

NORTH LITTLE ROCK PARKS AND RECREATION COMMISSION MEETING

September 20, 2010

The North Little Rock Parks and Recreation Commission meeting was called to order by Ms. Vicki Stephens at 5:00 p.m., on September 20, 2010, at the North Little Rock Community Center.

Commission Members Present: Tom Davis, Jeanne Hyde, Chandra Martin, Otistene Smith and Vicki Stephens. Charles Jones was sick and Bruce Waller was out of town. They were excused.

Staff Members Present: Bob Rhoads, Jan Eberle-Wilkins, Willie Elizandro, Tina Worrell, John Crow, Jeff Caplinger and Paula Jones, Attorney.

Others Present: Paula Jones, Alderwoman Debi Ross, Jennifer Franks, Bret Franks, Lynn McAllister and Ms. Love.

Minutes: Ms. Stephens presented the Parks and Recreation Commission minutes for the August 16, 2010 meeting.

Mrs. Hyde made a motion, seconded by Mrs. Martin, to accept the August 16, 2010, Parks and Recreation Commission minutes. All voted aye and motion passed unanimously.

Presentation of Plaque: Jeff Caplinger reported that the Parks and Recreation Department was one of four (4) organizations that received a plaque of recognition for outstanding performance, going above and beyond duty for the Census in the central Arkansas area.

Ms. Stephens thanked him and the staff.

Agreement with Feline Rescue and Rehome Inc. (FuRR): Bob Rhoads stated that this item will be held for changes until the next regularly scheduled commission meeting.

Jennifer Franks with the Feline Rescue and Rehome, Inc., said she appreciated the commission putting this on the agenda and is looking forward to working with Mr. Rhoads.

Ms. Stephens thanked her for coming.

Policy Related to Releasing Animals in City Parks: Mr. Rhoads reported that there are people feeding cats and Canadian Geese in Burns Park. As many as 150 Canadian Geese have been gathering and leaving droppings on the golf course, soccer fields and trails. The geese are also damaging soccer fields with their grubbing and eating of grass.

According to Jason Carter, City Attorney, an ordinance needs to be written and passed by the City Council to enforce the policy to not feed the animals and waterfowl in Burns Park.

The City Attorney's office would word the ordinance, but it would be similar to the following:

It is unlawful for any person to offer food, to feed, or cause to be fed to a domestic or wild animal or waterfowl in a city park. It is also unlawful to scatter food, seed, or edible matter for the possible consumption of animals or waterfowl in a city park. Exceptions will be made with authority granted by the North Little Rock Parks and Recreation Commission, or when a domesticated animal is fed under the owners control and care in the park.

Policy Related to Releasing Animals in City Parks (continued): Mrs. Smith stated that since there have been ongoing complaints about these Canadian Geese on the golf course, she made a motion to accept the wording and allow Legal to work on this proposed ordinance of feeding animals and waterfowl in the parks. Mr. Davis seconded the motion. All voted aye and motion passed unanimously.

Policy Related to Releasing Animals in City Parks: Mr. Rhoads reported that there is currently an ordinance in the City that prohibits releasing animals in any public or city areas, which mainly would be parks. This policy is under the Animal Control department. The current ordinance makes it punishable with fines up to \$1,000 for the first offense, with other fines per occurrence. Even with this ordinance, individuals continue to do this. Burns Park is one area of the city where this abandonment has been a significant problem in the past.

To reinforce this ordinance, staff is asking the Parks and Recreation Commission to formally endorse this ordinance and recommend staff to post as appropriate, signage in parks to discourage this. Also, staff is to assist animal control by watching for such abandonment in the parks and identifying individuals that they see who are abandoning animals.

Mrs. Smith made a motion, seconded by Mr. Davis, to endorse this city ordinance, and have the staff install signage and to watch for those breaking this law. All voted aye and motion passed unanimously.

