

## **Recreation Committee Meeting**

April 17, 2023

A meeting of the Recreation Committee was held on this date beginning at 4:04 p.m. over video conference call.

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

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

Also Present: Former Mayor Pegeen Hanrahan.

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 Gregorie, seconded by Councilmember Sakran, the Committee voted unanimously to approve the minutes of the March 20, 2023 Recreation Committee meeting.

### **Parks and Recreation Master Plan Discussion (Information Only):**

Mayor Tecklenburg said they had the honor of having former Mayor Pegeen Hanrahan with the Trust for Public Land Trust. Ms. Hanrahan said that the Clerk had been helping her set up meetings with each of the Councilmembers and they were getting ready to move forward in helping Council assess all of their options. She was also working closely with Mr. Kronsberg and he had an initial report in draft. As soon as staff approved it, they would get it out to all of Council and move quickly on helping Council narrow in on whether or not to move forward with Parks bonds and how to get that done. Councilmember Shealy thanked her for jumping on that as he knew time was of the essence with what they may want to do with it. He knew he spoke for everybody in that they were excited to sit down with her.

Mr. Kronsberg said they put this on the agenda as a follow-up to the e-mail he had sent regarding the introduction from the Master Plan and Chapters 7 and 8. He said those were the most important pieces of their next steps that made all of the recommendations based on all of the data in that plan. They had also sent out a draft project list which was developed out of the plan, and he looked to hear back as to their three most important priorities from the plan within their districts so they could move a list forward. Chairman Shealy asked if the list should be a mix of huge and small projects. Mr. Kronsberg said he thought it was probably a mix. He thought there were some system-wide recommendations the plan made, but there were the big moves, as well. Since the plan was broken down into five planning districts which were really geographical outside of the 12 Council districts, some of the priorities might be nearby or serve multiple districts. He said with 12 Councilmembers, 3 priorities each, they were going to have to

figure out what it was in the end. He said they didn't have to limit themselves to three. If there were some big picture, system-wide or some of the big moves that were a priority for them, he said to send them along and they would try to pull them all together and make sense out of a list.

Councilmember Gregorie asked what it would cost if they implemented the entire plan. Mr. Kronsberg said based on the 2021 numbers with regard to total all existing and new parks, the system-wide total would be over \$200 million. If they looked at new parks and facilities, they were looking at about \$130 million over ten years. If they broke it down to repairs and improvements in existing parks, it was about \$90 million over ten years. Councilmember Gregorie said he just needed to know that as they set up their priority list because that could have some potential political ramifications. He said they had to be careful with those selections to make sure that they were all inclusive. Mr. Kronsberg said the plan recommendations were really in a perfect world and it took a lot into consideration over ten years, so they needed to figure out collectively how they wanted to apply the plan and what their goals would be over a certain amount of time to get some important work done based on the current population and the population they anticipated being there in the future. Councilmember Gregorie asked if there was any specific criteria he wanted them to use to make those selections as there needed to be some correlation with stormwater retention and the Dutch Dialogues if they could. He was just trying to get a good feel for how they should go about doing the prioritization. Mr. Kronsberg said for new facilities they would always take those principles into consideration. The deferred maintenance items were the boilerplate items whether it was a broken sidewalk, a fence that needed to be replaced, signage that needed to be upgraded, turf that needed to be repaired, or facility improvements that needed to happen. It was a little bit of everything. Councilmember Gregorie said things like the Longborough Park they had been working on for a while, things like Ferguson Village where they had been given some land by Bishop Gadsden, should he include things like that. Mr. Kronsberg thought Longborough was already in the Capital Plan, and it was an active project, so he didn't think that one would need to be added, but he thought the other things needed to be. Councilmember Gregorie asked if they should consider something like the Lowline in the plan, as well. Mr. Kronsberg said if that was a priority, then certainly, but they already had a Planning grant, and they were working on that grant agreement with the Federal government. Councilmember Gregorie said that was how he looked at the LowLine that there was potential funding from other sources and he wanted to make sure that he should use that when making considerations. He asked about the new Bradham Park off Riverland. Mr. Kronsberg said that would be within Charleston County Parks and Recreation and would be taken care of.

