

Recreation Committee Meeting

June 14, 2023

A meeting of the Recreation Committee was held on this date beginning at 4:30 p.m. over video conference call.

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

Staff Present: Jason Kronsberg, Director, Parks; Laurie Yarbrough, Director, Recreation; Julia Copeland, Deputy Corporation Counsel; Matt Frohlich, Deputy Chief Financial Officer; Rick Jerue, Senior Advisor to the Mayor; and Jennifer Cook, Clerk of Council (recording).

Also Present: Jeremy Cook and Former Mayor Pegeen Hanrahan.

Chairman Shealy called the meeting to order.

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

Approval of Minutes

On a motion by Councilmember Bowden, seconded by Councilmember Sakran, the Committee voted unanimously to approve the minutes of the May 15, 2023 Recreation Committee meeting.

Old Business:

None

New Business:

a. Authorization for Mayor to sign Memorandum of Agreement between the City of Charleston and Friends of the Muni regarding future renovation projects

Mr. Frohlich said the MOU received in the packets was an old version that didn't reflect some changes. He showed some redline edits to the MOU. The changes were mainly for cleaning things up for consistency and better understanding. In the sixth 'Whereas' section, the original agreement said it would be a 50/50 split. That was modified to say, 'The City and the Friends would have discussions on what the levels of financial contribution would be between the two parties by each varying project,' which left it a bit more open-ended for both parties to negotiate on a project-by-project basis. In the eighth 'Whereas' section, the language was cleaned up about the purpose of developing acceptable design and cost estimates. Originally, there were three projects listed out and a priority. The original MOU had the restrooms listed as number two. He said obviously that was a project that the City was currently undertaking at 100% so that was being struck from this version of the MOU. Also, in the original MOU, there was an inclusion of a reference to a tee sheet system, but rather than have that specific project mentioned as a potential future project, they left it a bit more open-ended to propose other additional projects as they moved forward and as they saw fit. It provided some flexibility for the City and for the Friends to enter in negotiations on future items instead of tying them to that one single item. The last change was to strike some indemnity language which was purely legal. He said they could not indemnify

the Friends under South Carolina law which was standard practice and they saw it all the time in their contracts that people brought to the City. Mayor Tecklenburg said the only thing he would suggest, and it would probably make no difference, but the City was partnering on the restrooms. The Friends were providing some of the engineering and design services and then the City would pay for the construction. It was not a 50/50 thing. It would probably be more like 85 City/15 Friends, but it was a joint project in a way and that was the way he viewed it. Mr. Frohlich agreed. He said the project was well on its way and the MOU was coming after-the-fact and he didn't know if they had officially memorialized how the project would be handled. It was an understanding that the Friends were providing some of the design services upfront and the City would procure and construct on the back end. Mayor Tecklenburg agreed and said it probably didn't matter to go in the agreement, but for the record, he considered that project to be a partnership. Mr. Frohlich said it was.

On a motion of Mayor Tecklenburg, seconded by Councilmember Gregorie, the Committee voted unanimously to authorize the Mayor to sign a Memorandum of Agreement between the City of Charleston and Friends of the Muni regarding future renovation projects as amended.

b. Authorization for Mayor to execute Joint Use Agreement with West Ashley Historians regarding the Hillsborough Cemetery

