

NORTH LITTLE ROCK PARKS AND RECREATION COMMISSION MEETING

October 17, 2011

The North Little Rock Parks and Recreation Commission meeting was called to order by Mrs. Jeanne Hyde at 5:00 p.m., on October 17, 2011, at the North Little Rock Community Center.

Commission Members Present: Jeanne Hyde, Charles Jones, Chandra Martin, Otistene Smith and Bruce Waller. Tom Davis had a doctor's appointment and Vicki Stephens was out of town. These were excused.

Staff Members Present: Bob Rhoads, Jan Eberle-Wilkins, Jeff Caplinger, Kate Finefield, Travis Young, Jennie Cunningham, Pam Smith, Katrina Wilbon, Renee Henson and Assistant City Attorney Paula Jones.

Others Present: Ronnie Ritter with Arkansas Hunters Feeding the Hungry, Shannon Harris and Joshua Pangle.

Minutes: Mrs. Hyde presented the minutes of the September 19, 2011, Parks and Recreation Commission meeting.

Mr. Jones made a motion, seconded by Mr. Waller, to accept the Parks and Recreation Commission minutes as presented. All voted aye and motion passed unanimously.

Wildlife Observation Grant: Jeff Caplinger stated that after the commission approved submitting the \$100,000 Wildlife Observation Grant at the September 19, 2011, meeting, staff studied which location would best benefit from this funding. After evaluation, Campbell Lake Park was chosen.

Mr. Caplinger reported that the grant is for \$100,000 and no matching funds are required. Those offering \$10,000 in city labor, volunteer labor and equipment use will receive preferential consideration.

Campbell Lake Park improvements include:

- Building a natural trail along the north side of the trail at Campbell Lake
- Clearing a few areas along the north and south side of the lake for observation points and benches
- Building an observation blind on the north side of the lake
- Building an ADA accessible pier for observation and fishing on the south side of the lake

If approved by the commission, this will be submitted to the Mayor and City Council for final approval.

Mr. Waller made a motion, seconded by Mr. Jones, to accept this and forward the grant request for Campbell Lake Park to the Mayor and City Council for final approval before it is submitted to the State Parks Grant division for review. All voted aye and motion passed unanimously.

2012 Sports Lighting Grant (U.S.) Soccer Foundation: Mr. Caplinger stated that a 2012 Sports Lighting Grant, which is a part of the Field Building Grants from the U.S. Soccer Foundation, is available that would assist Parks and Recreation in lighting two (2) soccer fields. Staff is currently reviewing Fields 10 and 12 at the Burns Park Soccer Complex. This grant is due November 18, 2011, and if awarded, the department must work with Musco Lighting, U.S. Soccer Foundation's grant partner, to use the awarded funds.

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2012 Sports Lighting Grant (U.S.) Soccer Foundation (continued): The grant amount would be a credit given through Musco for the grantee to use, and the maximum amount is \$50,000. Grant awards will be announced in early February 2012. Some money has already been set aside for this project, including funds received through State Representative Barry Hyde from the Economic Development programs and general improvement grants.

Mr. Rhoads stated that with \$50,000 already donated from Centennial Bank, \$10,000 from the Economic Development Fund and the additional \$50,000 from this grant, the total would be \$110,000. If the job is contracted out, it will cost approximately \$200,000. However, the job can be done inhouse with city labor, and the grant will cover the materials. Regional and national tournaments require two (2) additional fields to be lighted, and there is a need for two (2) additional lighted fields for night league play. This grant does not require Mayor or City Council approval.

Mr. Jones made a motion, seconded by Mr. Waller, to authorize the department to proceed and apply for the 2012 Sports Lighting Grant. All voted aye and motion passed unanimously.

Capital Items for Sales Tax Referendum: Mr. Rhoads reported that at the last commission meeting, it was mentioned that the city would ask the voters to consider and approve a two and one-half cent (2 1/2) sales tax. One of those referendums, if passed, would mean that \$1,000,000 a year would be available to spend on city-wide parks and recreation projects. This tax would sunset in five (5) years.

