were affected.

Updates on Projects

Next are the Ward 1 highlights from Director Couch. He admitted that the tornado discussion was originally off the agenda, so he will go through Ward 1. This includes area where Little Rock Airport is, all of East Village, east downtown area comprising Ward 1. We have an extensive amount of parks in this area; the staff put together a list. There are 21 parks in Ward 1. Ward 1 is one of our older areas, so there are a lot of different parks there, some unique ones. I have an aerial of each one and will quickly go through them. There's no way I can get into every detail of every project in 21 Parks in a five-minute conversation, but I will give some overview. East Little Rock Community Center has been closed for several years. We still have some staff there, and I am looking into making some improvements to turn it into a special events center, utilizing some of our Bond and ARPA funds and making some other improvements to the existing tennis courts. There is a trail system called the Southeast Trail that comes out along the

levee, which is on the north side of this aerial, which is going to connect this back to the city. This area here is critical to renovate and bring back to Little Rock in terms of special events. A lot of that is because of the neighborhood here. The airport has displaced some of it, so how do we turn this into something else. There's also a clinic that operates here, the St. Vincent's Clinic which has been there for over 50 years which is very successful.

Next is the Clinton Library. Our biggest asset down here that we manage all the time is the Bill Clark wetland area up by the Arkansas River, which has a boardwalk. There's another project there where we have treks material that we will replace. I am working with some engineers currently to figure all of that out. We're doing some landscape improvements, pump improvements, and a lot of other things. We also have a sculpture that we're doing with the River Market committee at the Clinton Library. There is also an event this Friday night we're going to select the final one for that selection there. Director Couch informed the commission to stop him if they had any questions, as he was going quickly through the presentation.

The next is Riverfront Park, it has many projects. City Director, Dean Kumpuris asked him to look at doing a new project connecting to the treehouse, which is the latest project on the Arkansas River. Director Couch has a meeting right after the Commission meeting to look at the River Market, which we also manage, not physically—The Little Rock CVBD does, but it is still on our books. Vogel Schwartz Garden is also at Riverfront and is a great project we did a long time ago, with a lot of incredible sculptures. We have over \$5 million worth of sculpture assets in our parks today.

MacArthur Park is working very hard to get it up and running for the April 22nd Arkansas Museum of Fine Arts opening. We've partnered with them on many projects to make it look nice for the park. We do have a Master Plan and are looking to make significant improvements to the fishing pond as our next big push with that park group to bring back the fishing derby we lost. We also have a firehouse hostel museum here, and they have a project they want to push for a \$15 million new firehouse hostel, another project to cover.

Hanger Hill Park is a smaller neighborhood park. The most significant improvement there recently is that we did a new playground and improved the basketball courts and access. The tennis court there needs much love and I would love to find a new idea for that park, but it is a great little neighborhood park.

Pettaway Park is another great little neighborhood park. It is an up-and-coming neighborhood. There has been much new development in the area and Pettaway Park needs some further improvements in new playground and assets.

Dunbar Community Center is a great community center and asset to us. Currently, we're working on the tennis courts to put new lights on the courts. We also have Dunbar Garden at the bottom, where our contemporary sculpture will be placed. We're working a lot with Chris

Wyman, our staff working in the garden there. He's a part-time worker we're trying to give better benefits to, and we're going to use some funds from ARPA and the bond to improve our community center there.

Fletcher Park is another great neighborhood park. Recently been updated but it is in time for another little facelift sooner than later.

Crump Park received much funding from the previous tax initiative. We were able to put in some sports lighting, a excellent splash pad and improved everything in terms of accessibility. We still have a little bit of money left over, and we will be making some improvements there regarding the trail or the ball field. Crump Garden is also working with USDA and received a massive grant of \$180,000 to do a big hoop house in the garden. We worked with Dr. and Mrs. Hatchet, who went after and applied for the gift. We are trying to help assist them however we can.

Southside Park is another great neighborhood park. It has a football field, and we put in some sport light and are working with them on improving their drainage because they have many drainage issues in the park. Hopefully, we'll work on their parking lot and pavement improvements in the coming year.

Interstate Park wasn't on there, but that's a whole other thing, and we received a bid for \$600,000 to repave the main entry road, which I know everyone is looking forward to and is needed, so we're finalizing contracts there. That concluded Director Couch's report and Chairman Buie called for questions on Ward 1 parks report.

Golf Tournament

With no questions, Chairman Buie gave the floor to Commissioner Lauren Eldridge, who had a quick update on the golf tournament.

There were sound complications, so Chairman Buie provided the update. In terms of the golf tournament, it is still coming up on May 19th. Lauren is also working to send out a flyer for the game, and there will be some information on the sponsorship there, too, so look to receive a brochure from Lauren very shortly. There is also going to be a QR code for registering golf teams. Sponsorships will need to coordinate directly with Lauren on that. The other item that she wanted to mention was that one of the lunch vendors was going to be Director Peck's Trios, and they have sustained significant storm damage so we will be looking for a new partner there.

The sound issue was fixed, and Director Eldridge added that they would go live as soon as they have a registration portal on the website. Please think about sponsorships and email her as soon as possible. She will send out flyers with more information as well very soon.

Mike Garrity mentioned that the website was delayed a week due to the storm, but the information has been sent down to the company being used, and they're working on it. We should have it by the first part of next week.

Chairman Buie called for questions, and there were none. Chairman Buie then asked Director Couch for updates on the May 13th kayaking social event. There were none.

Sub-committee Reports

Chairman Buie then turned to the sub-committee reports.

First up is Social Media and Outreach with Commissioner France. He informed the commission that he and Mr. Garrity had a phone call the morning of the tornado, and they are producing an outline on social media strategy. They should have more of a system in May. Commissioner France is also looking forward to meeting the new Social Media Coordinator. That was all, and there were no questions.

Next up was the Master Plan Committee, with Commissioner Linda Smith. She informed the commission that they had not met, but she did applaud Director Couch and staff for bringing updates on the other park updates, which was discussed in the Master Plan committee early on.

Finally, the last sub-committee is Parks Conservancy, Chairman Buie informed the commission that they did have the social media plan enacted. He talked with Mr. Garrity and thanked him for getting the Parks Conservancy logo back on the website. He did have some things to have out after the meeting for the Parks Conservancy, with information on how to join and a sticker. Watch social media as they partner with Parks and Recreation, Mr. Garrity, and commissioner France.

Discussion Items for Next Meeting

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

Director Couch asked if there were another location (preferably not an entire ward) but a park or another location the commission would like him and the staff to give an update at the next meeting. Commissioner France asked about Hindman Park.

This concludes the Wednesday, April 12, 2023, Park Commission Meeting. The next meeting will be Wednesday, May 24, 2023, at The Centre at University Park at noon. Buie encouraged all who could attend the following events in person. Chairman Buie thanked everyone for their reports.

Meeting Adjourned.