Neighborhood Park Hours: Mr. Rhoads reported that normal hours of operation for North Little Rock parks are 6:00 a.m. until midnight. The exceptions are the Old Mill, which is 8:00 a.m. until 10:00 p.m. April 1 through October 31, and 8:00 a.m. until 7:00 p.m. November 1 through March 31. The lower part of Burns Park is closed from 9:00 p.m. until 6:00 a.m. year-round.

Park maintenance staff has been receiving complaints in reference to neighborhood park use after dark. Most of the complaints are coming from Military Heights, 17th Street, Lorene Joshua, and Conley parks. Individuals have indicated there are alcohol consumption and drug deals going on. Also, patrons are trashing the parks and being destructive to pavilions, playgrounds, and the grounds. He is asking for review and discussion with action to set these hours, and approve authority to post more restrictive hours on parks with documented park violations and abuse.

The question is how to close the problem parks at different times from the other neighborhood parks, in order to handle problems. Although the police like to have exact specified times posted on signs at parks, park staff is recommending these problem parks be closed from "dusk to dawn". Most of the problems start occurring the hour after dark. He would like to have the authority to close problem parks early.

Administrative staff would recommend the general hours for all neighborhood parks ten (10) acres or less (excluding the Old Mill), be 6:00 a.m. until 10:00 p.m. The parks needing more restrictive hours could be determined by the commission based on a case-by-case basis, or the authority for such action could be given to the Parks and Recreation Director.

Neighborhood Park Hours (continued): Staff would also seek authority to post more restrictive hours on parks with documented park violations and abuse. These hours would be 6:00 a.m. until dusk.

Mrs. Hyde asked if there are gates that can be closed at each park.

Mr. Rhoads said these parks cannot be physically closed unless the park is fenced. Signs would have to be posted with the hours of opening and closing.

Paula Jones said that in order for the police to enforce these park hours, an ordinance with a fine attached would have to be passed by the City Council.

Mrs. Hyde asked what the penalty would be for being in the park after closing hours.

Ms. Stephens asked if a person was in the park after closing hours, would the fine charged be per person.

Mrs. Jones said the fine would be per person. There is a general code provision that states how much fines are for different violations, however, the commission could designate the amount of the fine for the violations.

Mr. Rhoads said if there is a commission policy and a sign with park hours stated, a violator could be fined under the public nuisance law. However, an ordinance would carry more power.

Ms. Stephens said she wants an ordinance so this policy could be enforced.

Mrs. Jones said that this ordinance would also encourage the neighbors to call the police when there are problems.

Mr. Davis asked if the police have made any arrests.

Mr. Rhoads said that usually the police break up the violators. One of the neighbors said she is afraid to call the police due to retaliation by the offender and wants the police to patrol.

Mrs. Jones said if there is an ordinance, then the police can take action and write a ticket, instead of just telling the violators to leave.

Ms. Stephens said the commission needs to decide if they want parks with ten (10) acres or less, to have a designated time to open and close. Then the commission will need to decide if they want to have an ordinance implemented stating that if the timeframe is violated, there will be a fine. This should eliminate the neighbors from being as fearful. She asked if commission action should be taken to include Military Heights, 17th Street, Lorene Joshua, and Conley parks, or should they each be voted on individually.

Neighborhood Park Hours (continued): Mr. Rhoads said the park times should be voted on together as a 10 acre or less group. After this, time should be decided on these four (4) parks, and then decide who has the authority to set hours of parks.

Ms. Stephens said the Director of Parks and Recreation should have the authority to set park hours, after this possible action by the commission to set time for these four (4) parks.

Mrs. Smith asked if a blanket vote to set a time for all city parks less than 10 acres would cover these four (4) parks.

Mr. Rhoads said he is not recommending that all city parks less than ten (10) acres have restricted hours. Stricter hours are needed for these four (4) parks because these are problem parks.

Mrs. Hyde said she did not think set hours could close the parks, because people would still go to the park to walk their dogs late.

Mrs. Smith said closing the park means people cannot use the park.

Ms. Stephens said that a sign posted with the hours of use would stop people from hanging out after the park closes. Those walking their dogs would not be bothering anyone, and neighbors would not be calling the police on them. However, neighbors would call the police on those that are congregating there after hours drinking, using drugs and doing other things. A time just needs to be set for these problem parks.