Mr. Kronsberg said this was an agreement between West Ashley Historians to do some limited clearing in the back edge of what was Magnolia Park and potentially the former location of the Hillsborough Cemetery. The group had done some research and in one corner of the map was the existing Magnolia Park, but it was also labeled as the Hillsborough Cemetery. It was thought that maybe Dr. Charles Lining was buried there. The West Ashley Historians were asking for permission to come in with ground penetrating radar to do some limited clearing along the edge of the park to verify if it was actually the location of the cemetery and to document it accordingly. He said they had been working with them on it and it was a small area within the park and shouldn't be too invasive. Mayor Tecklenburg said he knew the City had the front part on Magnolia Road as the vegetable gardens that the Parks Conservancy ran. He asked if the whole back section of it was obligated to anybody at this point and was it part of their deal with the Parks Conservancy. Mr. Kronsberg said the land was acquired through the Mt. Pleasant Land Conservancy, the Parks Conservancy at the time, and through the Greenbelt Program. There were deed restrictions based on the Greenbelt Program and allowable uses were only those that were written up in the Greenbelt applications. Some of those uses could be a new office building for the Parks Conservancy and associated parking, but other than that he thought it was only used for the community garden and general park open space. Mayor Tecklenburg said he attended the Plantasia event held there a couple months prior, and the property was sizable and they could either do a lot more of the gardens or something else with it. It had some real potential, but at this point they would find out first where the graveyards were. Mr. Kronsberg agreed. Chairman Shealy said back when he was playing Dixie Youth Baseball they actually practiced there, so it was used back then.

On a motion of Councilmember Gregorie, seconded by Councilmember Bowden, the Committee voted unanimously to authorize the Mayor to execute a Joint Use Agreement with West Ashley Historians regarding the Hillsborough Cemetery.

c. Authorization for the Mayor to execute an after-the-fact approval for a Letter Agreement between the City of Charleston and Charleston County School District to allow Burke High School to utilize the locker rooms at Stoney Field as weight rooms while Burke's weight rooms are being renovated. The property is owned by the City of Charleston. (300 Fishburne Street, Stoney Field Stadium) (TMS #460-00-00-007)

On a motion of Gregorie, seconded by Councilmember Bowden, the Committee voted unanimously to authorize the Mayor to execute an after-the-fact approval for a Letter Agreement between the City of Charleston and Charleston County School District to allow Burke High School to utilize the locker rooms at Stoney Field as weight rooms while Burke's weight rooms are being renovated. The property is owned by the City of Charleston. (300 Fishburne Street, Stoney Field Stadium) (TMS #460-00-00-007).

d. An ordinance ordering a Referendum on the question of whether the City of Charleston shall be authorized to issue General Obligation Bonds of the City of Charleston in an amount not to exceed \$70,000,000 to defray the cost of Parks and Recreation Capital Improvement Projects in the City of Charleston as set forth in the Charleston Parks and Recreation Master Plan

Ms. Hanrahan thanked the Committee for making time to go over some of the priorities that were outlined across the districts for the City of Charleston. She said City Council had asked her organization Trust for Public Land to do some research and assess the viability of moving forward with a Parks Bond. She said they tested two amounts, \$70 million and \$50 million. The overall parks needs were in the few hundred million, so they had to be judicious about which projects could and could not be included. Interestingly, the \$70 million did better than the \$50 million which was great, and the support was very strong. It came back at 67% overall support. She said they drilled down with each of the different individually listed projects and then some more broad projects they presented costs, pros, and cons, the whole nine yards. She would be in town next week if anyone wanted to drill down into that with more detail. There was 67% support and opposition was down at 15.5%, and undecided was at 16%. They looked not just at the overall amount but also the delta between pros and cons. It was very strong data in talking to 300 voters in the City who were likely municipal voters coming up in the fall. She knew Ms. Copeland had drafted an ordinance with some of the preferences that they had learned in the poll. They only got the data back from McLaughlin & Associates the day before so they hadn't had adequate time to go over it in excruciating detail. One example she shared with Ms. Copeland, Mr. Kronsberg, Ms. Yarbrough, and Mr. Jerue was when the City made expenditures, if anybody wanted to have the data on what the expenditures were for, it was obviously open to the public. Oftentimes the public didn't know that. One example of something they would like to see in the ordinance, if possible, was 'The City will provide annual updates to the public as to how the funds have been spent' just for good transparency. There were other things that could be helpful in terms of putting emphasis on the more City-wide priorities. Each one of the City's districts across the whole City had identified the highest priorities across the entire City, but there were certain things like improving park safety, for example, was one they usually saw poll very well. It did in Charleston not surprisingly so. Councilmember Gregorie asked Ms. Hanrahan how they derived at the sample of 300 in the survey and if it was a random sampling. Ms. Hanrahan said it was and that the public opinion pollster chose a sample and called both cell phones which was about 40% of the responses and about 20% were landlines which tended to skew a bit older. She said they also had text to web, and they started with the State voter database appended with the Municipal voter database from both Charleston and Berkeley County. Then they break them down according to geographic and demographic distribution as projected to turn out this November. That was where

