

Recreation Committee Meeting

March 20, 2023

A meeting of the Recreation Committee was held on this date beginning at 4:02 p.m. over video conference call.

Councilmembers Present: Councilmember Kevin Shealy (Recreation, Chair), Councilmember William Dudley Gregorie (Vice-Chair) (*Absent*), Councilmember Stephen Bowden, Councilmember Sakran, Councilmember Caroline Parker, and Mayor John Tecklenburg.

Staff Present: Jason Kronsberg, Director, Parks; Laurie Yarbrough, Director, Recreation; Julia Copeland, Deputy Corporation Counsel; Melissa Cruthirds, Assistant Corporation Counsel; Mallary Scheer, Assistant Corporation Counsel; Rick Jerue, Senior Advisor to the Mayor; and Wanda Stepp, Clerk of Council's Office (recording).

Also Present:

Chairman Shealy called the meeting to order.

The meeting was opened with a moment of silence led by Chairman Shealy.

Approval of Minutes

On a motion by Councilmember Sakran, seconded by Mayor Tecklenburg, the Committee voted unanimously to approve the minutes of the February 21, 2023 Recreation Committee meeting.

Discuss next steps for the Parks and Recreation Master Plan:

Chairman Shealy said it had been almost a month since they had the workshop on their Parks and Recreation Master Plan. Pat Hoagland and Tom O'Rourke had told them to have a plan, to act on that plan, and find out how much they actually needed to get it done. Mr. O'Rourke had showed a figure of \$219,500,000 and out of that they needed to figure out what they were going to do, have a dedicated funding source, and make sure every district was represented. For example, if they wanted \$50,000,000 available every five years, have that kind of plan and funding source available, and go after finding money in the budget and/or have a voter approved bond referendum, and look for a non-profit funding source to partner with, as well. In their survey, it showed that only 5% of people would not support a bond. If the City was going to have it on a bond referendum, that question would need to be formed for the ballot by the middle of August, and he felt like it was a good year to do it because there was potentially more City participation with it being a Mayoral race this coming year. Mr. O'Rourke had introduced Pegeen Hanrahan, the former Mayor of Gainesville, Florida, who was the Trust for Public Land Representative for Florida, Georgia, North Carolina, and South Carolina. She could poll the City's constituents at no cost to the City and give a scientific survey on the possibility of a successful vote on a bond referendum. If they could get something to her within 30 days, she would have time to vote before the deadline, so they needed to talk about it and prioritize a list. Chairman Shealy said Mr. O'Rourke had mentioned that Mr. Kronsberg had already been working on some of those things. Mr. O'Rourke had said that if they did it, questions needed to be fair, constituents wanted to see how much, and then what they would receive for the money. Chairman Shealy said that was where they were currently.

Mr. Kronsberg said based on the outcome of that workshop when the Mayor had made the request for technical assistance to begin at the meeting, they had a formal letter drafted to request that technical assistance and it was ready to go out. He said if there was no objection from the Committee, they would like to go ahead and get the Trust for Public Land engaged. Chairman Shealy thought they should move forward if there weren't any objections. Councilmember Parker said she had no objection, but she thought they agreed to do that at the workshop. Mr. Kronsberg said there was a request by the Mayor to go ahead and do it at the end of that meeting and so they just had the letter drafted and it was ready to be sent out. He thought Ms. Hanrahan was on the meeting and they were ready to go. They had already started working on it a little bit, so this was just an official step to make it the official technical assistance request. Chairman Shealy asked if they needed to vote on it or could they just move forward. Mayor Tecklenburg thought they could just move forward with sending the letter out. Ms. Copeland said no vote was necessary as long as there was no objection from the Committee.

Chairman Shealy asked if they needed to talk about prioritizing or was that part of what Ms. Hanrahan did as he thought they needed to talk about prioritization and lists. He thought there was an idea of looking at a big projects list on items maybe \$10,000,000 plus, look at a smaller project list, some lower hanging fruit type thing, and make sure every district was covered. He said they probably needed to hear from each Councilmember as to what was located in their district that needed to be taken care of or something near there. For example, Bear Swamp was not in District #2, but it benefited his constituents and District #10, as well, that each Councilmember have priorities around their districts. Mr. Kronsberg thought those were some great points and they would want each Councilmember to evaluate their district based on the Parks and Recreation Master Plan and come up with a list of projects that were important to their districts. Mr. Kronsberg said they would certainly take a stab at it, as well. He said they had a couple drafts of project lists, but they wanted to make sure that each Council district was represented somehow. Sometimes a bigger project affected a lot of different districts knowing that if they had 12 big projects at many million dollars apiece, they would have to be able to afford something, be able to actually get some work done, and make sure they were all collaborating as they brought something forward. Mayor Tecklenburg thought that was a good idea and he thought that was part of the intent of the workshop, but sometimes it was a little harder to get down in the weeds. He said if Mr. Kronsberg and staff would facilitate with that list and get it around to their colleagues, and just be an informal thing, but get some feedback from each of the Councilmembers, then they could get back together for another workshop-type meeting and show the consolidated response of what everybody's thoughts were on priorities, both Citywide and within the districts. He thought that would help inform the effort by Ms. Hanrahan and her group to do her survey, as well. He said that got it down to what Mr. O'Rourke was talking about that by the time they got to putting a question on the ballot they would know what the projected costs were and the specific things they wanted to accomplish to help get them there.