Mayor Tecklenburg said they spent money on parks currently, so doing the bond wouldn't be new in a way, it was just more intensified and able to do some bigger projects particularly in a larger bite. He said when they had the workshop, it was shared that they had in this year's budget by about \$7 million to \$8 million worth of Parks related items they were doing. He knew things like the regular maintenance items were on the big list of \$200 million and they could do some more of that, but since they were going to continue that year-in, year-out investment to focus on those things that they didn't have currently which were the holes out there. The number one thing that kept coming back to him that was the W.L. Stephens Pool in West Ashley needed to be totally replaced in his opinion. He said the kinds of things that required some capital upfront that weren't a part of the Capital Plan already, but above and beyond the normal

maintenance and park replacement such as playground replacement on a somewhat regular schedule.

Councilmember Sakran asked if ongoing maintenance in the plan was something that was, typically, included in some of the bond referendums or was that for new projects from a strategy standpoint. If they were a constituent downtown and being asked to vote on something, it was very visceral when it was an improvement to the park they used currently. He said whether it was additional lighting, new sod, or whatever, was that always included in bond referendums which was the general maintenance or were they always thinking about potential new parks and projects. Mayor Tecklenburg said he had rode by Stoney Field and it was a joy to see people out playing soccer on the new turf field on a field that had not been highly utilized for weather conditions and other reasons. He said another example would be Stanley Chisolm Park where they could upgrade to turf rather than what they had currently and add lights, but they already had the park. It wasn't like building a new park, but significant improvement to an existing park beyond just fertilizing the grass in the springtime, adding turf and nighttime lights would be a significant improvement. Those were the kinds of things they were looking for. Councilmember Sakran said Stanley Chisolm Park had the space but needed significant improvements.

Councilmember Gregorie said with regard to Westchester Park, they had wanted upgrades such as lighting for years. He asked if they were going that far out with their recommendations where they thought that the existing park house was inadequate and needed to be replaced. He thought they definitely needed to do some work in Westchester. Mayor Tecklenburg said he didn't know what the Master Plan recommended, but as far as he was concerned, it was a blank slate. He said there was a list of things in the Master Plan that Mr. O'Rourke and them had pulled together, but if there was some glaring thing that wasn't in there and thought it was a priority for his district or area, then let them know. Councilmember Parker agreed that those were exactly the types of things to ask for, but she said they really hadn't gotten any idea about what a millage increase, how many million per millage increase. She asked if anyone could answer that as it circled them back to the question of what they would ask for as a new recreation center and lights were a big difference and how much would that cause taxes to increase. Councilmember Gregorie said they weren't going for a tax increase on that. Councilmember Parker said a referendum. Councilmember Gregorie agreed and said it was a bond, but he knew what she meant in that it was based on the cost. He thought a lot of those questions would be answered during her one-on-one. Ms. Hanrahan said that Mr. Kronsberg was working with the Finance staff and they had sent a conservative series of estimates. She said they had to make assumptions over the arc of the bond as to whether the tax base was stable. She said they usually assumed a stable, not growing or decreasing, tax base. They usually assumed a conservative interest rate on all of those things, and they also assumed all of the bonds were issued at the same time. Most cities didn't do that because they were done in pieces. She said Mr. Kronsberg had that, and the Finance Department would look at it to be sure they were accurate. After they got all of the input and did some public survey work, they would come back with a recommendation to the Committee. If she had to ballpark it currently, it would probably be something along the order of \$50 million to \$60 million. If they did a whole lot more than that, it might be difficult, but she would talk to each of them individually and they would see the table once the staff gave it an A-okay. She hoped it would be within a few days, but she wasn't sure how long it would take to make sure it was accurate. Chairman Shealy

thanked everyone for that discussion, and they looked forward to moving on and seeing some good things out of it.

**Report from Business Enterprise Manager, Justen Braddock:**

Mr. Braddock said after coming onboard with the City in October of last year, he decided to spend the first 90 days building a foundation and a platform in which his position would operate under. He tried to figure out where that umbrella lied and what it fell under as to his responsibilities or what stayed within the department. He met regularly with Mr. O'Rourke on his idea and the plan that he had built out in the Master Plan. He said they took a lot from it, but some of it they did not believe was the direction the department needed to go in serving individuals outside of the community. He thought they needed to focus on what opportunities they could provide the residents.

