

# MINUTES

**PARKS AND RECREATION COMMITTEE MEETING  
WEST HALL 1, CHARLESTON COLISEUM AND CONVENTION CENTER  
(THE VIDEO WAS ALSO MADE AVAILABLE AS A LIVE STREAM VIA ZOOM PER THE AGENDA)**

**5:30 P. M., MARCH 25, 2021**

Caitlin Cook, Chairperson, called the meeting of the Charleston City Council Committee on Parks and Recreation to order at 5:30p.m., JANUARY 28, 2021.

**Committee Members Present:**

Caitlin Cook, Chair

Chad Robinson, Vice Chair

Jeanine Faegre (attended virtually over Zoom)

Joseph Jenkins

Deanna McKinney

ABSENT: Pat Jones and Robert Sheets

A roll call was taken, and it was determined that a quorum was present.

1. Slack Plaza Redesign –

Mayor Goodwin stated that the Administration had received great feedback concerning the redesign of Slack Plaza/City Center over the past year. The Mayor added that no renovations had been put into Slack Plaza in over 15 years. The Administration has made a commitment to robust planning and programming.

City Manager, Jonathan Storage, thanked the WV Department of Transportation Division of Highways for their partnership on the project. Through the grant that the City received, the Administration engaged in a comprehensive selection process for a design engineer. Thrasher Engineering was selected to help with the design and bidding of the project.

Sam Rich, from Thrasher Engineering, presented their revitalization development plan to the Committee. Highlights of the presentation included:

- Currently, Slack Plaza has been neglected, has expansive areas of pavement, a non-working fountain, outdated light fixtures, etc.
- They considered: comfort, increase sociability, uses and activities and access and linkages.
- Goals for the area: to revitalize and encourage the reuse of the space in a way that is sustainable.
- There will be a walkway straight through the park with various interactive

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features, such as a shaded café area, public art/live wall, performance stage, food trucks, police station renovation with added public restrooms, seasonal features such as an ice rink, etc.

Councilmember Jenkins confirmed that the presentation showed the final plans.

Councilmember Cook confirmed that the green space will be real grass, and there will be electrical hook ups built into the light poles for the food trucks.

Councilmember Jenkins asked what the time frame was for the project. Rich replied that the project will be put out to bid in March/April, construction would likely start sometime in early summer and completion by the end of the year.

2. Resolution No. 446-21 - Honoring the life and legacy of Patrolman Robert Edward Easley, Sr. by dedicating and naming the western wing of the Martin Luther King, Jr. Community Center, which is dedicated to afterschool programming, the “Robert Edward Easley, Sr. Annex”.

Councilmember Cook stated that Robert Edward Easley, Sr. was a tremendous asset to the City of Charleston serving on the Police force, and is known as the “father of the after-school program.”

Councilmember Robinson motioned to approve the resolution. Councilmember McKinney seconded. With members present recorded thereon as voting unanimously in the affirmative, Resolution No. 446-21 was approved.

Robert Edward Easley, Jr. thanked the Committee for the resolution. He added that he was honored and humbled to be his son.

Carl W. Lawson Jr. spoke highly of Robert Edward Easley, Sr., and his impact on the City.

3. Update on Cato Park – with American Electric Power

City Engineer, Chris Knox, stated that he had been involved in discussions with AEP over the past several months concerning the Capitol Hill Chemical Transmission Line Project. The project will go 6 miles from North Charleston to Capitol Hill. The portion that affects City-owned property is Cato Park. He added that there had been some misrepresented emails incorrectly stating that there will be a 50-foot section taken out of Cato Park. It is actually more like 15 feet (the existing trail is 10 feet). AEP is required to put a 2-foot ditch on approximately a 12-foot path. He added that they have worked around all of the large, older trees. The majority of the tree removal will be near Tower

19. AEP has agreed to remove downed trees, replace the trail with the same gravel, replace the drains, etc. He added that they have also agreed to chip the treetops, remove downed limbs and create a natural curb for the trail.

Frank Jenkins, representing AEP (over Zoom), stated that the project will address a thermal violation to increase capacity of the transmission line. Highlights of his presentation include:

- They will use existing easement rights for ingress and egress, install additional wire on approximately 6 miles of power line and make upgrades at the Capitol Hill and Chemical substations.
- Crews need to use access roads in areas where the power lines are too difficult to access along existing rights-of-way (in this case, the area is too steep).
- Their crews will also need to access 2 towers with all-terrain vehicles for Tower 18 and a bucket truck on Tower 19.
- Work will begin April 5 (for access work that will last around 2 weeks), May 3 – June 4 (for wire-pulling activities) and June 4 (for reclamation activities). Jenkins added that the trails will have to be closed to the public during active work for safety reasons.
- Their goal is to minimize impact to the community and the environment.
- Their most recent examination of the path has led them to determine that they can create the access road to be 10-12 feet (as opposed to the 9-10-foot existing path).

