

**PARKS & RECREATION COMMISSION**  
**MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF MAY 27, 2021**

**PRESENT:**

Sam Hostetter, Council Representative  
Vicky Ferreira, Chair  
Jared Bissinger  
Donna Ownby  
Calvin Williams

**VISITORS:**

None

**PARKS & RECREATION DEPARTMENT STAFF:**

Dwayne Jones, Sherrie English

Ms. Ferreira opened the meeting at 6:00 PM and asked the members if they were able to review meeting minutes from the last meeting on February 27, 2020 (meetings were cancelled since that time due to Covid). She then requested a motion to approve the minutes. Ms. Ownby proposed a motion to accept the minutes as written. Second motion was made by Mr. Williams. All were in favor – none opposed.

Mr. Jones proceeded to review Parks & Recreation recent activities, upcoming events, and project updates:

- **Welcome to Jared Bissinger**, who is the newest addition to the Parks & Recreation Commission. We're glad to have him onboard. Our meetings are not extremely formal. We do occasionally have the public attend. However, this is rare but meetings are open to the public. We typically discuss a variety of issues: Budget, projects, staffing, special events, and more (mostly discuss projects). We are a broad department that includes the cemeteries and City building maintenance. We do not discuss these two areas at meetings as this is a Parks & Recreation Commission only.
- **Furloughs & Cutbacks:** We've experienced a very busy time, especially due to Covid furloughs and staff cutbacks. We've had to adjust as best we could to get things done. For example, office staff have been involved in planting hanging baskets, etc. We have a large project list and have managed to keep those moving forward. But, with all of the shifting and changing, there simply has been no time for reports to Commission members. Hopefully, there will be some easing of restrictions from the Governor coming soon that would allow things to return to a more normal status.
- **Budget & Staffing:** Just this week, most of the presented Parks & Rec budget was approved. But, we had two staff positions that were not funded. One was the Athletic/Aquatic Coordinator and the other was the Horticulture Assistant. Not only did we lose these positions in FY21, but they are not included in the FY22 budget resulting in a two-year loss of staff. This is a challenge because we don't have the staff to focus on other sports such as volleyball, wrestling, tennis, and others that could come back this year with the easing of restrictions. With the Horticulture position, we are actually down two staff members as we also have one person out with a worker's comp injury. This is difficult because there is the same amount of horticulture work to be done but less staff. We are also missing a 3<sup>rd</sup> position that is currently vacant, Building Custodian, and we have no candidates. We've been using other staff to keep up with emptying trash and a few other minimal tasks. Because we cannot find anyone interested in working in this position, we considered using the janitorial service that is used by the other City buildings. However, this service is having the same trouble that we are in attempting to hire and cannot find staff. It's not a good situation to be in.

- Pool Operations:** Starting this coming Saturday, we have contracted out the human management of the pool to the VA Gators, Inc. (VG) for this coming summer season. This group is the old SMAC swim team which is no more. This means VG will be hiring & paying all lifeguards (saving City cost of approximately \$70,000 per season) and managing swim lessons, swim team, etc. This operation went out to bid and we actually received bids from local and national bidders. VG will receive a small payment (\$5,000) for swim instruction and swim team, as we have a large base of family participation from prior years. This is a transition and there will be some bumps in the road, but we are here for support. With admission rates at \$4.00/\$2.00 per person, the pool has never been a money-maker. VG has made a few changes such as no family pass sales this year. But, they are offering discount punch cards. We are excited about the coming relationship with VG. There is a renewable contract if all goes well, but only time will tell. An added benefit to VG is that they manage a higher-level swim team and have unlimited use of the pool (before & after public hours) that, in the past, they had to pay for.
- Pool Maintenance:** In the summer of 2020, we chose to close the pool due to Covid, keeping pool covered and by adding baseline chemicals (to save costs), and kept pumps running. This turned out not to be a good decision. When pool was uncovered for this coming season, we had several issues. We discovered algae bloom due to warmer temperatures and lower chemical levels, a small water leak, and a couple of broken 6" pipes that occurred over the winter. During the summer of 2020, maintenance staff were being pulled to cut grass as we had no seasonal staff or inmates to maintain the grass in the City. These were things that we didn't anticipate as we've never closed the pool before in the summer. But, we're happy to report that, after dedicating two maintenance staff to the pool, all is in order now for the coming season. The City will continue to fund all chemical, utility, and maintenance costs for operating the pool.
- Park Touchless Water Bottle Fillers:** Our maintenance staff were able to add a new touchless water bottle filler system in all parks using CARES funding. This was not an inexpensive task as the cost was \$40,000+. Also added were touchless air dryers in park restrooms. Some restrooms now have touchless soap dispensers (in areas that are not typically prone to vandalizing).
- Serenity Garden Kiosk:** Kiosk has a nice new look as it was refinished with powder coating and repainted.
- Staffing:** We raised our part-time hourly rate to \$11.25 per hour, but still struggle to find seasonal staff. Currently, we have two seasonal workers out of the normal 8 that we need to maintain the parks. We have been able to use some contract services but they have the same difficulty finding staff that we do. Concerning fulltime staff, many have been looking for other jobs in the private sector as the pay is higher in many areas. Companies are also offering bonuses and other incentives to hire workers. Pay study results were not released to City employees, which creates tension and confusion. Difficult balance hiring and keeping staff at the present time.
- Arbor Day:** Since we were unable to work with the school students this year due to Covid restrictions, we had the children from the YMCA participate in a story hike down the greenway. Following the walk, a Red Maple tree was planted.
- Flowering Hanging Baskets:** We've added the beautiful hanging baskets around the City which required help from office staff due to shortage of workers in Horticulture. These baskets have an auto irrigation system in place, which is very helpful.
- Mud Run and Park to Park:** Both races took place this year – both with Covid restrictions. Races were very well received by registrants. It was challenging due to lack of volunteers but we were able to use in-house staff as much as possible and had good results.
- Special Event Updates:** This year, we will not have the Summer Extravaganza. With limited staff and resources, it's just too difficult to plan and too large of an event. However, we are planning a new race (replaces the Extravaganza race) – the Sunrise Spectacular – a 5 & 10K race on July 10<sup>th</sup>. We are also planning a new event - Sunset Spectacular – which will be fireworks set off at Sunset Park – also on July 10<sup>th</sup>. This is exciting because the fireworks can be seen from