Mr. Braddock said after January 21<sup>st</sup>, they had a business plan and pro forma approved. At that point, he began reaching out to local decision makers. During the first three months, he had built a network of almost 963 decision makers in the community. He already had one-on-one discussions with 196 of those and those would be long-term conversations. He said a lot of them were planting seeds, building, and growing roots over time. Since February 1<sup>st</sup>, they had brought in \$22,500 in sponsorship dollars. There was another \$7,500 in the mail currently, so that would take them north of \$30,000 since February 1<sup>st</sup>. He said another \$15,000 roughly in value in-kind a lot of which was going towards marketing efforts. Currently, they had about \$90,000 worth of proposals that had been presented to decision makers and they were currently being reviewed as they went back and forth on discussions. They already had \$65,000 pledged for 2024 not starting until February as budget cycles had already passed for 2023. Hopefully, they would be able to get in those talks this year to try to get the first stab at dollars for the 2024 year. He said on top of just the sponsorship side, they were revamping marketing. There was a current stigma around Recreation and what that looked like in the City as some people referred to it as babysitting, daycare, a place for their kids to burn off steam, but he didn't think that was the approach or the impact they were having on the community. He said they were the first line of physical and social development for the kids as they reached kids 3 to 5 into their middle school years. They impacted their physical development, bringing them into a team setting, and having an impact on their societal growth. Those were stories that needed to be told. Currently, they did not have the capacity or the ability to tell those stories with Facebook and Instagram being new to the department. Despite reaching 325,000 people through their venues last year, they only had 3,000 people on Facebook. He said trying to get that messaging out telling the stories of those kids was something he thought they needed to put a lot more focus and attention to. In doing so, it would increase the value of the programs they were putting forth and, therefore, would increase the value of the sponsorships they could bring on to support those.

Councilmember Sakran asked Mr. Braddock what was the one thing that he had seen as the biggest opportunity for his position and the Recreation Department. Mr. Braddock thought the biggest opportunity was that they were starting with almost a value of zero. They already had some local partners that came in such as Harris Teeter, Dicks, and Roper. Those Roper conversations needed to be reviewed going forward, but if they looked at the number of

residents or individuals that they reached on a yearly basis, they exceeded what the Charleston Battery was pulling in for their athletics and exceeded what the RiverDogs were bringing in. He said Environmental Social and Governance (ESG) was becoming a huge part of corporations currently as they were bringing in multi-million/billion dollar either businesses, organizations, or manufacturing into the City. It provided them an opportunity to reach their ESG goals but contribute back to the City for a common good and their development. Councilmember Sakran said he couldn't agree more, and his last comment dovetailed to Mr. Braddock's comment regarding promoting all of the good stuff the City did, was essentially their social media outreach with regard to the City's website and how they promoted and communicated throughout the City. He thought there was certainly room for improvement, particularly, with Instagram and Facebook, and getting into the communities. He thanked Mr. Braddock for what he was doing and said he was spot-on with those two items.

Chairman Shealy asked Mr. Braddock what type of in-kind were they looking for. Mr. Braddock said currently they were working with Charleston Radio Group. They operated five different radio stations locally in the market. One thing they were working on was event creation and they had already spoken with the Mayor's Office on Children, Youth, and Families, the Police Department, the Parks Conservancy, as well as getting Cultural Affairs on board. He said they were all competing, currently, for one event which was movie nights, and it didn't make sense for five different departments to operate at a 10% capacity to reach a very small scale of people. They were talking to each department, and they were only reaching 25 to 50 people per event while paying for movie screens, popcorn, or whatever it may be, at the City's cost, so it was not friendly to finances or the staffing time. In bringing everybody together, they were looking to create a music and movie series in the summer downtown at Gadsdenboro Park in which they could all lend whatever assets they had available to them to reach 500 to 750 people per event and use that as a revenue generating opportunity, as well. It was also in a great location downtown where it was a free event to some of the inner-City communities. It was accessible whether it was by CARTA or walking, so they could provide a large-scale, family-friendly event downtown that benefitted the community, but was also financially sustainable.