Chairman Shealy asked Mr. Kronsberg if there was anything they needed to do to help him prepare. Mr. Kronsberg said they just needed to figure out how they wanted to present and receive feedback for each Council district. He said they would share a list that they had put together based on the Parks and Recreation Master Plan. It was a long list, but they had tried to narrow that down a couple of times. He asked what the best way was for them to receive input from each district and each Councilmember in the district. He asked if it was an e-mail or a formal form that they provided. Chairman Shealy thought they could just e-mail it out ahead of time to give people time to look it over before they had any type of workshop sessions. Mr. Kronsberg said he would get with Ms. Yarbrough and then they would get something out to

everybody. Councilmember Sakran said it would be helpful to see a consolidated list they were working on as that would give them something to react to and think about. He didn't want to duplicate information and he wanted to understand from their vantage point what they were thinking in terms of a list.

Chairman Shealy asked if they knew how soon they could have the workshop. Mr. Kronsberg said he and Ms. Yarbrough could get them something out in the next couple of days based on the work they had already done, and then as far as scheduling a recap and a workshop based on information they got back, he deferred until when they were able to schedule that meeting with the Clerk and the Mayor.

Discuss uses for Carr-Richardson Park:

Chairman Shealy said Carr-Richardson Park was already being used as a neighborhood park. He had gone by the park and there was a man that had moved back to Charleston from Maine who spent about three days a week at the park. Chairman Shealy asked him what kind of people he saw. The man said mostly older people, but he did see some younger people occasionally. He was the only one that happened to be there at the time. Chairman Shealy thought it was going to serve a great purpose as a community park, but he knew they had a lot of money in a very nice facility, a very nice building, that sat locked up. He thought it was worth discussion to see where they planned on going with Carr-Richardson Park. He asked if the building was just going to sit empty, and if they got the kitchen equipment. He asked how they would use that and what was the plan going forward.

Mayor Tecklenburg said it was his recollection that they were going to have some historical materials in there about the neighborhood that didn't necessarily imply that the facility would be open all of the time because they had to have staff. He recalled talking about the space being available for events, receptions, family reunions, neighborhood gatherings, and his guess was that they would manage it like they did most City facilities when they were requested for public use. Chairman Shealy asked if they were going to have that advertised currently, and was it going to be available, or were they going to wait. Ms. Yarbrough said they currently had an inventory. She didn't know about the kitchen. She would have to go back to the Capital Projects Manager to get information on it, but they had 48 chairs, 11 tables, and some things like that that could be used if a group wanted to have an event there. Recreation was now accepting permit applications to use that facility. She didn't have staff assigned to it as no staff came with the opening of that building, so anything that was used they would have to find staff and people would pay a staffing fee as well as a rental fee and cleanup fee. She said the question on her mind was if that building was more like a Recreation facility or was it more like an Enterprise facility in that if people were wanting to use it for reunions, wedding receptions, or things like that. She said their buildings didn't get that level of use as theirs were, typically, more of a birthday party or somebody was having a get together, but because of that, Recreation did not have any alcohol allowed on any of its permits. She said that pre-dated her and Mr. Kronsberg, but that was just the way it had always been. She said St. Julian Devine, Arthur Christopher, James Island Recreation Center, Lenevar, Deming, or any of their neighborhood playgrounds didn't allow people to have alcohol at those kinds of events, and she was pretty sure that most people that had a wedding reception were going to want to have alcohol. She said it hadn't come up yet, but those were some questions that were out there that between Parks and Recreation, BFRC, and the Mayor, and they probably needed to ask how to best handle it. In

the meantime, if someone wanted to use that facility, they did have to have a staff person work there so there was a charge and a reservation process.

