

Recreation and Parks Advisory Board Meeting
February 17, 2016
Department of Recreation and Parks Headquarters
Conference Room #1
7120 Oakland Mills Road
Columbia, MD 21046

Members Present:

Dr. Joel Goodman, Chair; Sylvia Ramsey, Vice Chair; Dave Brown; Joanne Kiebler; William Santos; Michael Smith; and Dan Tracy.

Members Absent:

Tom Franklin; Cindy Vaillancourt.

Staff Present:

John Byrd, Executive Secretary; John Marshall, Chief, Bureau of Parks; A. Raul Delerme, Bureau of Park Planning and Construction; Laura Wetherald, Chief, Bureau of Recreation; and Barbara Anderson, Recording Secretary.

Approval of Minutes:

Ms. Ramsey made a Motion to approve the January minutes as written. Mr. Tracy seconded the Motion. The Motion passed unanimously.

Director's Report:

Mr. Byrd reported that he is meeting with the County Executive next week for a final discussion about the budget. He met with the Budget Office the week before last to go over a few details. The Department is fixing some structural issues with the Recreation and Parks Fund (formerly known as the Self Sustaining Fund). Expenses that are now charged to that fund will be charged to the General Fund which should help with personnel and purchase expenditures for Operations.

Dr. Goodman asked if the changes will tie the Department's hands at all.

Mr. Byrd responded that part of the issue is that the Department went to the Self Sustaining Fund too often. They are working on getting back to putting money

into the appropriate fund, so that funds can be accounted for more easily. There have been a couple of audits of the Department over the last year. The Auditors were concerned that the Department was using the revenue funds such as the Recreation and Parks Fund and Forest Conservation Fund to pay for things that are not directly revenue related or forest conservation related. The Budget Office has been very empathetic to the problem and appreciates what the Department has done over the past seven or eight years. They know that the Department took a significant hit in the last fiscal year and are being very helpful in assisting with the issues.

Dr. Goodman asked Mr. Byrd to elaborate on the Operating Budget in terms of new health insurance requirements.

Mr. Byrd responded that there are expenses associated with contingent employees that fit the formula for healthcare and benefits, but the Department does not need to absorb those costs.

Ms. Wetherald added that those decisions of who would be offered the benefits were made by the Human Resources Department, and they funded those benefits this year. Even though a lot of employees may have been offered healthcare benefits, many chose not to take them.

Mr. Byrd reported that the golf course lease for Timbers of Troy was offered to Kemper Sports. They are working on the details of that document now, and it will probably be sent out for review next week or the week after.

Mr. Santos asked if the Department was doing anything structurally now to prepare for the jump in minimum wage next year.

Ms. Wetherald responded that they have already prepared for that. Generally, the life guards were affected the most. But the Department has already boosted the rate for life guards in order to get better quality life guards. There are very few people out of the 700 contingent staff that are making minimum wage or close to minimum wage. There are three more levels to the minimum wage increase. The Department has a process in place to increase the wages for the next three years so that wages will always be at least \$2 more than minimum wage.

Mr. Byrd reported that the Department received seven or eight complimentary letters related to the snow storm. The level of commitment from the staff during the snow storm week was impressive.

Dr. Goodman asked if the snow storm qualified for federal funding.

Mr. Marshall will discuss that in his report.

Bureau of Parks:

Mr. Marshall reported that in the Horticultural and Land Management Division, staff members are in the process of finalizing contracts for grounds maintenance throughout the County. He is also trying to get a handle on how much work is actually contracted out.

Staff has been GPSing trees at the Centennial Open Arboretum and at Patapsco Female Institute Historic Park. They are also GPSing ash trees for the emerald ash borers study.

Staff is also working on landscaping plans for Belmont. The Department is seeking volunteers to assist with the gardens at Belmont. A workshop will be held sometime this spring for anyone interested in adopting a section of the formal gardens.

Mr. Marshall reported that the Department is working on an integrated Pest Management Plan. A Pesticide Policy Committee will be established to garner input and create a policy guide for the use of pesticides in the parks as well as to create the Integrated Pest Management Plan. A draft of the plan was sent out to the Advisory Board members.