the art and the science of polling lied. She said one of their colleagues had explained some of the anticipated dynamics associated with the municipal elections and she had spoken with the pollster about what if there were certain demographics that were being more driven to the polls, so in that when they asked the questions they did screen out people who tell them they weren't going to vote. In general, she thought about 80% were voters that voted in 2019 and then the remainder were newer registrants but who had voted in November of 2022 and/or November of 2020. She said it was sort of an art and science of projecting who was likely to turn out, but it should be demographically representative of an anticipated November 2023 electorate. Councilmember Gregorie asked if they could then break their sample down demographically. Ms. Hanrahan said they could and the smaller the district the less accurate any one set of numbers would be. They did break them down in multiple different ways, but for example, they did divide the City up into regions but it wasn't by City Council district. They could get data by City Council district, but it was less accurate. She said on the basis of party orientation, which was not a thing in the vote file, but race, age, gender, and all of the normal demographics. Councilmember Sakran said in looking at the list of potential projects when they took out McMahon and Corrine Jones, there were no other projects on the Peninsula. However, when he went to the bottom and reading improvements of existing playfields and any remaining City parks, was that pot of money being allocated to that going to be spread out all across existing fields. He asked if the parks downtown would see upgrades because of that pot of money that was going to be allocated under that line item. Mr. Kronsberg said the way it was written was there was a pot of money they knew could only go so far so the list was derived from all of their priority lists that were sent in, cross-checked with the Parks and Master Plan, and the last bullet intended that they have a certain amount of money they could spread around to each district and make improvements Citywide outside of the specific projects listed. That would be dependent on how far they could spread the money around, so that was the intent of that last statement. Councilmember Sakran asked if Ms. Yarbrough was involved in vetting some of those because he had had several questions about ballfields downtown and the response had always been that they didn't have enough ballfields because of the condition. He wondered if that was taken into consideration in looking at some of the projects downtown. Mr. Kronsberg said Ms. Yarbrough was and that they had all worked together on it. Ms. Yarbrough said she had been in communications the whole time and some of those items that Mr. Kronsberg and she had been able to do over the last few years that he had in his budget had been tennis and outdoor basketball court resurfacing, and they had made sure they spread it Citywide as well as the playground equipment replacement that Mr. Kronsberg and his crew had been able to do. She said that was kind of looking at it Citywide and taking a pot of money and scooping it out that way. Mr. Kronsberg thought it was good to note that they also had the regular City budget process and the Capital process outside of the referendum. They had current work that was ongoing, and they still anticipated other work, as well.

Chairman Shealy said there was West Ashley Park on Woodland Road that was purchased with Greenbelt funds. He didn't know how many years ago, but it was before he was on Council. So, it had been over six years since it had been sitting there and nothing had happened to it, and he didn't see it on the list. He asked what happened to the park since it wasn't on the list. He asked if it stayed like it was as. Obviously, it wasn't a priority if it wasn't on the list, but in his mind with West Ashley Park busting at the seams with soccer and baseball as well as at Bees Landing, it seemed like it would be a need for the City to have a park in that area. Mr. Kronsberg said there was always the other projects as part of the Parks and Recreation Master Plan, but in working with the Mayor and Ms. Yarbrough, they had to go through all of the myriad of recommendations to figure out how they could serve the most people in the City with their highest needs. A lot of them were the big complex-type features they saw on the list and some of the bigger athletic fields like Dill Track and Bear Swamp to try to get some good critical mass and rectangular field space established outside of the smaller neighborhood-type parks. He said it was still out there