Councilmember Parker asked where the funds would be reinvested and whether it would be in the community or programming, etcetera. Mr. Braddock said they had created an Enterprise account where all of those dollars were going back into. The decision as to where those dollars were going was outside of his scale and would need to be in a conversation with Director Yarbrough on where those funds would be allocated. He said, ideally, they were investing them back into their programs to increase the quality of the experience the kids were having while participating in the programs or increasing the quality of their facilities to provide them a better experience. Ms. Yarbrough said the first year of budgeting with Mr. Braddock there were some numbers thrown around, and she didn't think it was fair to bring Mr. Braddock in and say, 'Here's your goal, make it, and your salary is attached to it,' and she didn't think he would have accepted the offer. She said they had been working in a more relatable way trying to put some real numbers to it. Was it \$60,000 the first year realizing that Mr. Braddock had to create a foundation and relationships? She said what Mr. Braddock had managed to do some research on and pick away at was they had a lot of value, but they had to be able to demonstrate that to those folks willing to spend money. Instead of it was a dollar and they were going to invest it there, they had kind of grown it a little bit more organically than that, but they would put those funds back into their programs as needed. They had done that with all of the sponsorships they had managed over the last ten years to get in the department, but they had not hemmed

themselves into where Mr. Braddock had to bring in \$200,000 or they didn't get to do A, B, and C. Those programs were not attached to those dollars currently, but they would start working as those dollars came in to identify uses.

Chairman Shealy told Mr. Braddock great work so far and he was excited about what he had done and where he was headed. He thanked Mr. Braddock for the extra work he had been doing outside of his job description such as driving Recreation buses and all kinds of other things. He knew Mr. Braddock was very valuable to the Recreation and Parks Departments. Ms. Yarbrough thought the best way Mr. Braddock had found to understand the department was to immerse himself in it. His co-workers have asked him for help with unloading things and setting up things. He was the Easter Bunny at a couple of sites. He really had joined in and worked with everyone even though his position was unique to the department, but it had helped him understand the community, who they served, and who they were a lot better. She said he had been a great fit to the department, and they were thrilled to have him.

**Staffing:**

Councilmember Parker said she knew staffing wasn't on the agenda, but she had some questions and wanted to discuss staffing or the field and park maintenance issues. She knew they had talked about staffing at their last Committee meeting and number-wise it all seemed great. In her area, she knew the crews did a great job with the crews the City had, the equipment, and what they were able to do. She knew they were spread thin, but at some point, if they didn't have the staffing capacity to do what they needed to do, she asked if the Committee could discuss contracting some services out or what were the needs or how could they, as a Committee, help those departments. She said on the Island everybody was crammed into all of the fields at the Recreation Center. They had some beautiful baseball fields, parks, and things that could be utilized, but they weren't always able to be maintained regularly to where they could be used. Chairman Shealy told Ms. Yarbrough to let them know what they could do as a Committee and how the Committee could help them get staffed up to get things going in the right direction. Ms. Yarbrough said she and Mr. Kronsberg work closely on and had with the folks that were available to both of them in their departments. She couldn't speak to the specifics of Mr. Kronsberg's staffing currently, but they had actually done a little better this year. They were especially seeing an uptick in full-time positions and people applying for jobs. They had seen more folks apply for Recreation Specialists, Athletic Supervisors, and positions like that in her department especially where it tied to full-time. She believed it was a direct result of some of the additional hourly payments that they had worked on, and helped pass, and the recognition that that had gotten had been helpful to them. She said they also relied heavily on volunteers. She would have to let Mr. Kronsberg speak to where he was in terms of his staffing. She knew it was very difficult for trades/craftsmen people in terms of if they were trying to get someone to paint their house, they were on an eight-month waitlist. She had no idea where they were, but she knew that was a tough one to fill.

