

## **Recreation Advisory Board Minutes December 10, 2012**



### **Members Present**

Wayne Wheeler, Chair  
John Parrish  
Josh O'Connor  
Mildred Nance-Carson  
Barry Mundt  
Jordan Veale  
Ashley Arrington

### **Staff Present**

Roderick Simmons, Director  
Abigail Riley, Special Projects Coordinator  
Amy Rickman, Recreation Superintendent  
Sandra Travis, Festivals Program Supervisor  
Al Kopf, Parks, Planning & Development Superintendent  
Christy Bass, Interim Business Services Superintendent

### **Guests Present**

John Russell, Executive Director Montford Park Players

Wayne called the meeting to order at 12:30pm.

### **1. Welcome New Board Member: Jordan Veale**

Wayne welcomed Jordan to the Board. Jordan is originally from Atlanta. He has worked in Therapeutic Recreation, and he completed internships with North Carolina Arboretum in adaptive and special recreation. He currently works in the intellectual and development specialities field.

### **2. Approval of November Minutes**

Josh moved to approve the November minutes. It was seconded by Barry. All approved, and the motion passed unanimously.

### **3. Presentation: Montford Park Players Partnership**

John Russel represented the Montford Park Players to discuss their partnership with the City and their plans to construct a new amphitheatre at the Hazel Robinson Amphieatre at the Montford Park Complex. The Montford Park Players were created 40 years ago funded by Hazel Robinson because she thought Asheville would be the perfect location for Shakespeare in the mountains. This partnership between the Players and the City has been one of the longest partnerships in City's history. The Department provided space in the park at the Montford Center , and the

Montford Park Players constructed a theatre in the park to perform. The Department, the City, and the Navy Construction Battalion built the amphitheatre to be used as a performance space. John reiterated that the relationship between the organization and the City is an enduring, lasting, and prospering partnership. He added that its success is a testament to the collaboration between to the two groups.

The stage house began falling down two years ago, and the Players raised \$15,000 to help with the construction of the new performing arts facility. They now have plans for a comprehensive makeover of the entire area. They have a long-term lease arrangement with the City where they will maintain and pay for utilities. The Montford Park Players received a grant for \$120,000 from the Tourism Development Authority, which will provide more space for citizens and tourists. John presented the site plan of the area, which included a state-of-the-art and environmentally friendly restroom building where tickets can be purchased along with concessions. It will include a handicap accessible path that follows the Americans with Disabilities Act guidelines. There will be extensive renovations to the front of the amphitheatre, and a brick patio with the intent to sell brick pavers to honor donors.

The project is estimated to cost approximately \$229,000. The Players have raised \$138,000, with 18 months left before breaking ground. John expressed that this is a wonderful opportunity to continue the partnership with the City while providing a service that only mostly larger cities have. The Montford Park Players is the longest running Shakespeare in the Park program in North Carolina and the third oldest in the United States. There have been over 10,000 people in attendance to their programs, and it is the fourth among outdoor theaters in North Carolina.

Wayne asked if they had a lease agreement with the City. John affirmed. He added that it is a long term, ten-year lease with two five-year renewal terms. All construction built by the Players will belong to the City per the agreement. The Players are responsible for maintenance and utility fees.

Wayne asked if the amphitheater is terraced earth. John said that it is. It is a natural-sloping hillside. The Battalion cut out terraces, which have been faced with wood posts and beams to make seating. It allows patrons to be more comfortable and relaxed.

#### 4. Bele Chere 2012 Report

Sandra gave an overview of the financial results of Bele Chere 2012. She presented the expense and revenue summary. Direct festival expenses were controlled for the past four years. The festival gained \$2,400 for 2012. This number has been holding steady since 2009. Attendance remained equal to previous years at approximately 275,000 people. Bele Chere has not suffered the attendance drops that paid events have in the past due to the downturn in the economy. Other events have seen a 30 percent decrease. Staff worked with local nonprofits and returned approximately \$41,000 to those nonprofits. This year's Taste of Asheville provided the opportunity for permitted pushcarts to apply for a spot. This change was accepted and appreciated by the restaurant and pushcart community in Asheville. Staff worked with local

media for the first time including, Mountain Express, WLOS, and the Asheville Citizen Times via the Entertainment Committee. Staff saw it as a successful partnership and plans to continue.