Mr. Byrd added that the draft was also sent to the Sierra Club, Bird Club, Farm Bureau, and to the Community Sustainability Board. He is asking for comments back by the end of next week. He will incorporate the comments and share the policy with the Board. An entomologist at UMD who specializes in neonicotinoids has also been contacted to review the policy.

Ms. Ramsey interjected that there is a State Senate and House Bill: 2016 Pollinator Protection Act. In 2015, Maryland bee keepers lost 61% of their bees. This bill would remove the toxic pesticides from shelves and would let consumers know when they are buying plants or seeds treated with toxic pesticides.

Ms. Ramsey continued that she has received information regarding the US Government suspending one of its top scientists for publishing research on bee killing pesticides. The Inspector General sent out a press release stating that the Agriculture Department is opening a broad investigation into complaints that agency officials have silenced USDA researchers on issues such as pesticides.

Mr. Marshall reported that the take for Managed Deer Hunts stands at 148 and the take for Sharpshooting Operations stands at 134 for a total of 282. There are a few dates left in the season and the take is already where it was at the end of last season.

The Department is working with the Dorsey Hall community to install 4-poster units within the next two weeks. The units house feed. Deer put their heads through the rollers to get the feed. The rollers are covered with a pesticide that kills the ticks on the deer.

County Park Rangers have put together a report detailing their involvement with other departments in the county and throughout the state.

Dr. Goodman asked how many park rangers were on staff.

Mr. Marshall stated that there are currently three full time park rangers and one park ranger supervisor. Generally the Department carries eleven contingent rangers.

The Robinson Nature Center Maintenance Building is now under roof.

The kitchen and Smokehouse at Belmont Manor and Historic Park are now complete. The accessible paver walkway and paver flooring to be placed under the tent is on hold to address storm water issues. The fire alarm system should be complete up there now. The bridge abutment repairs along Belmont Woods Road will happen this spring.

Mr. Marshall also passed around *Bride's Magazine*. There are several photos in the magazine taken at Belmont and Patuxent Female Institute Historic Park.

At Centennial Park, repairs to the dam structure are complete and inspected and the water level is back to normal.

Mr. Marshall reported that Dan McNamara has been promoted to Natural Resources Division Superintendent.

The Department purchased one of the proposed bottle fillers for county Parks. Mr. Marshall is planning a sponsorship campaign to fund the bottle fillers.

Mr. Marshall reported on the epic January snowstorm. The official grand total before this storm for Howard County was 23 inches. This storm was close to 30 inches. The Department will qualify for help from FEMA. Unfortunately, the bar for future assistance could now be set at 30 inches.

The Department handled a lot of transports during the storm. When the snow became too high for County vehicles, Department staff coordinated the National Guard for them to do the transports. The National Guard brings the vehicles and the manpower. During the storm, the Department and the Police completed nearly 300 transports. Prior to this storm, the most transports completed numbered about 50.

Many staff members were stuck at work, working 12 hour shifts. It was an all hands on deck event. Mr. Marshall is incredibly proud of the staff.

Mr. Tracy asked about the transports.

Mr. Marshall responded that most of the transports were for county staff, and getting them where they needed to be. Doctors and nurses were also transported to the hospital but not returned home.

The Department is in the process of creating the After Action Report now. There are several issues to work through.

The hospital's emergency plan was inadequate for the magnitude of the storm. The County will be meeting with hospital representatives to improve their plan, so this does not happen again.

There were also issues with the school system. Many of the County walkways and sidewalks are transport routes for kids to walk to and from school. The BOE asked for help with their snow clearing responsibilities, so the Department had to help open up their walkways.

There were problems with the walkways that the Department was responsible for clearing as well. They would get the walkway clear, and a plow would go past and cover the walkway again.

Mr. Delorme added that there could have been many more transports for dialysis patients. Fortunately, the patients were able to wait until Monday when DPW could get roads plowed enough for the patients to get out on their own.

Bureau of Capital Projects, Park Planning and Construction:

Mr. Delorme reported that a lot of projects are moving forward more slowly than expected due to the weather.

