

## **Recreation Advisory Board February 13, 2012**



### **Members Present**

Mildred Nance-Carson  
Wayne Wheeler  
Wanda Hawthorne  
Lonnie Gilliam  
Josh O'Conner  
John Parrish  
Todd Dunnuck  
Hutch Kerns

### **Staff Present**

Roderick Simmons, Director  
Debbie Ivester, Assistant Director  
Abigail Riley, Special Projects Coordinator  
Diane Ruggiero, Cultural Arts Superintendent  
Sandra Travis, Program Supervisor  
Frank McGowan, Business Services Superintendent  
Amy Rickman, Recreation Superintendent

### **Council Present**

Cecil Bothwell

### **Guests Present**

Karen Caldwell, Project ASSIST Tobacco Prevention Coalition

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

### **Approval of January Minutes**

Lonnie moved to approve January minutes, seconded by Mildred, and all approved. The motion passed unanimously.

### **Bele Chere Tobacco Sponsorship**

Debbie stated the Bele Chere Tobacco Sponsorship item concerning Project ASSIST was brought before the January meeting. At the January meeting, the Board asked to have this same agenda item come back to them for the February meeting. They wanted specific information from staff regarding mobile marketing and tobacco marketing at Bele Chere. Debbie added this will also allow for more dialogue with Project ASSIST. Diane will make the presentation of the staff report material. Sandra Travis, Diane Ruggiero, Debbie, and Roderick can answer any questions the Board has. Karen Caldwell from Project ASSIST is also present at the meeting to answer questions.

Presentation: Bele Chere uses sponsors to help offset the costs of festival. Mobile Event Marketing (MEM) is a type of marketing that companies use at different festivals and fairs all

over the country. Bele Chere is a popular destination because it will reach a diverse population of people. The footprint for the festival is smaller in the last few years, and because marketers need a large, level area, space is at a premium.

In 2009, the Sponsorship Coordinator position was frozen. Remaining staff is, at best, managing sponsors. There is no capacity to increase sponsorship. Reorganization of Bele Chere festival requires that all sponsors have to give cash contribution, not an in-kind contribution.

The Camel MEM is brought to Bele Chere through BFG Communications, and they have been working with the Bele Chere festival for the past three years. The Camel tent has been in the same location in 2009 and 2011. In 2010, they had a different location, but it was not conducive to their size. Camel has been a good partner because they follow the festival rules and regulations, and they show up on time and prepared. They also work well with the Fire and Police Departments to be in compliance with City Ordinances.

In regards to the Board's questions regarding a different company to sponsor with, Diane has been in contact with BFG. She asked if they will consider another MEM in the place of Camel. BFG is currently not able to commit to a continued relationship with Bele Chere if it is not able to use Camel.

Considerations have to be made when working with mobile marketing companies, and they cannot compete with food and sales vendors.

Wayne asks about the cost to City for employee overtime. Diane says that the costs of the festival include Porto-johns, bands, and other things. Staff works with all City departments to produce Bele Chere. The festival also pays for additional EMT and security to supplement police and fire.

Wayne clarified his question. He wants to know if the reduced footprint reduced the City's costs. Diane responded it significantly reduced the City's direct costs, and that is why they made that decision. Now the festival has a 48% less cash outlay than before. Wayne asks if they need marketers less now. Diane stated no. 1/3 of the festival's revenue comes from the cash that the sponsors provide, and there is a reduction going forward as they continue to lose sponsors. They heavily rely on them so as not to burden tax payers.

John asked why the festival is losing sponsors. Diane responded that one needs to work to recruit sponsors. In the past, the Sponsorship Coordinator position worked on that to bring in additional revenue and not to use tax payer dollars to fund festivals. Without the position and with the limited capacity that the Festivals Division currently has, they are just trying to keep the sponsors they already have.

John said that loss of that position can be tied to a loss of \$85,000 to \$100,000 festival dollars. Roderick and Diane agreed.

Cecil Bothwell stated that US Cellular pulling money from Bele Chere with the Civic Center agreement should be noted by the news media that are present at the meeting. He added that he is

puzzled by the \$15,000 the festival could lose if the Camel sponsorship would be pulled. He asked about musicians' pay. Diane responded the budget for performers is \$75,000.