Councilmember McKinney asked where the misinformation came from. Knox replied that AEP had their surveyors initially flag the limits of the project based on the DEP approved permit of 50 feet wide. He assumed that the mistaken assumptions came from that.

Councilmember Jenkins asked why the project was not listed on AEP's website. Jenkins replied that it is a rehab project that does not acquire any new easements or existing lines, etc.

Councilmember Faegre stated that she represents Ward 5 which contains Cato Park. She confirmed with Jenkins that the intention is to keep the access road to a maximum of 12 feet in most areas. He does not know who owns the additional access point in the area. They did determine that the environmental impact would be greater if they chose to incorporate that for their use. Councilmember Faegre asked if they tracked how many trees will be removed. Jenkins replied that they do not usually do so, but the inspectors involved will identify which trees will be cut beforehand. They do plan to avoid cutting the more mature trees. Councilmember Faegre asked about potential runoff to Garrison Avenue. Jenkins replied that their project will not increase any runoff whatsoever. It will improve the drainage around the trail system. Councilmember Faegre stated that there have been complaints about the trees that have already been torn down, and there is also concerns that the felled trees will roll down onto the road. Jenkins replied that he will make note to have the inspectors in the field address any possible issues. Councilmember Faegre expressed a concern shared by her constituents that an old oak

tree will be cut down. She added that she appreciates and understands what they are doing, she hoped they will keep their impact to a minimum.

From the audience, Councilmember Knauff asked how AEP made the assessment that runoff was not going to affect the area. Jenkins added that their plans are designed to handle the storm water and calculate the amount of runoff. They will not be making changes as to how the area drains in that way. Councilmember Knauff asked how frequently maintenance like this is done. Jenkins clarified that this specifically is a capital project brought about by a study. Maintenance (usually comprised of inspections) is probably done on the lines around once a year.

Councilmember Robinson confirmed that with Jenkins that their approved permit from the DEP is 50-feet for the limit of disturbance. He also clarified the AEP plan is for a 12- to 15-foot-wide path with as minimum impact as possible. Councilmember Robinson also asked if there will be a substantial amount of timber. Jenkins replied that for this project, there should not be much. Councilmember Robinson confirmed that cut trees could be re-used on the trail (as crossings, etc.).

In response to the public speakers, Councilmember McKinney requested that the Committee walk the trail to see it for themselves.

Councilmember Robinson asked what authority the City has to change/stop this project. Knox replied that he did not think the City had any authority. City Attorney, Kevin Baker, added that AEP's easement predates Cato Park and is perpetual in nature. He added that there is no way that the City could stop the project, but they have been working with AEP to try to mitigate the damage.

Councilmember Faegre agreed with Councilmember McKinney's request to walk the trail, adding that this should have happened months ago.

4. Public Speakers – all spoke about the AEP project in some manner

- Robin Sizemore
- Harvey Allen
- David Schles
- Mary Ellen O'Ferrel
- Dennis Strawn
- Robin Godfrey
- Gail Bellamy
- Jack Hoblitzell

5. Update on Vandalia Pool Project -

Councilmember Cook added that the Vandalia group did not have any new updates, however, the Parks and Recreation Department has determined that the project would be low-cost to the City. Councilmember Jenkins added that the project is for a community garden in the old Vandalia pool.

6. Discussion on Rec Centers and City Pools for Summer 2021 –

Director of Parks and Recreation, Rashaun Sayles, added that the Rec Centers have remained closed except for e-learners. They are currently discussing the possibility of opening them for the summer with new programming. They have plans to get the pools operational for maintenance only until they are approved to open them. They have also done several events, such as the Halloween and Christmas drive-through events. She commended her team, Dax Miller (Facilities Manager), Jeremy Mullins (Maintenance Manager) and Jennifer Neil (Deputy Director). Sayles added that they have also added an after-school program to the North Charleston Center.

7. Update on Ballfields –

Councilmember Cook stated that, currently, the Little League Ballfields at Bigley and Kanawha City will be maintained by Capital Midwestern, while the Oakmont and North Charleston Fields will be maintained by the Parks and Recreation Department until Charleston Central starts their season. The City typically starts to prepare their fields around the beginning of April. Councilmember Cook added that there are no updates to the playground on Bigley Avenue as they are still doing research for that.

Councilmember Knauff stated that the baseball league president, Director Sayles and her team met earlier that day. He added that the league had done an amazing amount of work to get that field ready, including the ability to have travel tournaments.

8. Approval of Previous Minutes 1-28-2021 –

Councilmember Robinson motioned to approve the minutes of the previous meeting on 1-28-2021. Councilmember McKinney seconded. There was no objection and the minutes were approved.

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

Meeting adjourned.