Mr. Kronsberg said that building was constructed for a 49-person occupancy and there was no kitchen programmed into that facility. There was an area that could be used as a warming kitchen where people could bring in pre-prepared food and there was an area for all of that to happen and set up for serving and functionality, but there was no kitchen in the facility. That would have been a much different project. Councilmember Sakran asked if the question was whether they thought the use would be more Recreation or Enterprise, and if Enterprise meant there was going to be a fee for it. Ms. Yarbrough said that was correct and, typically, when people used one of the smaller facilities like McMahan in his district, if someone wanted to have a birthday party, the fee was very economical per hour and then there was a staff fee. It was something they could have, the kids could all play, and it was all right there. Her thought was a facility of that size in that area, given where it was situated and it was picturesque, she thought people would want to use it for that reason for some nicer types of events than what Recreation, typically, hosted, but more like what the City does at the City Gallery or at the Dock Street. She wasn't saying it was one of those facilities, but it lent itself a little bit to that. It started out as a neighborhood park, and it was a neighborhood park. They had to drive down many streets to get there, there was limited parking, and there was an occupancy number that the Fire Marshal had put on the building. She thought they all needed to figure out the best way to use it within the resources the City had. They were starting to get phone calls about putting something on the calendar, so they were accepting those applications for permit currently.

Councilmember Sakran agreed and asked if the City was willing to re-visit that no-alcohol rule. If not, he could also see it being used by corporate afternoon events to do meetings, so it definitely was a money generator and a revenue generator for the City. Ms. Yarbrough said she had never found anything in writing where it said no alcohol at City recreation and parks where children were. It had just always been that way ever since she had been there. She said where there were small neighborhood parks it was hard if they had alcohol in them if they were to have a problem to have police at things and things like that. Particularly where they had children they didn't have alcohol or permit it for alcohol, but she couldn't find that in writing. It had just kind of been a philosophy.

Chairman Shealy asked what the next step would be to move that forward if they decided to make it more of a venue for weddings and that type of thing. Ms. Yarbrough said she hadn't discussed it with Mayor Tecklenburg, but she thought it would be that discussion as to whether that was the direction the City would want to take with it. She said it had a beautiful playground and a place where people could go, spread a blanket out, and have a free afternoon with their kids, but at the same time there could be a corporate event with wine and music in the early afternoon or the afternoon hours. She asked if that would fall closer to what the people in BFRC did as she wasn't sure where the facility fell. She thought that decision needed to be made. Mayor Tecklenburg said he didn't want to rule out the possibility of allowing a corporate event or a wedding reception there which could include alcohol use. It was such a picturesque place with a beautiful view, but he would err on the side of making sure that the kids' birthday party got higher priority. He knew the City didn't make money off of it, and in that case having an extra staff person might necessitate a little extra fee than the \$25 normally charged, but currently, just getting started, he would err to keep it in Recreation and for community, small events,

neighborhood events, kids' birthday parties, and things like that. He said they would think a little more about the bigger marketing push and whether there was some way to bifurcate it such as if it met a certain requirement, go ahead and handle it through Recreation, real simple, low costs, reasonable, and maybe think about those events be it a wedding reception or people from out of town where there would be a little different fee structure and alcohol was allowed to be served. He said maybe Ms. Yarbrough and Recreation would keep it until some threshold and then it would go over to BFRC when it became that other style event. Ms. Yarbrough agreed, and she would reach out to Julia and Legal to help her come up with some guidelines. She just wanted to make sure that the information they gave to callers was equitable and fair, so she didn't want someone to feel like they were letting one group use it and not another. Mayor Tecklenburg said they would try to develop those guidelines.

Update on Greenbelt submissions:

Mr. Kronsberg said the Greenbelt Advisory Board Subcommittee met and they approved both Woodmere and the Bradham tracts unanimously. He said the Woodmere application had been updated as the Mayor had spoken with the adjacent property owner. The Beach Company owned the water body and the island adjacent to the Woodmere Tract and they agreed to give the City that property which had a significant value of over \$400,000. It helped the City's Greenbelt application significantly by showing almost a 100% match to the project, so it increased the City's score when the Greenbelt Advisory Board got the results of the Subcommittee meeting. He said that was a really good thing that just happened over the past two weeks, so they were moving ahead on that. He said both of those were in the queue to go to the Greenbelt Advisory Board and then to County Council. Chairman Shealy said that was great news.

Mayor Tecklenburg said he was still interested in a future application being the parcels adjacent to the Muni that included part of the VISTA opened up along Maybank of the Stono River. He thought they had been working on it but hadn't made an application yet. Mr. Kronsberg said when they were working with the Open Space Institute on the Bradham Tract, the Mayor reminded them of those properties next to the Muni and had asked the Open Space Institute for some assistance on that process. He said they were reaching out to get an appraisal for a fall Greenbelt cycle which he thought would be in September. He said they were working on the appraisals based on the potential for that land and to create a value that the City could then utilize to draft that Greenbelt application for that fall/winter Greenbelt cycle.