Cecil asked if an anti-smoking booth can be apart of the festival? Diane responded that a nonprofit gets 10ft x 10ft booth for \$50 at Bele Chere. She is happy to work with nonprofits.

Josh asked if there is an advertising policy that conducts standards for the festival. Diane said that when she works with any organization, she needs to know booth content, signage, etc. She also works very far in advance to manage those standards. This is the same policy for all booth participants. Participants who utilize booth spaces are not allowed to sublet their booth space. Sponsors are heavily regulated, and they must sign agreements with their rules and regulations. In this agreement, it is very clear what they are allowed and not allowed to do. Staffing, booth times, etc. is very heavily regulated.

Mildred asked if festival goers are currently allowed to smoke during the Bele Chere. Diane said the area of Bele Chere is a public right of way, and yes they are allowed to smoke.

Cecil stated that Diane's answer contradicts what the City attorney told Council earlier that within the boundaries of Bele Chere become a park.

Roderick said we need clarification on that, but it is not feasible to regulate smoking within the festival boundary. It is not city property, and the City can only mandate no smoking on city property, per State law.

Wayne asked how much Camel is paying the City. Diane responded that it is currently \$15,000. But if BFG cannot provide someone else in Camel's place, Bele Chere does not have the staff to recruit other sponsors, and it may not be able to get that money back. It is time consuming and logistically difficult to find another sponsor, and she would consider it a \$15,000 loss.

Mildred asked if the Camel tent promotes smoking.

Diane stated that there are no cigarettes being sold or smoked. They are not allowed to ask people to come in. They check identification and one must be at least 21 years old. They feel that providing air conditioning is their marketing tool to talk.

Wanda asked for a timeframe to hear something from BFG. Diane does not know if they will ever be able to commit. If the board makes a decision, they will approach BFG. She does not know what would happen from there.

Wanda called for other discussion.

Josh requested that the floor be given to Project ASSIST.

Karen Caldwell thanked the board for allowing the group to be at the meeting. She stated the Camel tent is large and visible, and that no tobacco use is allowed. She added that according to the FDA, they can give free coupons. They can give a sample product, but it can only be eight

items. Although youth aren't allowed in, they know what is going on in that tent—that tobacco products are being promoted. This promotes tobacco use. She asked the Board to understand that 90 percent of people who start using tobacco are under 18 years old. \$38 million in Medic Aid expenses in Buncombe County are contributed to tobacco use. She added that she has been sending the Board factoids each week.

Hutch asked what action staff is looking for from the Board.

Roderick stated staff is bringing information as requested by the Board.

Josh asked what would happen if an action is made.

Roderick responded that the Board would make a recommendation. There would be discussion with the Bele Chere Board. It would then go out for public comment. It would then go to Council where it would probably be placed into the Finance Committee for review since it is dealing with budget numbers. Finally it would have to be voted on by Council because Council approves festival boundaries, and this would limit activity in the festival boundary.

Josh moved that the Board go through the process and this go to Bele Chere Board for review for the elimination of tobacco sponsorship at Bele Chere and whether clarification is needed on smoking in festival boundaries and make that a policy one way or the other.

Roderick said these are two separate issues, and there needs to be two separate motions. He clarified that not allowing smoking in festival boundaries is one issue and not allowing tobacco sponsorship is another issue.

Wanda asks for a second on the motion pertaining to smoking within festival boundaries.

Josh clarified that he is asking for staff to provide a clear policy that has been vetted through staff and the City Attorney.

It was seconded by John.

Wanda asked Josh what his second motion is. Josh stated a second motion is to make a decision to ban tobacco-related sponsorship within Bele Chere.

Wanda asked for a second. Debbie stated that they need two separate votes.

Wanda asked for a vote on policy clarification for smoking within Bele Chere boundaries.

Roderick said no vote is needed on this because he can clarify that. He will work with the City Attorney's office to get the Board members further information on this issue. He suggested to the members to take that vote off the table.

Josh clarified that his motion is to ban tobacco-related advertising at Bele Chere. It was seconded by Wayne.

Todd clarified the process of moving forward with the motion. John asked by voting yes, you are voting to ban. Wayne said they are voting to send it forward to the Bele Chere Board.