Mr. Kronsberg said they had held steady with their staffing. They were getting more positive feedback from the existing staff with their pay raises, but across the board they were still at the same open percentage versus filled percentage. It wasn't a new issue that Councilmember Parker mentioned. He said they always tried to keep up with the Recreation scheduling, but the Recreation scheduling did not get lower, it just got more. They had six staff members that did

ballfield maintenance. They went from Daniel Island to Johns Island, and it was hard to get everything. Their ultimate goal was to make sure they got the field maintenance done for the Recreation Department schedule. They didn't always get it done, but most of the time they did. It was hard to keep adding more when they didn't have any more people to do it. He said it was a tough one and he didn't have a good answer for anyone on it. He said outside of talking about affordable housing and why people live in Charleston, their positions, typically, were advertised. People weren't moving to Charleston to take those jobs, so it was a really hard proposition.

Councilmember Parker said she knew they weren't going to solve that problem currently, but as far as maintenance went and since they had the Enterprise Manager on the line, she asked about getting sponsorships to take on the fields for a season. She was using James Island as an example because that was what she knew, but she asked the other Councilmembers about the fields in their areas. She said James Island had beautiful fields, but they were stretched thin. There were only so many crews and they were doing everything City-wide. She asked how they could contract services out and gain sponsorships to help with the field maintenance for a season in order to help with staffing. She said, ultimately, they all wanted the same thing. They had beautiful parks and fields, but how did they utilize them and keep them maintained and looking nice so that everybody could use them both for programming and on the weekends with their families.

Ms. Yarbrough said that Mr. Braddock had already been looking heavily at ballfield signage and ways that he could directly bring in money to areas that was kind of on the back of popularity of those sports programs. She said as long as they hit companies and businesses in their correct budget cycle, she thought they could show value and they would want to buy-in. Where they were going to have to do it carefully or some really hard efforts was in some of the areas that were more inner-City, some of the areas that had some disparity, in terms of economics and those kinds of things. They might not have some of those field sponsorship signs in some of the parks downtown where some of the inner-City teams played. They were going to have to share the wealth, but Mr. Braddock was definitely looking at that as a way of trying to advertise and sell those advertisements in all places. She didn't want to divulge any of the companies he was talking to, but he had some fairly big places that he was talking with. It just didn't come together as quickly as they may want it to. She thought if they were able to generate that new revenue stream, they could do that with their Parks Department as to make sure they invested money back into those fields with having certain things done every year annually so that the fields were in the best shape they could be and assisting Mr. Kronsberg and his crews with some of that field maintenance to make the ballfields the best they could be.

Councilmember Sakran said he was just trying to understand in that it was not an issue of funding, but rather staffing. He said as a small business owner, he would happily sponsor any of the downtown parks and fields. He asked Mr. Kronsberg if, all of a sudden, he saw an influx of \$20,000 or \$30,000 to be dispersed around some of the fields, it was a matter of staffing in getting folks to go out, maintain, and do the work. Mr. Kronsberg said yes, and if they were to figure out a contract scenario, he was sure there were companies that did that, and if they could get them on a routine schedule. To Councilmember Sakran's point, it was staffing and having the people that knew how, could spend the money and provide the oversight for the contractors, but it was a little bit of everything. Ms. Yarbrough said in looking at some information she shared a few meetings back, if they looked at their numbers, currently, for participation were much higher than they were even four years ago. When they registered for youth sports, they didn't

say the first thousand kids get in and the rest of them didn't. They took registration for an entire period and currently their numbers were high and huge, and they had to get creative in how they offered sports, so they had started doing little kids' basketball in the fall instead of the winter. They may have to do that with some other sports. They may be doing tee ball with the four- and five-year olds in the fall instead of in the spring. They were going to have to figure out the best ways to take the resources they had and make them work. Mr. Kronsberg was fighting an uphill battle from Recreation because every year they added more individuals to the program which made it harder to keep that schedule. Councilmember Parker agreed, and she saw the huge uptick which was why she wanted to know what they could do, more specifically, contracting those services out for specific parks. She asked if it was letting them know the specific parks and then Ms. Yarbrough and Mr. Kronsberg getting a number. She knew they were stretched thin, and they were basing, basically, all of their coaching off of volunteers, but the actual parks maintenance was a different story. She knew it wouldn't happen overnight, but with the Enterprise Manager on, it was a good time for discussion. Mr. Kronsberg said they just had to figure out what the scope of work would be, make a budget request for annual contract maintenance, and they just wanted to make sure they were maintaining the correct areas. It would certainly take the pressure off of the six folks that did that work. When he started at the City in 2010 as a Project Manager and then in 2012, got more into the Operations side of things, since then they had grown their contract maintenance program twofold because of the territory they had to cover and there just wasn't enough people to get that work done, so it was certainly an option they should consider.