Willie Elizandro said that problems with drugs and alcohol occur after sunset, and an ordinance is the only way to take care of these problems. Setting a definite closing time could mean it could be either dark or still light after 8:00 p.m. He suggested using the word *dusk* as a closing time.

Ms. Stephens said a definite time needs to be decided and set, not just stating dusk or dark.

Mrs. Hyde suggested setting winter hours and summer hours.

Mr. Rhoads said that is what was done at the Old Mill.

Mrs. Smith said there is a possibility that all parks could have problems, and that is why she recommended a blanket time of 6:00 a.m. until 10:00 p.m. for all of them with ten (10) acres or less to close at the same time.

Ms. Stephens said she agreed with Mrs. Smith's recommendation, and they all needed to close at the same time. She liked the idea of winter and spring hours.

Mr. Rhoads stated that most all of them have pavilions. Some of them have basketball goals, which has been a problem for the neighbors.

Mr. Elizandro said he agreed with Ms. Stephens.

Neighborhood Park Hours (continued): Mrs. Smith said the sign could also state that no alcohol or drugs were allowed.

Mrs. Stephens said she agreed with Mrs. Smith in that if these four (4) parks close early, people will just go to other parks that are open later.

Mrs. Hyde said some of the groups in parks less than ten (10) acres that have a party room and are still there after dark. If a blanket policy is made for every single park, it will affect every park differently because each park has something different to offer.

Mrs. Worrell said that the recreation centers are located in parks, and closing time has been designated at 12:00 midnight.

Mr. Rhoads recommended tabling this item until the next regularly scheduled commission meeting and the commission agreed.

After School Program Update: Mr. Rhoads reported that the commission had asked staff to consider charging fees for the After School Program (ASPIre).

Tina Worrell stated that the recreation staff does not want to charge for ASPIre because parents would not be able to afford it. However, if it becomes necessary, only a minimal amount should be charged. She checked to see what private places were charging for their after school program. Most of them charged \$50 to \$60 per week, per child. The staff recommended charging \$50 to \$60 per year, per child. The Boys and Girls Club charges \$30 per year, per child, which is their membership. The recreation department charges \$15 per year, per child for their annual membership.

The Federally funded Learning Center and Workforce volunteers are free to the department, but paid by Federal funds to help with recreation's ASPIre. As of August 31, 2010, these agencies will no longer be funded. There are 345 children enrolled in the After School Program or area on a waiting list. The ASPIre program started up on August 19, 2010 with the first day of school. The North Heights Recreation Center is averaging 135 youth daily (membership is 430), Glenview is averaging 100 daily (membership is 231) and Sherman Park is averaging 115 daily (membership is 154).

Staff met and discussed overcrowding at North Heights and set basic policies in place for the entire ASPIre. Limiting the number of participants was set based on space available, staff available and the ability to provide a safe and fun recreation program for participants. Glenview's limit is 170, Sherman Park's limit is 130 and North Heights limit is 130 participants. North Heights is already at capacity and will not be accepting new ASPIre participants until openings are available. Staffing has become an issue with the volunteers. In the past, the Learning Center's volunteers and WorkForce volunteers have helped with ASPIre. Most staff agrees that charging a fee would be tough on families who cannot afford after school care. If fees were to be charged, they would need to be kept at a very minimal amount.

Mrs. Martin asked Mrs. Worrell if she had met with the school district about the increased number of youth that would be going to the recreation centers for ASPIre.

After School Program Update (continued): Mrs. Worrell said she had not met with anyone from the school district.

Mrs. Smith asked Mrs. Worrell if when referencing \$50 to \$60 per child, she was talking about Supplemental Education Service funds that are being paid to private companies to tutor and remediate these children.

Mrs. Worrell said her after school program cost quotes are from North Little Rock schools, Cabot schools, YMCA, North Little Rock Athletic Club, LePetite Academy, Sherwood Parks and Recreation, Hand in Hand Daycare and Ellen J. Daycare. These quotes will give the commission an idea of what other places charge for after school care.

