

MINUTES

PARKS AND RECREATION COMMITTEE MEETING

5:30 P. M., JANUARY 30, 2020

A/V CONFERENCE ROOM

Caitlin Cook, Chairperson, called the meeting of the Charleston City Council Committee on Parks and Recreation to order at 5:30p.m., JANUARY 30, 2020, in the Audio/Visual Room in City Hall.

Committee Members Present:

Caitlin Cook, Chair

Chad Robinson, Vice Chair – arrived at 5:35

John Kennedy Bailey

Pat Jones – left at 6:15

Deanna McKinney – arrived at 5:34

A roll call was taken, and it was determined that a quorum was not present. At 5:34 p.m., a quorum was present.

1. Discussion – East End Dog Park

Councilmember Cook introduced Ric Cavender from Charleston Main Streets. Cavender explained that the dog park was built 15 years ago on a lot owned by the Charleston Urban Renewal Authority. It is a popular space that it also a unique collaboration between the City and CURA. Over a year ago, a tornado knocked the canopy partially down. The East End Urban Design Committee recently met to make plans on how to improve the space. On January 31, 2020 they will release an online survey for about 2 months (as well as on-site responses when the weather is warmer) asking what the users of the park want to see done in improvements and features. They will need to know what funds the City would be willing to contribute, so they will have a better idea of what their group will need to do in terms of fundraising. In July/August 2019, they partnered with AARP to coordinate with Andrew Howard, who created Better Blog. It is a nationwide consulting agency that applies “tactical urbanism” high impact, low cost projects to a public space.

From the audience, Councilmember Steele said that a short-term goal should be to take down the canopy. She would like to see agility equipment and more activities added for the dogs. Cavender said there also needed to be items that would make the experience more comfortable for dog owners. Councilmember Cook asked the Deputy Director of Parks and Recreation, Jennifer Holley, if she knew when they would be able to take

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down the canopy. Mark Rowley, Head of Maintenance for the Parks and Recreation Department, answered that it could be down within the week. Cavender stated that the maintenance of the space has been great, but the space is aging in general and things like the surrounding fence need repairs.

Councilmember Cook asked Rowley what he thought were the most urgent improvements. Crowley said that the benches needed to be replaced to dog-friendly ones. As it is now, the benches have slats on them to prevent the dogs' legs from slipping through them. He also recommended a concrete pad shelter.

Holley asked if the survey could research what would help pet owners to more reliably pick up after their dogs. Councilmember Steele said she thought the majority of the waste abusers were those that used the dog park during non-peak hours.

Councilmember Robinson added that the county will most likely have extra turf from their various projects. Cavender said he would check into it. He thought the entrance area would only need turf. A major expense when turfing is the digging of the ground and laying corrugated pipe for drainage. Rowley added that it was very difficult to install the fence because of the foundations of the surrounding buildings, so it is a problematic place to dig. He also added that a gravel area could be added for a rinsing station and would help prevent muddy ground.

2. Approval of Previous Minutes (at 5:50 p.m.)

Councilmember Bailey motioned to approve the minutes of the previous meeting on 10-24-2019. Councilmember Jones seconded. There was no objection and the minutes were approved.

3. Discussion – After School Programs

Councilmember Cook asked the Committee to think what they can additionally do for the City's youth. She asked if there was interest in getting the leaders of the various after school programs together, along with Dr. Susan Gamble, to discuss possible grants and the needs of the City's youth, particularly teens.

Councilmember Cook asked Holley for an update on the Teen Night Out program. Holley answered that they extended the hours of one community center a month until 11:00 p.m. for teenagers. They have food, music, PlayStation tournaments, glow-in-the-dark basketball and extra games. They must be signed out when they leave. The first event had around 45 kids; the next event had 80. She added that the issue has been the lack of staff for the second event as they did not anticipate the drastic increase in attendance. They are actively recruiting volunteers; they also want to explore possible grants for staffing. Councilmember McKinney offered that a lot of people want to help, but don't know who to contact. Councilmember Robison suggested reaching out to UC or State since the athletes are required to get community hours. Additionally, the sororities and fraternities might be interested.

Councilmember Cook asked what would be the best way for Councilmembers to connect with the public concerning recruiting volunteers. Holley answered that she could be contacted directly as well as anyone in the specific community center. The department has developed a new volunteer form, and Councilmember McKinney asked if that could also be put on the City's social media sites. Holley added that they welcome volunteer instructors for any activity, such as with the hip-hop dance class.

4. Department Update

Holley stated that the department is focused on camps during school breaks (like Spring Break) for every community center. Councilmember Cook confirmed that breakfast, lunch and a snack will be provided. Each camp will have activities specific to their location. There will not be a limit on how many can attend. Summer will be similar, but will rotate centers every 3 weeks. They are working with Step by Step for the Kanawha City Center.

Rowley added that new doors have been installed at North Charleston and the King Center. They will begin to assess needed updates to the various parks and trail systems. The North Charleston pool will soon be repaired and operational.

5. Senior Softball League

Pete Kelley, Director of the Senior Softball League, addressed the Committee with some issues the league has been having with the King Center field. In 2015, the CVB conducted a Sports Facility Analysis, which proposed a soft ball sports complex. The report states that fees collected from soft-ball leagues from the City total \$12,000/year. Their field has drainage issues and inadequate lighting.

Councilmember Robinson stated that, as the previous Capital Midwestern Little League President, he shared Kelley's frustration with the previous leadership, but the current Administration has a different mentality than the previous one. He stated that he and the Committee want to see all the facilities updated, and the current Administration is working towards that goal. Ideally, profits from City-wide tournaments can go to investing in the Community Centers and fields. Kelley voiced his hopefulness and stated that he did not want softball to be overlooked. He shared with the Committee the recommendations they have made. The Committee expressed their desire to work with him and the Senior League.

Kelley asked for an evaluation of the lighting system and added that their league had qualified electricians who could possibly volunteer to fix the lighting. They would rather stay in Charleston than go to Shawnee, and will need to make that decision soon. Councilmember Robinson stated that they want the group to stay in Charleston, and he is willing to work directly with the group to start working on quotes, etc. The lighting was identified as a top priority. Robinson said he would be willing to ask the Little League parents to volunteer for a day to do things like grade the in-field. Robison said that he believed there was an available storage building the group could use. Councilmember Bailey stated that, when the group comes to them with what they need, the Committee will advocate on their behalf for funds.

6. Discussion

Councilmember Bailey shared photos of the Bigley playground that had rusted equipment and safety issues. He would like to see the equipment replaced and a fence around it as it is situated in a parking lot. He also mentioned that the nearby dumpster should have a concrete pad, be moved against the building and have a fence placed around it.

Councilmember Robinson motioned to adjourn the meeting. Councilmember McKinney seconded.

Meeting adjourned.