



Parks and Recreation Commission Meeting Minutes

August 9, 2023

The Centre at University Park

Attendance: Matt Buie, J.T. Ferstl (Virtual), Cannon Fletcher, Ben France (Virtual), Linda Smith, Mike Bernardo, Ron Bara

Absent: Lauren Eldridge, Samuel Ellis, Director Andrea Lewis

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

LRPR Staff: Leland Couch, Angela Nelson, Shawanda Craig, Justin Dorsey, Briana Hatfield, Katie Stehle, City Attorney Beth Carpenter

Welcome, and Introductions: Chairman Buie called the meeting to order and welcomed everyone present.

Roll Call and Approval of Minutes: Katie Stehle called the roll, and Chairman Buie reported that a quorum in attendance was seven (7) members. Chairman Buie thanked everyone for coming; Chairman Buie then asked for the July 12, 2023 minutes to be approved. The motion passed, and the minutes were approved.

Citizen Communication: Chairman Buie yielded the floor to multiple members of Jim Daily Fitness and Aquatic Center. Ms. Joy was first at the podium. Ms. Joy mentioned her background in health education and her 30 years as a member of Jim Daily Fitness and Aquatics Center. Her background focused on elderly fitness. The use of the indoor pool has been a huge factor in fitness and flexibility for members. Ms. Joy commented on the closure of the indoor pool and the troubles it has and will cause for those who rely on the center.

Chairman Buie thanked Ms. Joy and called for any other citizens that wished to speak.

Another longtime member of the Center took the floor. She mentioned those behind her were there to have their voices heard about the importance of the center. She commented on the Center being one of the few places where people of all walks of life can gather. The group gathered want to be supported and promoted. They currently do not feel that way. In regards to the pool, she mentions potential decline in membership and the worries of the staff. She mentioned the staff have done a wonderful job in cleanliness. She asked an open statement to Director Couch as to when the indoor pool will be open, why no work is currently being done, and why no staff has answers.

Chairman Buie thanked her and called for any other citizens that wished to speak.

Human Resource related issues. The Directors Administrative Assistant position has been filled by Katie Stehle. Deputy Director Nelson introduced Katie to the Commission. Deputy Director Nelson mentioned a decision has been made on hiring for the open Parks Planner position. Interviews for the Parks Marketing and Social Media Coordinator, Outdoor Recreation Coordinator, and the Construction and Planning Coordinator positions are underway. Management is in the process of revamping positions in the Maintenance and Operations Divisions to fit the structure and needs for the Department. The community centers have gotten a request to increase staff to have more hands on board. As a Department, we are continuing to focus on the progress of the *Parks Handbook*. Next we will focus on the *Parks Manual and Procedures*. We are also continuing to stay on top of our reconciling for our financial records. Focusing on the accuracy of our Divisional assets. . The second Park Stat meeting was on Friday, July 28, 2023. It was a great turnout and a great opportunity for staff to focus and work on ways to improve divisional goals. The accreditation team also met to further discuss accreditation. Deputy Director Nelson mentioned an upcoming conference that staff will be attending in September, The Arkansas Recreation Parks Association. Staff has been focused on the submission of three awards. She mentioned last year they submitted in 5 awards and won 5 awards. Staff is hopeful they will be as successful this year.

Chairman Buie thanked Deputy Director Nelson for her report and then called for questions. Commissioner Fletcher asked if the accreditation was state or national. Deputy Director Nelson answered with, national. Every five years the staff is focused on receiving accreditation.

Chairman Buie called for questions. There were none, he then welcomed Katie aboard. Director Couch gave Deputy Director Craig the floor.