on the list, but based on the limited amount that would be available if this passes, although it was a large sum of money, how did they equitably distribute the work across the City. Ms. Hanrahan said the project Chairman Shealy described brought up an interesting point about Charleston in that oftentimes when they worked on Parks Bonds, it included both acquisition of land and particularly natural land and then also maintenance and improvement of active recreation. She said because of the nationally respected Greenbelt Program of Charleston County, the City really didn't buy that land independent of the County as there was such a great funding source for the County, but those were among the most popular projects. It was just getting people out in nature. She said all of them who were older ran around as kids in the woods growing up and people were concerned that children didn't get out in nature as much. She had a conversation with Supervisor Johnny Cribb earlier and that was one of the things they really liked to see when something like this passed, was a local government going to Columbia and Washington and pulling down other sources of funding using organizations like their Parks Conservancy, Lowcountry Land Trust, and Lord Berkeley Conservation Trust to try to get private philanthropy and putting together sources. She said they specialized, for example, and she had spoken with Councilmember Waring at some length because he had a park in Maryville that recently opened that had an interesting story behind it about environmental justice. She said they did a lot of work around Black history and making sure that Black history was told as a lot of those sites were poorly understood. For example, one of the things they loved to see when a city like Charleston went forward with Parks Bonds was to try to match those with State and Federal dollars and she thought the City was well-positioned with the diversity of projects and the community they had. It was, obviously, one of America's great cities and she thought there were lots of opportunities to take those dollars and multiply the effect.

Councilmember Gregorie said so they could use the \$70 million or parts of it for matching/leveraging to get grants from the State, Federal, and County. Ms. Hanrahan said certainly if the project was an eligible project under this ordinance and using their Parks Bonds, they could go to Washington or Columbia and make the case that other sources of funding should be brought to bear. When she was fortunate enough to serve, they did some major park projects where they went to Washington and lobbied for specific pots of money that were being matched with local dollars. For example, there were certain little pots of money for parks near military housing, as one example, that Charleston likely had some military housing that they might be able to apply for those dollars that not everybody could apply for. That was sort of the next level of analysis for this whole effort. She said they were going to hold some private sector meetings next week to try to build some support and they would welcome anyone who wished to come and participate with those, but they wanted to try to raise some private money and bring some other resources to bear. Councilmember Gregorie asked Ms. Hanrahan if they had any data to show how that leveraging had occurred in the past. He asked if anyone had taken their bond money, like the \$70 million, and doubled it based upon matching grants that were out there. Ms. Hanrahan said she could send a presentation that they did for Berkeley and Dorchester where they pulled out some examples. She said some of the oldest programs in South Carolina were in Beaufort County which she realized was not always the apples-to-apples comparison for different places, but they had a nice long program and she thought they had brought down some other sources of funding. The State Conservation Bank had been a great source of funding for matching Greenbelt dollars she assumed, but she was happy to send the presentation they did in Berkeley and Dorchester that had some examples of that. She said in the interest of full disclosure one of the benefits of those projects being very active Recreation focused was that there were more matching funds for natural land and flooding. She knew Councilmember Gregorie had spoken a lot about addressing flooding and that was a high priority for the citizens and voters, and she knew that all of the projects would likely be addressing flooding issues and stormwater management issues. She said they had to as it was a high priority, but those were the kinds of

dollars that they could more easily bring down from the State and Federal funding sources than building ballfields, play equipment, and those kinds of things.

On a motion of Councilmember Bowden, seconded by Councilmember Gregorie, the Committee voted unanimously to approve an ordinance ordering a Referendum on the question of whether the City of Charleston shall be authorized to issue General Obligation Bonds of the City of Charleston in an amount not to exceed \$70,000,000 to defray the cost of Parks and Recreation Capital Improvement Projects in the City of Charleston as set forth in the Charleston Parks and Recreation Master Plan.

There being no other business, the meeting adjourned at 5:05 p.m.

Submitted by Wanda Stepp
Clerk of Council's Office