Mrs. Stephens asked if the department received any financial aid for the after school program from any of the sources that Mrs. Smith mentioned.

Mrs. Worrell said the department does not receive any financial aid.

Mrs. Smith said the Boys and Girls Club is a Supplemental Education Service Provider and is receiving up to \$50 per child for after school care. The Boys and Girls Club just received \$325,000 for this program.

Ms. Stephens asked if the Parks and Recreation Department could get funding for their program.

Mrs. Smith said she did not see why not, especially since the department partners with the schools, and there is funding for these purposes. She suggested Mrs. Worrell check this out to see if the department qualifies for funding since they are working with the schools. The 21CCLC allows funding for art, music and other things as an after school program.

Mrs. Worrell said they applied for funding through the 21CCLC several years ago.

Mrs. Smith said 21CCLC got an increase in funding up to 12 million dollars..

Mrs. Worrell said she is interested in providing for the children and would need to hire more staff, but the recreation centers are limited as to how much room they can provide. She said she knew who to talk to at the school district. If more children are to be safely allowed at the North Heights center, more space would be needed. The fire marshal will allow a 5' area per child, but that is not enough space for the children to participate in a quality program. Sherman Park is nearing maximum capacity by only having 15 more slots available. Glenview has room for an additional 70 children. Staff is not available for these programs if maximum children attend.

Mrs. Smith said the liability of having a lot of children packed into a building makes her uncomfortable.

Ms. Stephens said she feels the school district should help the department since they are telling parents to sign their children up to the recreation centers ASpire program.

After School Program Update (continued): Mrs. Smith said she will talk to someone at the North Little Rock School District that would know about funding.

Ms. Stephens said she is hopeful the department can get some kind of funding, because extra staff will be required.

Mrs. Hyde suggested getting high school students to volunteer to help with the program. Some private and public schools require their students to perform service hours as credit, and these schools are looking for places to allow their students to work.

Mrs. Worrell said the high school students that need volunteer hours are not available at 2:30 p.m., when the program starts, but are working hours after school. The department is looking for volunteers now, so if someone is available or there are any schools that want a place to have their volunteers work, please have them call her, or give her (Mrs. Worrell) a contact name and number and she will get in touch with them.

Mrs. Hyde said she thought she could get some school contact information for Mrs. Worrell. She would like the department to pursue volunteers through the schools, and check on grants that are available.

Ms. Stephens said the staff does not want the ASPIre program to have a fee increase, and they are content to keep the program fee at \$15 per year. There is nowhere else these children could get the care they get with the department for \$15 per year. She feels that the rates should be increased to \$30 per year to match the Boys and Girls Club rates.

Mrs. Smith asked if there was a difference in the quality or type of programs that the Boys and Girls Club offers.

Mrs. Worrell said the Boys and Girls Club does not have the staff to have quality programs at this time, so they are more or less babysitting the children.

Mrs. Hyde said more staff is needed now, so she suggested the department increase the ASPIre fees to \$30 per year for one (1) year, while working to obtain more volunteers and seek grants for funding.

Mr. Rhoads said the Mayor had approved the department emergency hiring four (4) parttime staff to help with this program. This would allow for one (1) employee at each center, plus an additional employee that would go to the busiest center.

Mrs. Worrell said four (4) more parttime staff would be needed in addition to these four (4) that were approved.

Mrs. Hyde suggested that the ASPIre rate increase to \$25 per year.

After School Program Update (continued): Ms. Stephens said that \$25 per year is not too much to pay for a child to be watched each afternoon, and be in a learning program.

Mrs. Martin suggested the rates be gradually increased.

Mrs. Worrell said that most parents have paid ahead for one (1) calendar year beginning in August 2010.

Mrs. Smith said there could be fall and spring semester payments.

Mrs. Hyde said there could be a six (6) month program, with \$15 being paid each six (6) months.

Ms. Stephens said \$15 buys an annual membership, and the ASPire program is included. There is no charge for the program. She thinks the membership should stay at \$15 and charge per semester for the ASPire program.