Chairman Shealy said they did it with Sanitation currently where Trident Waste did outside of I-526 in West Ashley. He thought it was Republic that did Daniel Island. He said maybe there was something they could look at to see how they had done it. Mr. Kronsberg said the Greenway was contract maintenance, all of Daniel Island grass cutting was contract maintenance. He said they did all of the infield prep, but they had contracts on Carr-Richardson Park, the African American Museum, a number of newer parks around the City that they weren't capable of, based on the number of crews they had, to take care of them. He said it was what they did already and if that was the directive, they would try to figure that out.

Councilmember Gregorie said over the last couple of meetings they had been having people coming in and alleging a whole bunch of stuff. He thought the latest was the Easter egg hunt at X number park versus other parks, and he knew where they were trying to go with that. He asked if there if there was a way to respond in kind because it was just being left out there. He said they knew better and that there was an answer as to why they did this one versus the others because if they did them all, they would be talking about over 100 Easter egg hunts. He just didn't like that kind of stuff to be lingering out there implying they were doing it in some type of offhanded way for lack of a better term. Ms. Yarbrough said she agreed, and it wasn't something she stomached very well either mostly for the staff that worked there. She said the City paid her a fair salary to try to make decisions and manage things, but everybody else was doing their job. She sent a memo the previous week after Council to the Committee, and at the Mayor's suggestion, she sent the same memo out to the rest of Council that talked about the number of events they had including the fact that on the Saturday before Easter the City partnered with Mr. Jones's Concerned Citizens of the Peninsula/Lowcountry and provided a jump castle, staff, and prizes for the Easter egg hunt that was done at Martin Park. In all, they held 12 Easter events throughout the City. On the Eastside, there was one at St. Julian, there was one at Shaw, and there was one at Martin Park, so she thought they covered that area



pretty well. Then, they did something at Arthur Christopher with that group and they did something with McMahan, so they tried to cover a number of areas. She was happy to go into more detail or take thoughts from the Committee on a better way they could do it. Given the old way they did it, which was one huge Easter event, and the community came to them, they had gotten great feedback from their staff and from the community since COVID when they had gone into smaller more manageable events and allowed families to take part in them without having to go into a 5,000 person crowd at Hampton Park and get in line with folks from Goose Creek and Ladson that wanted to take part in the City's egg hunt. She said this year they had some great community events. Johns Island was well attended, they had events on James Island, and they had events on at Thomas Johnson. They worked directly with Donna Jenkins and her Neighborhood Association to put on an egg hunt, so she thought they were doing a lot of things they should be doing and doing them correctly, but she was happy to share that information in some different ways. She assured them that they were doing everything they could do to serve the needs of all of their residents especially their residents that needed them the most. Councilmember Gregorie said maybe that was on him as he hadn't read the letter yet. He told Ms. Yarbrough she had answered him and had been proactive which was all he was talking about. She didn't know if that meant it still wouldn't be talked about, but there was methodology and facts putting around things and that was some very inadequate information that was shared at Council the prior week. Councilmember Gregorie said it was coming off as something more personal than anything of substance, but if Ms. Yarbrough had already done a response, he was fine with that. He thought the Mayor's suggestion to send it out to everyone was a good idea. Ms. Yarbrough agreed. Councilmember Gregorie wanted to make sure they weren't letting it sit and simmer. He appreciated what Ms. Yarbrough had done, and now he could respond in kind when asked.

Chairman Shealy thanked everyone for their efforts and everything they did for the Parks and Recreation Departments.

There being no other business, the meeting adjourned at 4:55 p.m.

Submitted by Wanda Stepp  
Clerk of Council's Office