Recreation

Recreation Programs Deputy Director, Shawanda Craig, greeted the floor by informing that staff will be conducting interviews for the Outdoor Recreation Coordinator following the Parks Commission Meeting. The Community Centers have been busy this summer in providing cool spaces for the public to take a break from the heat. Deputy Director Craig commended staff for providing the cooling spaces and assisting the public with snacks and water. The Summer Playground Program has ended, there was around 525 kids that participated in the program. Therapeutic Recreation has around 40 kids to participate. MacArthur Military Museum continues to host two traveling exhibits through the end of summer; *The Color of Freedom: Honoring the Diversity of America's Servicewomen*, and *Manufacturing Victory: The Arsenal of Democracy*. Deputy Director Craig encouraged the Commission to visit the exhibits if they have not already. She mentioned a key personnel staff member of the museum would be leaving soon and she will be missed. Midnight Basketball will be ending at the end of the week. Staff is gearing up for the start of volleyball season. Registration is still open if anyone is interested. Jim Daily Fitness and Aquatics Center has wrapped up their Movies at the Pool. The pool will close on October the 28, 2023 weather permitting.

That concludes Deputy Director Craig's report. Chairman Buie called for questions.

everyone to come and visit the Riverfront area to see for themselves the exciting changes that are being made.

Deputy Director Dorsey mentioned him and Director Couch have been reviewing the plans and waiting on the bid documents for Jim Dailey Fitness and Aquatics Center.

Chairman Buie thanked Deputy Director Dorsey and called for questions. Chariman Buie opened the floor to Commissioner Smith.

Commissioner Smith inquired if the work at Kanis Park is ongoing or is there a pause with contractors? Deputy Director Dorsey mentioned there were several issues with the sub-contractors. He mentioned the project is taking steps forward, but then taking two backwards. Deputy Director Dorsey is hopeful the issues with the road will be finalized first.

Chairman Buie called further questions. Commissioner Fletcher had a general comment about the contractors. He mentions how he has seen issues with contractors performing resurfacing projects. Commissioner Fletcher is personally going through the same thing on his project in Northwest Arkansas. He mentioned, with his project, there has been discussion on adding verbiage in the contracts so that the prime contractor who receives the bid will have to perform a certain percentage of the work and not sub-contract.

Chairman Buie thanked Commissioner Fletcher and called for any further questions, but there were none. Chairman Buie moved on to old business.

Old Business

Chairman Buie referred to the agenda, mentioning the next item of discussion would be the Golf Tournament. This item falls under the purview of Commissioner Eldridge who is absent from today's meeting. Item has been tabled.

Chairman Buie moved on to the next order of business: scorecard analysis of park assets, update. Chairman Buie announced the scorecard analysis has been finalized, discussion is closed.

Chairman Buie then moved on to the next item of business: sub-committee reports. Chairman Buie opened the floor to Commissioner France to speak on social media outreach. Commissioner France opened with inquiring from Deputy Director Nelson if a Social Media and Marketing Coordinator has been hired. Deputy Director Nelson informed everyone that they have not been hired, the job is posted, and interviews have not been conducted. Commissioner France mentioned he didn't have a report, but requested once the position is filled he would like to sit down with the new Social Media and Marketing Coordinator and discuss how they can better utilize social media and use it as a benefit to the Parks Department.

Chairman Buie thanked Commissioner France and moved on to the next item of business: Master Plan sub-committee. Chairman Buie opened the floor to Commissioner Smith. Commissioner Smith mentioned she had no report, but is excited to hear about the proposed sales tax section of

salt. The data is color coded to reflect the severity of the crimes committed. The same Commissioner noted that the data looked like theft of property and breaking and entering have the same numbers. Mr. Perry mentioned that was correct, sometimes the two are inter related. Mr. Perry moved on to the point of this data, to bring crime in the parks down. Mr. Perry commented on a way this can be achieved: working with *Overwatch Solutions* to install camera pods within the parks. This would increase the parks safety and security. Mr. Perry elaborated further on how the security pods would be beneficial.

Chairman Buie mentioned that Commissioner Bernardo had a question. Commissioner Bernardo inquired about the vehicle break-in data; are the increasing numbers spread across all parks or just certain parks? Mr. Perry mentioned the numbers ebbs and flows from year to year. Commissioner Bernardo would like the spreadsheet data available to the Commission to review further. Commissioner Bernardo then inquired about who would be monitoring the security pods footage. Mr. Perry commented viewing would fall to the City to review footage, between Park staff and the Police Department. Director Couch stepped in by clarifying that Parks is currently working with the Police on cameras. Mr. Perry is representing a sample of solution to help with the security within the parks. Staff is working day to day on finding solutions and with Police on options available to the parks.