Troy Park Phase II and Middle Patuxent should be going out to bid by the end of this month or beginning of March.

The Budget is going to the Planning Board tomorrow evening. The Budget may have gone up slightly since it was presented to the Advisory Board as funds were added to the golf course project.

The framing for the pavilion as well as the restroom facilities at Blandair have gone up.

Concrete barriers are being installed on Route 175. Work is beginning on the ingress and egress points.

The Federal Government is going to start testing the infill product used on synthetic turf fields.

Dr. Goodman asked if the County has plans for installing any new fields this year.

Mr. Delorme responded that the Department will be installing a turf field at River Hill High School.

Dr. Goodman asked if there had been discussion of putting that project on hold.

Mr. Delorme said they will not be putting the project on hold.

Mr. Brown asked if it was determined that the infill presented a significant health risk are there other infill products that can be used.

Mr. Delorme responded that there are other products that could be used.

Mr. Byrd added that there are about eight or nine other types of infill material. They are all more expensive and do not have the track record of study or use patterns. The Department has a lot of information on the infill product if anyone would like to see it.

Mr. Brown stated that he participated in the BOE work session on the budget, and the infill question was raised by one of the Board members. Mr. Brown would like to look at the information.

Mr. Byrd is happy that this study is being done.

Mr. Brown asked if the study was only going to look at one product.

Mr. Byrd answered that he is not sure.

Mr. Tracy asked which fields would be replaced this year.

Mr. Delorme responded that two fields at Western Regional and one field at Cedar Lane will be replaced this year. All new turf field construction including baseball fields uses the same infill.

Ms. Wetherald added that the study is only for six months. A lot has been done through other studies on the long term effects.

Mr. Delerme reported that he had a meeting today with a new developer that just purchased a piece of the Grace Property called Simpson Oaks. The developer wants to build a trail connection from their subdivision that goes along the Middle Patuxent down to Grace Drive where it connects to Cedar Lane and then crosses the road and underneath the bridge to Robinson Nature Center. He wants to build the trail to Recreation and Parks standards. A bike route along Grace Drive will also be built.

Mr. Santos asked if that particular development asked to be annexed into River Hill. If so, the Columbia Association may also be involved in the planning process.

Mr. Delerme stated that the developer indicated the open space would be dedicated to Recreation and Parks.

Dr. Goodman stated that he participated in the Great Backyard Bird Count over the weekend. He wanted to know if the County participated in the event.

Mr. Marshall stated that he thought it would have been through Sue Muller in Natural Resources, but he did not have any details.

Bureau of Recreation:

Ms. Wetherald updated the Board on ESF14. She reported that her division is now in charge of the volunteer management of an emergency event. The past snowstorm is not the type of event where emergency volunteers in this program would come out. Volunteers would not be brought out to shovel driveways. She is recruiting staff members to be on the ESF14 Team. There are currently twelve staff members on the committee. If the ESF14 ever needs to be activated, those employees will be working from headquarters.

Ms. Wetherald added that Team Rubicon could be asked to assist. Team Rubicon began in Haiti following the earthquake. It is made up of retired military members who come in to manage volunteers.

Ms. Wetherald and her staff met with representatives from Team Rubicon and will meet with them again next month. They will not do formal agreements but will guarantee a certain number of people within 72 hours of the event. The

County now has in place 12 staff members who will work 12 hour shifts, 2 to 3 at a time, until Team Rubicon arrives. If Team Rubicon is unable to come, the shifts will start over and volunteer groups will be brought in. A volunteer base will be trained in advance.

Mr. Marshall added that ESF stands for Emergency Support Function. Certain ESF's are activated based on the storm. Sometimes different ESF's need to be activated based on need.

Ms. Wetherald reported that there are many positions available. Fliers are going to be posted in the community. All applications are done online.

The junior counselor program fills up every year. There are only about 140-150 spots available.

Staff members are currently busy getting everything ready for camps – hiring staff, finalizing contracts.

Wine in the Woods information for the brochure is due in about three weeks.

Planning for the July 4th Celebration is also underway.