Mr. Rhoads presented a list of possible items to be constructed or purchased if the referendum is successful. The priorities are based mainly on the previous list of capital items approved at the August

2011 Parks and Recreation Commission meeting. The total amount represented is \$9,500,000. Equipment items make up approximately \$1,000,000. Those items listed in the first four (4) years would be priority items. If the referendum is successful, the city might sell bonds and purchases could be made in the first two (2) years.

He removed some large center construction items until further review could be done. For example, the request to add onto the North Heights Recreation Center was removed because if the school mileage does not pass, the elementary school next to the recreation center may be available for use. The Mayor had asked him for a recommended list and City Council will have final approval of items to fund.

Mrs. Martin clarified that if the commission voted to approve this list, it is in no way an implication that the commission was in support of the upcoming sales tax – this list would just be ready for funding if the tax passes.

Mr. Rhoads replied that this is correct.

Mrs. Martin made a motion, seconded by Mr. Waller, to approve and submit the items in the first four (4) years as proposed projects for the referendum to the Mayor and City Council. All voted aye and motion passed unanimously.

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Canada Geese in Burns Park: Mr. Rhoads reported that there has been an issue of the continued growing population of Canada Geese. Residents have been complaining mostly due to health issues and droppings left at the soccer fields and golf course. The geese have become completely unafraid of people and their pets. In fact, geese have been reported to hiss and attack park users.

Kate Finefield, Park Ranger, stated that resident Canada Geese, which have become semi-domesticated through human interference, have become an issue in many parts of Burns Park, Riverfront Park, Campbell Lake Park, golf course and river trail. These geese have forgotten how to migrate, and are semi-dependent on humans for food and survival. They are aggressive to humans and pets, create disease through their waste, and destroy park property. The Mayor's office and Parks and Recreation have received multiple complaints about them in the past few years, with the complaints growing with the geese population. Canada Geese defecate up to 92 times a day, for an average total of 1/3 cup of dry feces and one (1) pound of wet feces. The feces contain many harmful bacterium, including: *Cryptosporidium*, *Campylobacterm*, *Giardia* and *Salmonella*. All four (4) of these diseases, especially *Crypto*, place not only

park users at risk, but also the park maintenance workers who are in and around these droppings all the time.

Geese also have been blamed for damaging the greens at one of the golf courses, causing holes and greens to be shut down while they are under repair and costing money. Also, several soccer games have had to be moved to different fields because of the large amount of goose feces on the playing field.

Larger cities use Carbon Monoxide to gas their flocks of geese, but these are flocks numbering in the tens of thousands, so it is a more cost efficient method of disposal. The best solution for removal of the Burns Park flock is to have closed urban shotgun hunts during the winter season, November 19 through January 29, then organized destruction of nests and oiling of remaining eggs through a federal permit in the spring. In addition, a US Federal Wildlife Society depredation permit would be applied for in January 2012, which is destruction of the geese without a limit in the spring.

Geese must be killed with a shotgun because it is the quickest and most efficient method of death. Archery should not be used because there is too much risk of maiming or crippling the bird with an arrow instead of death.

Staff is proposing that Burns Park access be closed off at the following points:

- The entirety of both golf courses, although hunting will only be permitted on the front nine of each
- Trail from the “mayor’s gate” to the golf course – Shilcutt Bayou Bridge
- Motor vehicle access to the White Oak Bayou
- The entirety of the soccer complex

With the help of North Little Rock Police and the Arkansas State Game and Fish Commission, citizens would be prevented from entering these park areas during the morning 30 minutes before sunrise until 9:00 a.m. on a designated Tuesday through Thursday (date yet to be determined). Public notice would be posted about the hunt through local media and the Parks and Recreation website. The current limit for a Canada Geese hunt is two (2) geese per person. All of the goose meat would be processed by the local organization, “Arkansas Hunters Feeding the Hungry”, which in turn donates the processed meat to local food pantries. The goose processing would cost no more than \$3 a goose. A \$3.00 entry fee for the hunt could be requested to offset the processing cost.

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Canada Geese in Burns Park (continued): These methods will in no way impact the migratory birds that visit June to July, but will prevent the resident populations from growing larger and becoming more of a problem.