Fort Pemberton update:

Mr. Kronsberg said the LWCF grant funds had been awarded and the City had accepted them. He said they required deed restrictions to be placed on the property and those deed restrictions would be coming at the next Council meeting. As part of the Greenbelt approval process, the Greenbelt Board, at the time, required a Concept Plan to be approved by the Greenbelt Advisory Board which then went to County Council which was unique and not the norm for a Greenbelt project, but they presented to the Greenbelt Advisory Board the Concept Plan and the Greenbelt Advisory Board recommended that for approval. It would be forwarded on at a meeting the next day of the Charleston County Council. He said that was required for the City to

access the Greenbelt funds. It was a long process. He said they met with design-focused members of the neighborhood, Steering Committee review input received from the Open House they held onsite in the neighborhood, hosted four information stations, and gathered a lot of information which was hosted by the Parks Department staff last year. He said they received concurrence from the Steering Committee of the Concept Plan. In addition, there was a conservation easement held on the property by the South Carolina Battleground and Preservation Trust and they had also delivered the plan to them as they needed to review and approve for concurrence with their easement that they held on the earthworks part of the property which was the former fort. He said they had requested a proposal for design services to take that in-house developed Concept Plan to construction documents for permitting and bidding, so that was currently under review and being negotiated with the design firm to take that product to the next level. There was a lot going on behind the scenes with regards to Fort Pemberton. He said it was amazing when there were multiple conservation easements, deed restrictions, the Greenbelt requirements, so it was a lot of work to get where they were currently.

WPAL Park update:

Mr. Kronsberg said the proposal was underway, consultants were working, the environmental survey was complete, and the upland and bathymetric survey fieldwork was finishing up that week and the next. They expected to have all of that survey information hopefully in the next month or so, and then they would schedule some additional community engagement which would drive the development of a Conceptual Plan planning to start that work in the second quarter of this year. Hopefully, late third quarter or early fourth quarter they should have a fully vetted plan with construction documents ready to update the cost estimate, evaluate funding, and get that project ready for bidding. Chairman Shealy said they had talked about a lot of beautiful waterfront properties that the City could be proud of. He thanked Mr. Kronsberg for all of his work.

Mayor Tecklenburg noted that on the WPAL site, they might have enough funding dedicated for the planning and design work, but he didn't think they had funding allocated for construction yet. He said the construction of the park could be one of the items on their Parks and Recreation Master Plan that they helped prioritize. Mr. Kronsberg said he believed there was some funding available, but it wasn't based on a design. He wasn't sure exactly how much, but as they all knew, the cost of construction had increased daily especially over the last year. Once they got those construction documents done throughout that process, they would be updating cost estimates and then working with Ms. Wharton and her staff in BFRC to see where they were with that, but he agreed it could be part of the discussion they had previously as far as a project list.

Parks and Recreation staffing updates:

Mr. Kronsberg said the last time they reported out at the February Committee meeting, the big picture was 159 budgeted positions, 116 filled, 43 vacancies which was a 72% filled rate, and 27% vacancy. He said they had taken some other positions in their facilities, they took one position and made it two, so they had budgeted, currently, 160 positions and they were still at 116 filled. There had been a lot of changes within the ranks. There had been three or so

promotions to open positions which left those positions open, and then he thought three or four new hires over that same period of time, but it was a bear when they were looking at 160 positions across Facilities Maintenance, Grounds Maintenance, and Urban Forestry. He said they could certainly get deeper into that, but it was a lot of different divisions and roles within the City Parks Department that determined where the biggest openings were versus what their challenges were. It hadn't changed much over the last two months. There had been a lot of good feedback based on the salary increases, so from a Facilities Management staffing point of view, they had filled some electrical and plumber positions, but with the ebb and flow of attrition and retirement they were still pretty steady across the board.

Ms. Yarbrough said they also had a couple of people that left in the last 30 days who were in full-time positions, but they also had people, either from internally or outside the organization, applying for those jobs, so in a net spot they were about the same. She said they were seeing more applications coming in when jobs were open, and she thought that was because of the pay being upped and being more competitive. That had been great in having more candidates to look at and people interested in coming to work in an organization, so she was very happy with that. She said they were still struggling with part-time. Part-time was a difficult animal to address, so they had taken a few part-time positions and combined them to create some full-time positions. They hoped that would help them in finding someone that wanted to come into the organization and stay rather than just coming in for six or eight months and leaving. She thought the new pay plan, that Council generously voted on, had helped the City attract some new candidates, so that had been great.

Chairman Shealy said he was glad to see they were moving forward with their next steps on the Parks and Recreation Master Plan. He thanked Ms. Yarbrough and Mr. Kronsberg for all of their work as they were short-staffed, and they were doing incredible work.

There being no other business, the meeting adjourned at 4:41 p.m.

Submitted by Wanda Stepp
Clerk of Council's Office