Winter programs are starting and spring programs are beginning. It's a very busy time.

Ms. Wetherald continued that they are focusing on a more stringent marketing plan for the summer camps. Marketing will be streamlined.

The new County website came out today. It's cleaner and easier to navigate than the old website.

Teens at North Laurel Community Center prepared casseroles for the Grass Roots Crisis Intervention Center. The Center was very grateful to have the casseroles to eat during the snow storm.

A model call for elementary, middle and high school students was held at the end of January at the North Laurel Community Center. Models have been selected and will begin practice for a formal fashion show at the end of March.

The Youth Theater Workshop was held on January 30th at Long Reach High School. About 60 students between the ages of 9 and 14 participated in acting for musicals, puppetry, improv, musical theater, dance and audition techniques. A production was held at the end of the program.

Intern, Chloe Hodge, is currently working in Therapeutic Recreation with Susan Potts. To get a degree in Therapeutic Recreation (CTRS) now, candidates need to complete 560 hours of supervision under someone who is a Certified Therapeutic Recreation Specialist. Ms. Hodge is from UNC Wilmington.

Mr. Tracy asked if the Summer Concert Series will be back.

Ms. Wetherald responded that the concerts will be back at Centennial Lake. They are also working on doing something like the Traveling Band concept in the schools next winter.

Mr. Santos asked how the new fitness membership for seniors is going.

Ms. Wetherald responded that it was going very well.

Mr. Byrd added that the Department is reviewing all fees including in-county versus out of county rates.

Ms. Wetherald stated that the facilities are revenue producing and she doesn't want to push customers away. Many programs are not at capacity when it comes to working out. Howard County residents get first priority to sign up.

Old Business:

Mr. Byrd reported that the Land Preservation Plan contract has been awarded to Sasaki Associates. They will be meeting soon for their initial kickoff meeting.

He would like to propose that a subcommittee be formed from the Advisory Board to help with the process. He is hoping for two to three go to people from this Board.

Ms. Ramsey asked if Mr. Byrd could describe the process.

Mr. Byrd responded that there would first be a discussion about the comprehensive survey for the County. So, it would be good to have some input on the survey. There will be also be some focus group sessions. He doesn't know the detailed process as it will be part of the orientation meeting.

Dr. Goodman suggested that an email be sent to the Board members with a short description of what the responsibilities would be. Responses could be sent back to Susana, and the results will be discussed at next month's meeting.

New Business:

Mr. Byrd reported that there is what he considers a landmark bill for Program Open Space protection. It is Senate Bill 927 and House Bill 1464, Program Open Space Trust Fund Act of 2016. The proposal for that bill is to take Program Open Space out of the formula for balancing the budget, so that the money for POS is not used to balance the budget. The proposal also describes the payback formula for reimbursement of all funds that have been borrowed since 2006. Mr. Byrd will be attending the first hearing next Tuesday. The bill has some very influential sponsors on both sides of the aisle.

Mr. Tracy asked who put the bill together.

Mr. Byrd answered that it was created by Partners for Open Space, a coalition of conservation organizations including the MACo Recreation and Park affiliate, Trust for Public Land, Nature Conservancy, Chesapeake Bay Conservancy and others.

Mr. Byrd reported that there is also a bill focusing on the warning signs for synthetic turf fields. It's the same bill as last year but focuses on school systems. He suspects that it will not pass pending outcome of the EPA study.

Two bond bills will be presented, one for Huntington Park and one for South Branch Park. Both bills were approved by the local delegation and will move forward to committee.

There is also a concussion bill that would impose disciplinary action on volunteers who violate the concussion policy. It puts a lot more responsibility on the agencies to manage the process beyond their ability. Mr. Byrd believes the bill will die in committee.

Mr. Brown added that the bill would have made it much easier for parents and athletes to seek civil damages.

There being no further discussion, Mr. Tracy made a Motion to adjourn the meeting. Mr. Smith seconded the Motion.

Dr. Goodman adjourned the meeting at 8:15 pm.



Dr. Joel Goodman, Chairman



John Byrd, Executive Secretary