Debbie stated that by voting yes today, this Board is voting to ban tobacco-sponsored products at Bele Chere. This sets in motion the process that has been discussed during this meeting and outlined in the staff report.

Wanda asked for a show-of-hands vote on the motion presented earlier. Those in favor of the motion are four. Those opposed to the motion are four. The motion fails.

Hutch said this issue needs to be discussed further. He does not think this is under a critical deadline for 2013. He wants more information and discussion with the Bele Chere Board to see how money can be supplemented. He is unclear on Bele Chere's financials. He asks if it is breaking even. Roderick stated it has for the past two years. Sandra clarified that it has for three years. Hutch stated he does not want to base this decision just on dollars. He asked what percentage of the total budget does Camel sponsor.

Roderick and Diane stated 12 percent.

Hutch thinks the festival can attract more advertisers for healthy living due to Asheville's popularity.

Todd clarified that BFG represents more sponsors other than Camel

Cecil urged the Board about there being a small amount of time to get this achieved. He thinks it needs to be decided in the next couple of months to plan for Bele Chere 2013. Josh agreed, especially regarding budget preparation.

Wanda asked if there are multi-year sponsorship commitments. Diane responded no. She added that Camel is BFG's only MEM tour.

Wanda asked Diane about the Children's Area at Bele Chere and if it resumed this year. Diane stated it has been moved inside the Civic Center that is alcohol free and air conditioned. She added that it is one of the more popular attractions.

Wanda asked about programming that addresses the teen population. Diane responded they are a difficult demographic to target, but they have worked with nonprofits to target teens. The murals last year were a popular activity for the teens. She added that Bele Chere staff works toward having constructive activities for teens.

Cecil asked how much Bele Chere lost from US Cellular. Diane said \$35,000 and it is a loss they have not been able to fix.

Josh asked about the result of the vote.

Wanda asked what happens now.

Debbie stated the Board has the option to send it to the Bele Chere Board. She added that members of both boards can dialogue in order to construct a recommendation. The next step in the process can be to have conversation with the Bele Chere Board.

Wanda asked the members if they want to have a conversation about this with the Bele Chere Board.

Hutch said the budget is another talking point in these discussions. He asked US Cellular pulled out their sponsorship. Sandra stated the assumption is that they have pulled out their funding due to US Cellular's presence in the Civic Center where the Children's Area and Senior Oasis is located. She thinks this will allow them to choose to not sponsor Bele Chere.

Hutch wanted this process to be activated in the next few months, and he wanted a friendly amendment.

Josh understood the fiscal concerns. He would be willing to help out with a process to move discussions forward.

Debbie gave a point of order on how to move forward from here. She said that staff can facilitate discussions between the Recreation Advisory Board and the Bele Chere Board. Roderick added that members need to be talking to the Bele Chere Board now because they have time within the next 8-10 weeks so members do not disrupt their 2012 planning.

Wanda, Josh, Hutch, and John volunteered to participate in those discussions with the Bele Chere Board.

### **Director's Report**

Roderick presented information pertaining to the Municipal Golf Course. Council wanted staff to put out a Request for Information (RFI) and received six respondents. By the end of the week, the Request for Proposals (RFP) will go out. It will be a two-month review process. Staff will need to look at the makeup of the committee to make a final recommendation to Council. It will then go to a Council committee and to Council for a decision. It will be reviewed by staff and the community before going to Council.

Wayne asked if City Attorney will also review it. Roderick responded the City Attorney will be involved once the company has been selected and negotiations for the agreement begin. Roderick stated that he wants as many stakeholders engaged as possible in order to make a good recommendation to Council.

### **Reports**

#### Pack Square Conservancy

Roderick reported the Conservancy has not met on a regular basis. They are currently restructuring. They hope to finish redesigning their structure in the next two months. Once the structure of the Conservancy is determined, the organization can be evaluated.

### Bele Chere Committee

Wanda reported Ilene is the Bele Chere board chair for this year. The meeting is the first Wednesday of each month at 5:30 pm. The 2012 footprint will stay the same. The members are looking at the music selection. Information for submitting proposals is at [www.belecherefestival.org](http://www.belecherefestival.org) site. They are looking for volunteers for music selection. In March the volunteers will listen to music and other media submitted. She added that there will be a Bicycle Benefit at the opening of the festival to honor the fallen firefighter, Jeff Bowen. They want to present his family with a check. This event is a work in progress. Look for more information to come.