Mrs. Hyde agreed, and thought that January 1 would be a good time to start charging for ASPire.

Ms. Stephens said this item should be postponed until the next regularly schedule commission meeting. Meanwhile, Mrs. Smith will check on grants that may be available, and Mrs. Worrell will check with private and other schools to see if there are volunteers available. There are probably some sources that have not been tapped. She said ASPire is a great program and staff has done an outstanding job on a shoestring budget. It is not fair for the staff to keep working like this with little money.

Mrs. Worrell said the North Heights Recreation Center will need more room. Two (2) years ago, the North Heights Elementary School representatives would not let the recreation staff use any of their (school) facility after hours, due to the facility being cleaned.

Mrs. Martin asked if the school is currently being used by anyone else after hours. The school could not deny the department using the building and let someone else use it.

Mrs. Worrell said the school is not letting anyone else use the building after hours.

Mrs. Smith asked if the department could use the Police Athletic League building for some of the classes.

Mrs. Worrell said the room they might have available is very small. When any recreation center participate goes to the Police Athletic League building, two (2) staff employees have to go with them, and staff is not available.

Capital Plan for 2011-2015: Mr. Rhoads submitted a list of items requested from the public hearings summarized into a capital plan for 2011-2015. This report included a status column that shows what has been funded or will be funded. Costs have been reviewed. Priority has been determined and is incorporated into a Five-Year Capital Plan. Most items have been added to later years since a new Hamburger Tax Bond was approved at the end of last year by City Council. New funds will not be available for at least three (3) years. All items requested have been put on the priority list.

Capital Plan for 2011-2015 (continued): Safety items have been prioritized first. The Senior League field at Burns Park has some issues such as lead paint and making areas handicapped accessible. The building and concession stand is 50 years old.

If there are some items that the commission members want funded, he will go to the Mayor and ask for the money.

Ms. Stephens said that Mrs. Worrell wants the North Heights classroom spaces expanded. This item is on the capital plan for 2013 for \$750,000. She asked if this could be done in 2013.

Mr. Rhoads said the list is based on money that would be available the first two (2) years. The other items were spaced out the remainder of the years. North Heights expansion will probably not be able to be done in 2013 unless bonds are redone or a grant is received. There are not any indoor grant funds as far as he knows. The grant trend right now is focused on making facilities handicapped accessible and putting lights underground.

Mr. Rhoads asked that the five (5) year capital plan be approved, which is required for grant purposes, and the 2011 budget which is money left over and not yet spent for this year.

Mrs. Martin asked about the Glenview status requests.

Mr. Rhoads stated that most of the Glenview items are in progress.

Mrs. Hyde made a motion to accept the five (5) year capital plan and the 2011 budget with priorities as presented, then forwarded to the Mayor and City Council for final approval during the budget process. Mrs. Martin seconded the motion. All voted aye and motion passed unanimously.

Director Reports:

Mrs. Worrell reported:

- There will be a free Fenix concert in Burns Park this weekend, at 7:00 p.m.
- September 26, 2010, will be the last weekend that Funland will be open this year.
- Jeff Caplinger has obtained a Lego League grant. Participants will learn how to build, program a robot and go to competitions.

John Crow reported:

- There will be Little Rock Futbol soccer tournaments the next two weekends in Burns Park.
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Mr. Rhoads reported

- The Big Dam Bridge 100 mile bike ride will be September 25, 2010

Calendar of Events: Ms. Stephens stated that the next commission agenda deadline is Tuesday, October 5, 2010, at 2:00 p.m. Any items need to be called in by that date and time to the Parks and Recreation Administration Office.

The next regularly scheduled commission meeting is Monday, October 18, 2010, at 5:00 p.m., in the North Little Rock Community Center.

Adjournment: Mrs. Smith made a motion, seconded by Mrs. Hyde, to adjourn at 6:10 p.m. All voted aye, and the motion passed unanimously.

Public Comments: Ms. Stephens opened the meeting for public comments, but there were none.

Submitted by,

Otistene Smith, Secretary