Ronnie Ritter with Arkansas Hunters Feeding the Hungry, said this problem is not unique to Arkansas, but is happening all over the nation and these hunts are becoming urbanized. The meat will be processed locally and distributed to local food banks for distribution.

Mrs. Smith asked how many geese would be killed at one time.

Mrs. Finefield said that would depend on how many hunters there are per day. The limit is two (2) geese per person, per day.

Travis Young stated that each hunter will be required to have Arkansas State Migratory Bird and Federal Migratory Bird Hunting licenses, and the same hunters could come back each day of the hunt. A Game and Fish Wildlife officer will be present at the hunt(s), and the number of hunters will be determined for safety purposes. It will probably take no more than 15 minutes for the hunters to get their daily limit on the first day.

Mrs. Finefield said that not all of the geese would be killed at the winter hunt, and that is why spring and summer hunts are recommended.

Mr. Jones asked about the geese at Riverfront Park.

Mrs. Finefield said Burns Park has the greatest problem right now.

Mrs. Hyde asked how many geese are at Burns Park currently.

Mrs. Finefield stated that there are upwards of 200 geese in Burns Park right now.

Mr. Rhoads said the flock at Riverfront Park is probably the same as those in Burns Park. The City Council will have to approve this hunt due to ordinances.

Mr. Jones asked how the public was going to perceive this hunt.

Mrs. Finefield said Mr. John Barton and others with the bicycling community are behind this action. There are always people that will have a problem with any kind of inter-city plans.

Mrs. Hyde asked what the life span is of a Canada goose.

Mrs. Finefield said these are considered to be as geese in captivity because there are no natural predators. All they do is eat, sleep, defecate and mate, and the life span is approximately ten (10) years.

Mrs. Smith stated that if this action to hunt passes, a public relations campaign would have to be done to explain it to the community.

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Canada Geese in Burns Park (continued): Mr. Rhoads said that people do not understand what they are doing when they feed the geese. This makes them domesticated. Steve Ralston said there were problems with the geese when hosting the Arkansas Open Golf Tournament.

Mrs. Finefield said if the geese become dependent on being fed by people and it stops, they would starve to death. They do not know how to fly to Canada to eat.

Mr. Young said geese could eat an acre of cropland in less than ten (10) minutes.

Mrs. Hyde said she does not think it would be a good idea to have a hunt more than once until the first hunt is evaluated, in possibly one (1) year. She feels this hunt will stress people, areas will be blocked off and guns would be allowed in the park.

Mrs. Finefield said she looked at every alternative to this plan.

Mr. Rhoads said he recommends a second hunt because once there are shots, the geese will fly off temporarily elsewhere, such as to the soccer fields, Cooks Landing or Riverfront Park.

Mrs. Finefield said that instead of having a winter hunt and spring deprivation permit, there could be just two (2) winter hunts in a year in the least busy season. The winter geese that would be killed in the winter are the geese that live here year round. Winter hunts would not involve migratory birds since they live here.

Mr. Young said bird hunting ends January 29. The next season starts in February and there is no bird limit. If the commission and City Council agree only to one (1) hunt, he would recommend a February hunt.

Mrs. Finefield said the geese are a public hazard. The public may not like the hunt, but sometimes the public does not know what is best. This problem needs to get under control now before it gets a lot worse. She still recommends a winter hunt and spring deprivation removal permit. People have called wanting to know what the department is going to do about the geese problem in Burns Park.

Mr. Waller said that by approving this, it would give only the department authorization to get with the Game and Fish Commission and go forward to find out what steps need to be followed. In order to make this happen the final approval will have to come from the City Council. The commission's vote will be to proceed and forward to the City Council for the final action.

Mr. Rhoads stated that two (2) ordinances ban hunting in Burns Park and shooting inside the city limits. So in order for this hunt to happen, the City Council will have to vote to approve it.

Mrs. Martin said that regardless of how the City Council votes, this action will be a reflection on the commission that they (the commission) instituted, supported and encouraged this.

Mr. Waller stated that if these geese are as much of a hazard as he is being told, and if the department is going to be responsible for it, the commission should instigate it.