The areas of concern staff heard most was the use of sound amplification by individuals that are not officially part of the festival. There is currently work being done with the noise ordinance revisions to address this issue. Budget management remains a concern, and it is a top priority of the festivals staff to manage expenses in line with revenues.

Wayne inquired about the overtime costs for police. Sandra said that it is primarily police and fire that use overtime during Bele Chere, and it is absorbed by each department.

Josh asked about the status of sponsorships for the 2013 festival. Sandra said the festival lost the tobacco sponsorship and the \$15,000 for not selling the parking lot space, but the budget expected a loss in sponsorships.

Barry asked why the expenses and revenues did not match. Sandra said cost projections had stayed consistent throughout the years, but the difference comes from the decreasing budgeted revenues. Roderick added that staff tries to be conservative when projecting revenues to ensure that expenses do not exceed the budget. He added that the City budget is different in that expenses exceed the budget, the City authorizes staff to spend more, but Sandra's team excels in keeping expenses to the minimum.

Wayne asked about the status of bringing in all the sponsorships specified in the budget. Sandra said that goal was not being met due to the elimination of the Sponsorship Coordinator position when the budget was revised last year.

Ashley asked for a definition of contracted services. Contracted services are entertainment costs. The \$15,000 shift in those costs was due to a change in the contracting process.

## **5. Director's Report**

### WNC Nature Center

Roderick sent out an update last week to members on reducing this subsidy. The Department is currently in the process of assessing how to achieve this, and the Department should have a consultant's recommendation in February regarding how to operate the WNC Nature Center more effectively and efficiently.

Wayne asked why the City would use funds to improve the entrance to the Nature Center when it is looking to contract operations to a third party. Roderick said the Nature Center will remain a city asset. Although a third party may run the operation, the City will continue to maintain and invest in its capital funding. The current improvements are a part of the master plan to increase the experience for the visitors and its revenue.

### Greenways

Council approved the design and engineering of Beaucatcher Greenway to begin. Beaucatcher Greenway will be a part of a larger concept of greenways called the River to Ridge Initiative that Roderick will present at a future Recreation Advisory Board meeting.

The Department is in the process of entering into an agreement to take care of the vegetation and managing the maintenance of the Waller Tract. In the spring, staff will begin addressing the issues of connecting the greenway to the road and make it safer to access the property. With the Department aware that people are using the tract, staff will begin addressing the storm water issues.

#### Carrier Park Parking

Staff is currently addressing the safety issue in the parking lot by Amboy Road. The Department is partnering with the North Carolina Department of Transportation to create one driveway to create better visibility and improve safety. This project will begin in the next two months.

#### Pack Square Park

The Department had to renovate the stage because the design and workmanship of the original stage were flawed. In addition to correcting the issues with the stage, the brick pavers around the area were fixed. The issues with the bollards are currently being addressed.

#### Dr. Wesley Grant, Sr. Southside Center

The Center is now LEED Platinum Certified. City Council will be receiving the certificate of acknowledgement at their Tuesday meeting. Council and staff worked with Jane Matthews, the project architect, to achieve this result.

Wayne asked if staff had assessed the amount of damage caused by the Occupy Asheville protestors and its cost. Roderick said staff analyzed the soil, and there was less damage than originally thought. Staff cut down diseased trees and replanted sod while coming in under budget. The stairs were replaced by Building Safety.

Ashley asked about the follow-up for the top of the stage. The Downtown Commission is raising funds, and they are trying to raise \$50,000. Building Safety is meeting to decide maintenance for the future.

## **6. Reports**

#### Bele Chere Board

No report.

#### Asheville Area Riverfront Redevelopment Commission

Wayne said they held a public meeting in the past month to speak to the final alignment of the plan. He asked if anyone had been in attendance. Roderick said the Commission would be taking their recommendations to City Council in the next month. John attended the public meeting. He said that it was extensive and interesting. He added that it was set up in stations, with each station explaining each stage of the project.

## **7. Other Business**

Mildred announced that she had resigned from the Asheville Parks and Greenways Foundation. Wayne asked the next step in the process for having a liaison between the two Boards. Roderick said that is a decision up the Foundation's Board, but he would contact their Chair to see how she wanted to proceed.

## **8. Adjournment**

Wayne adjourned the meeting at 1:03pm.