almost anywhere in the City, as Sunset Park is the highest point. We will be posting more info and sending out a press release in the near future. Groovin' on the Greenway is back! It was packed last Thursday and is going on tonight as we meet. We have a great line-up each Thursday evening through July 29<sup>th</sup> (Mr. Jones held up Groovin' poster with dates/info).

- **New Signage:** New and improved signs are coming for the parks and greenway concerning dogs being in the parks/on the greenway. We've had heavier traffic in the parks, both people and dogs, and more issues involving dogs.
- **New Fitness Programs:** We've added 3 new fitness programs that take place outside in the parks. These include Mindful Movement by the River at Ridgeview Park, Five Elements of Yoga at Serenity Garden, and a Senior Walk along the greenway.
- **South River – Scenic River Designation:** This was voted on and approved by the Governor and will become law on July 1<sup>st</sup>. Press release coming soon.
- **South River Preserve (Constitution Park):** Had a meeting this week, via Zoom, with trustees from state and federal levels. Hoping for a constructible draw by fall/winter and out to bid with spring construction.
- **Sunset Park Update:** We've received 50% plans (engineer plans) from Wiley Wilson. However, Sunset has been on a long pause. Hoping for drawings to be in by the end of this July.
- **Greenway – Phase 2B (from Shiloh Church to North Park):** Ready to go – all easements have been cleared, final set of plans at VDOT for review. Challenge may be missed construction window as prices are now elevated. People are now using the trails, we've had some signage and neighbor issues but we're very close.
- **Greenway Phase 4 – North Park to Basic:** Have the first round of funding, \$400,000, for engineering right-of-way. We are 95% certain to receive 2<sup>nd</sup> half of funding. We have a site meeting with VDOT coming up in June. We only have 1 property owner to work with, which is nice, so we're moving forward.
- **North Park:** New basketball court was completed – painted and striped. However, it wasn't installed correctly as there is a massive bowl in the middle of the court that fills with water. It has to be redone completely at contractor's expense. New goals will also be added. Will do some announcements when all work is completed correctly.

#### Questions/Discussion:

- Mr. Williams inquired if it would be less expensive to pay a FT Athletics/Aquatics position as opposed to paying VA Gators, and losing the pool revenue. Mr. Jones stated that approximately 2/3 of the FT salary for this position goes to the pool. Pool is approximately 65% taxpayer funded. In addition, the City does not have to pay the approximate \$70,000 in lifeguard/pool attendant wages with operational arrangement with VA Gators. More discussion ensued over the pros and cons of this arrangement.
- Ms. Ownby inquired if there would be a Kids' Mud Run this year. Mr. Jones stated that, due to staffing issues and logistics with Covid requirements, it wasn't felt to be a positive thing. We may have something for the kids in the fall.
- Ms. Ownby commented that she has noticed much more fishing and activity at Basic Park. Mr. Jones explained that the waters were stocked with trout for youth who are fishing in that area.
- Ms. Ownby commented that she likes the new lines in the parking lot at Basic Park.
- Mr. Jones stated that there is no firm answer to-date on when the Rosenwald Community Center will open to the public.
- Mr. Hostetter inquired about the status of the 13<sup>th</sup> Street Greenway – Phase 3. Mr. Jones stated that this project is no longer in this department and he felt that more information should come from Public Works soon. However, the last he had heard, it was recommended as a one-way street up-hill on 14<sup>th</sup> Street through the tree streets.

Meeting was adjourned.

Respectfully submitted,

Sherrie English