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Canada Geese in Burns Park (continued): Mr. Jones said this is a no-win situation. If the commission does not do anything, there are problems. If the commission does something to remedy this, there are public relation problems.

Mrs. Finefield said that from former urban hunts she has seen, there is a lot of interest in the beginning. However once the public sees that it is not as tragic as they had originally thought, the arguments die down. However, if the geese keep growing and defecating, becoming more aggressive and territorial, it will be more of a long-term problem. The public will then ask why the commission did not do anything to control this.

Mr. Ritter stated that there will always be public outcry, but the food going to food pantry will help.

Mrs. Martin made a motion, seconded by Mrs. Smith, to: have staff work with the Arkansas Game and Fish Commission to implement one (1) three (3) day hunt in Burns Park (date to be determined), obtain a spring deprivation permit, re-evaluate the situation at some point after the hunt, educate the public and forward to the City Council for final review and approval before action is taken. All voted aye and motion passed unanimously.

Mrs. Finefield said she would be glad to explain the hunt reasoning to the public.

Lodge Proposal Review Committee Member Selection: Mr. Rhoads stated that the master plan approved by the commission included building a lodge in Burns Park. Proposals are currently being sought for a lodge to accommodate the many users of the park who come from out of town for athletic tournaments and family reunions. Proposals are due October 24, 2011. Staff is seeking one (1) commission member to serve on a committee to review the proposals received in depth. Others to serve on the committee would include Joe Smith (Director of Commerce), a representative from the city's finance department, and Director of Parks and Recreation. Concerns will include impact on Parks and Recreation financial and park use.

Mr. Waller volunteered to serve on this committee.

Mrs. Smith made a motion, seconded by Mr. Jones, to elect Mr. Waller to serve on this committee. All voted aye and motion passed unanimously.

Director Reports: Mr. Rhoads presented the director reports.

Professional Stamp of Burns Park: Mr. Waller asked if a 2012 professional stamp of Burns Park land survey would be something needed in the future to include in grants.

Mr. Rhoads stated that there is a deed on file now, but it would be an advantage to have a professional stamp land survey. One may be required for accreditation. The cost will be in the thousands of dollars.

Mr. Waller requested that Mr. Rhoads find out the cost of this service and bring this information back to the commission members.

Mr. Rhoads asked Mr. Caplinger to get this information by the November regularly scheduled commission meeting for the members, and Mr. Caplinger said he would.

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Director Reports (continued):

Ordinances: Mr. Rhoads reported that the staff is still working with the legal department on rewriting the city ordinances.

All Terrain Vehicle Park (Ott Park): Mr. Rhoads stated that Mr. Ott (landowner) donated \$60,000 to \$80,000 value of land back to the city for an all terrain vehicle park, and requested that the park be named Ott Park. Members of the all terrain vehicle clubs have stated that they will manage and operate it. It is located on the Old England Highway east of Interstate 440. There are two (2) lakes on the land. The Arkansas Game and Fish Commission will either sell or donate land to the city next to this location to make the total park 200 acres.

Mrs. Martin asked if the department is going to have to maintain the park.

Mr. Rhoads replied that all terrain vehicle clubs have stated that they will maintain it. Except for the parking lot and restroom, the park will remain in a natural state.

Mr. Rhoads stated that due to the Ott donation of some of the land, a surplus was left in the grant funds to make putting in a gravel parking lot and perhaps a fixed restroom possible.

Staff: Mr. Waller said he appreciated staff attending the commission meetings.

Calendar of Events: Mrs. Hyde stated that the next commission agenda deadline is Tuesday, November 8, 2011, 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, November 21, 2011, at 5:00 p.m., in the North Little Rock Community Center.

Adjournment: Mrs. Smith made a motion, seconded by Mrs. Martin, to adjourn at 6:00 p.m. All voted aye, and the motion passed unanimously.

Public Comments: Mrs. Hyde opened the meeting for public comments. Katrina Wilson stated that the Glenview Recreation Center will have Halloween open house on October 31, 2011, 5:30 p.m. until 7:30 p.m., and everyone is invited.

Submitted by,

Otistene Smith, Secretary