### Asheville Parks & Greenways Foundation

Wayne reported they met last month at the Dr. Wesley Grant Sr. Southside Center. He thinks it is a great facility. They have expanded to 20 members, and they are currently dividing into committees. He added that the Foundation's main focus is to raise money for splash pad.

### **Other Business**

Roderick stated the Department just completed the transaction of selling the Reid Center property to the Asheville Housing Authority to repurpose it as a job center. The City no longer owns the Reid Center. Part of the money from the sale will be used to fund the splash pad. Wanda asked if there is still access to the gym. Roderick stated yes and the Department is leasing the gym from the Housing Authority.

John asked about the Sponsorship Coordinator position. He wanted to know if there is an opportunity for volunteer grant writers. Roderick responded the Department partners with many nonprofit such as the Friends of the Nature Center and Asheville Parks and Greenways Foundation to write grants, but the Department is always looking for volunteers. Roderick added that if anyone knows of any opportunities, to let staff know.

### Public Comment

Tim Sadler commented that he has serious concerns about Bele Chere. He has been talking to people in the community. Businesses and residents have the same low opinion of Bele Chere. He says that it is rare to hear anything positive about it. He wants there to be a more collaborative effort. He looks forward to working with the Bele Chere Committee. Wanda told him that it is the Bele Chere Board. Staff told Tim that the committee meeting is open to the public. He is interested in showing that people can still have fun without drinking. He asked why smoking is still being allowed, and he added that he could find some pornographers to sponsor Bele Chere.

Tim wanted the Board to note that hip-hop artist, Agent 23 Skidoo, from Asheville won a Grammy. He thinks something is wrong if there is not a strong hip-hop presence at Bele Chere.

Tim recommended using language in the golf course RFP for sustainable design. He sees this as an opportunity for Asheville to have the greenest and most sustainable golf course in the country.

Tim stated he wants to see an audit of the Bele Chere festival. He thinks there is nepotism and favoritism within the festival. He stated he hears from others that the same people benefit from the festival every year. It is a signature event of the city, and he wants it to be better.

Wayne asked if merchants are against Bele Chere. Tim reiterated that there is much negative talk about Bele Chere. Wayne said that hotels, restaurants, bed and breakfast establishments must be happy with Bele Chere. Tim thinks that a business cannot cater to the needs of the festival goers is outrageous. He wants downtown businesses to get a free booth. He will get numbers together on business trends during Bele Chere. He said the consensus is that Bele Chere is a taint on the City.

Wanda asked if he has attended a festival. Tim responded that he has attended the festival, but it has been commercialized and co-opted. He thinks Camel is a good example of this. He does not feel that it is helping to promote the City as a healthy city. He said that its evolution has been a disgrace. He added that this is his opinion along with the opinion of an overwhelming number of people in the city including business people and residents who have lived in the City for 30 years.

John asked about Bele Chere attendance.

Diane responded that an official study has not been taken in recent years. They judge numbers by merchant sales. There was a decline in 2010 because of the extreme heat, but those numbers increased in 2011. She added the attendance is still strong. John asked about number the festival use to draw people. Diane answered that numbers from 2007 is the official count still used, which was 200,000-300,000 attendees.

John stated he commends Tim since he thinks it takes courage to state his views. He added that 200,000 people attending Bele Chere is a pretty strong vote in favor of the city.

Tim responded the City can do a much better job moving forward. He thinks Bele Chere can provide other activities than drinking and cigarette promotion. He said that he is not calling out anyone; and he is simply echoing sentiments that he has heard such as people leaving town for Bele Chere.

Wanda asked Tim to put his suggestions together. She also asked him to have Agent 23 Skidoo submit his material to the Bele Chere committee by the February 24<sup>th</sup> deadline for musicians. Tim stated that he will do both.

### **Adjournment**

Wanda called for a motion to adjourn; it is seconded by Wayne. All vote in favor. Motion passed unanimously. Meeting adjourned at 1:26 pm.