Chairman Buie called for any further questions from Commissioners. Commissioner Smith commented she has seen an increase police presence within the parks. Director Couch mentioned that was an interesting comment and he has also seen the same. Director Couch noted he has spoken with Chief Helton recently, mentioning he appreciated all that the Police Department has done.

Director Couch and Chairman Buie both thanked Mr. Perry. Ms. Hatfield stopped the data presentation.

Chairman Buie then moved on to the next item of business: Sales Tax. Director Couch took a few minutes to discuss. Director Couch emphasized how exciting of a time this is for the Little Rock Parks and Recreation Department to have an opportunity for something this big. Everything is in progress, nothing is 100 percent finalized. Director Couch reiterated the upcoming public meetings for the proposed sales tax starting between, August 14 and August 30. He recommend to the floor, to come to a meeting, if able. Director Couch then briefly mentioned some points and projects. Roughly \$60 million dollars annually, roughly \$600 million dollars over a ten year period has been proposed: War Memorial and Hindman are some of the bigger projects; noting the proposed indoor/outdoor sports complex at War Memorial. There is also proposed indoor tennis facility, updates at the golf courses, improvements at all centers, trails, and playgrounds. Director Couch concluded by stating all of the Parks Departments assets will receive some type of improvements and/or updates. Focus will be on improving more of the existing assets and provide additional funds for the operations and maintenance. Both of which are highly needed to maintain and operate the parks and facilities at a higher level.

Chairman Buie thanked Director Peck and called for any further questions. Commissioner France asked for information about the meetings. Director Peck mentioned the meeting schedule was available on the Little Rock website and either she or Director Couch could provide further documentation to the Commission. Director Peck confirmed Commissioner France's question. Director Couch mentioned he can send out the calendar of meetings for the proposed sales tax.

Chairman Buie then opened the floor to Commissioner Smith. Commissioner Smith inquired about the proposed indoor/outdoor sports facility and if it what sport it would hold. Director Couch answered by stating Little Rock Convention and Visitors Bureau had a study conducted for the previous sales tax proposals. From this information the department was able to form an idea of what the need was for the city. With the knowledge that the numbers have changed over time, Director Couch has been working with Little Rock CVB and others to finalize what will be needed for the indoor facility. Proposed, there will be 10 multi-propose indoor courts: volleyball, pickle ball, basketball, or special events. The facility would be managed by an independent provider that will report back to the city. They would be responsible for having events and tournaments. Director Couch summed up his answer by stating the main goal is to have the facility be as multifaceted as possible.

Director Peck was recognized. She mentioned her time being on the LR CVB for about 12 years and being a part of two (2) studies Director Couch mentioned. Director Peck informed the floor that the number one piece of the Tourism pie is youth sports. Director Peck made further comments on ways the proposed facility could boost tourism within the city. She also mentioned citizens have been asking her, why there? Director Peck states that studies have been done for at least 15 years and War Memorial was ranked in the top 3. She voiced her approval for the facility.

Commissioner Smith was recognized. Commissioner Smith commented about her support to bringing youth sports to Little Rock.

Commissioner Ferstl was recognized. Commissioner Ferstl echoed Commissioner Smith's support. He mentioned talking about the study years ago and elaborated on the reasoning behind choosing War Memorial: in the heart of the city and the ancillary support. He further mentioned the potential downfall would be the challenge of the topography. Directed at Director Couch, Commissioner Ferstl mentioned for the indoor facility to consider indoor turf. Lacrosse, football, and soccer are all sports that cannot be played when it rains. There is a great need for a multi-use turf facility.

Director Couch commented that he has been reviewing facilities at different sites within the state. He mentioned one where the recently replaced their outdoor ballfields with turf. The question of using with rain was brought up. The facility responded by saying with the outdoor turf, they are able to continue playing without damage being done to the field. Director Couch commented he hears Commissioner Ferstl's concern and appreciated him bringing it up. The idea is to have an outdoor turn field that can be used during the rain or after the rain.