

Recreation Advisory Board September 12, 2011



Members Present:

Wanda Hawthorne, Chair
Wayne Wheeler, Vice Chair
Mildred Nance-Carson
Todd Dunnuck
Mary Ann West
Josh O'Conner

Staff Present:

Debbie Ivester, Assistant Director
Christy Bass, Business Services Supervisor
Frank McGowan, Superintendent of Business Services
Al Kopf, Superintendent of Planning & Development

Approval of August minutes postponed until a quorum was present.

1. Board Vacancy Update

Debbie addressed the current board vacancy, stated that applications were due on August 3rd and announced that council has selected three interviewees who will be interviewed tomorrow, September 13th. Debbie added that an appointment might be made at the September 13th council meeting or at the October 23rd meeting. The three interviewees are Barry Mundt, Robert Pierce and John Parrish – two of the candidates were recommended by this board.

2. NCRPA Conference Update

Wayne discussed the recent NCRPA (North Carolina Recreational & Park Association) conference held in Greensboro that he and Wanda attended. They toured the new children's garden which was educational and beautiful, the new aquatic center that hosts national and international meets as well as the natural sciences center. Wayne stated that Greensboro has been successful in raising money through bonds. He said that the meeting topics discussed selling the parks and recreation services as important as a Police Department because of the ability to keep people out of trouble and staying busy. They were encouraged to keep in touch with elected representatives and to constantly seek public input. Wayne added that one worry is the North Carolina Parks and Recreation Trust Fund that it can be tapped by other various systems, such as housing groups that are interested in money that is typically for Parks and Recreation.

3. Approval of August Minutes

Mildred motioned to approve the August minutes, Josh seconded, and the August minutes were approved unanimously.

4. CIP Budget Presentation and Public Comment

Debbie stated that this CIP (Capital Improvement Project) public comment session is part of the 2012-2013 CIP budget preparation. For the current fiscal year, 2012, the board had a sub-committee develop CIP budget priorities, which the Recreation Advisory Board approved, which staff then brought forward as part of the budget preparation for the current year. Debbie provided some overview on the currently planned projects that are also in the master plan priority list. She reminded board members that this process is to help line up priorities and prepare for the upcoming budget cycle for fiscal year 2013.

Debbie stated that the master plan priority list covers fiscal years 2009-2019 and took into account priorities from both public comment and city council. She stated that the first of the fiscal year 2013 CIP recommendations will be submitted in December 2011 to the City Council Finance Committee and City Council will take action on the budget in May 2012. She added that those on the CIP sub-committee are Lonnie, Mildred and Hutch and that they will bring back recommendations to the board for review and approval. The public comment session today is a significant part of the information for the sub committee. Debbie explained the way a project was placed on the planned project list was based on age, condition and significance of the facility (considered priority one). The unplanned projects were placed on the list based on a less critical need for improvement. The intention was that as a priority one project was completed, the priority two (unplanned) will move onto the planned list. Todd asked if the numerical order of the list is the actual order that projects will be completed. Debbie responded that this list is not numbered in an ordered way; however some of the items towards the top of the list are being worked on due to existing momentum.

Wanda opened the public comment session and reminded each person that they have 2-3 minutes.

Barbara Kolack Veach, Friends of the Nature Center

Barbara commented on the great quality of life that is provided by WNC Nature Center. She added that a study was commissioned which showed that it was the second most popular park destination. Barbara stated that another basic economic impact study also showed that there is a capital infusion of \$2 to3 million from the WNC Nature Center. She added that the Friends of the Nature Center is gearing up for a capital campaign for site plan improvements at the center and all improvements done over next two years will be fully funded by the Friends and other sources.

Jim Grode, Greenway Commission

Jim urged the Board to keep high connectivity in mind and prioritize facilities with some high priority connectivity projects; such as the new Dr. Wesley Grant, Sr. Southside Center followed by the Town Branch greenway which is a high priority for the Greenway Commission. He reminded the board to keep connectivity in mind as they prioritize projects.

Steve Rasmussen

Steve stated that he served on the Downtown Master Plan Committee and a major topic was the need for more pocket parks in downtown Asheville. He added that the comprehensive plan looked at finding more opportunities for small parks within downtown residential areas. He stated that there is a park option by the Montford community on the property that used to be the Deal Buick car dealership, which before that was the George Pack mansion. He stated that he has been working with various people including Harris Teeter (the new owner property owner) about saving some of the relics that are there along with an old magnolia tree. Steve added that the magnolia tree has a greater chance of survival if it is moved to a location nearby. There is an understanding that there is a great deal of the property that will not be used by Harris Teeter and is wondering if it is possible to negotiate a pocket park on this land that would also save a tree, relics as well as offer a nice park for this area.

Wayne asked what street the property is on. Steve responded that it is on the corner of Merrimon and Chestnut and that Harris Teeter is only planning on building on the far south part. Wanda asked what purpose a pocket park would serve. Steve stated that the people in the community would like to have some green space and they would feel more encouraged if the City was talking to the owners as well as the master plan talks about the importance of these parks for walk-ability purposes. Steve added that this is a prominent area and there could be a lot of uses.

Susan Roderick, Asheville Greenworks

Susan stated that she wanted to make sure the Beaucatcher Sister City Park is in the master plan Asheville Greenworks has a small fund started that they would like to use to help with the park and if support is needed from the public to let them know.

Holly Stiles, Friends of the Nature Center

Holly echoed the words of Barbara Kolack Veach and stressed the impact of the WNC Nature Center and to keep the WNC Nature Center in mind and they appreciate being considered

Aaron Johnson, Friends of the Nature Center

Aaron stated that he would like to see the WNC Nature Center kept as high as possible on the list. He added that they are doing great things with the master plan site plan and could benefit from as much funding as possible.

Wayne commented that he really liked the plan Chris Gentile, Director of the Nature Center, presented at the last meeting and the idea of keeping the animals more indigenous to this area.

Wanda closed the public session and thanked everyone for coming out and all of their efforts in the community.

5. Director's Report

Debbie updated the board on the progress of the playground at the Martin Luther King, Jr. Park and that it is close to completion, with 100% completion expected in October. She added that we are planning to open the park to public at the end of September. Wayne stated that he drove by and that it looks really good.

Debbie presented the Parks, Recreation & Cultural Arts Dept. annual report for FY 10-11 stating that this is a compilation of all four quarters, adding that this report is used for city council and will be on the city's website. Debbie thanked Megan Shepherd and Don Fairbanks for their work on this.

Debbie stated that the grand opening date for the Dr. Wesley Grant, Sr. Southside Center has not been set as of yet. The proposed date that has been submitted to the Mayor's office is October 13th, but this has not been confirmed. She added that a save the date notice will be sent out to all boards when the date is set. Debbie reminded the board that the last time the City opened a new center was in the 1970's.

6. Reports

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Wanda reported that she was unable to attend the final meeting but she will ask about what happened.

Asheville Parks and Greenways Foundation:

Wayne reported that he attended his first foundation meeting and that their main thrust is to raise money for the splash pad at the new Dr. Wesley Grant, Sr. Southside Center. He added that the more money that can be raised then the better the splash pad can be.

7. Other business

Wanda stated that the tree at the Merrimon tennis courts has been cut down and it looks a lot better.

Josh asked when we will know more about the Pack Square Conservancy. Debbie responded that she does not have an update today but that Roderick is the direct liaison between the city and conservancy. She expects that he will have an update at an upcoming meeting.

Wayne motioned to adjourn and Mildred 2nd the motion.
The meeting adjourned at 1:10 pm.