

## **NORTH LITTLE ROCK PARKS AND RECREATION COMMISSION MEETING**

**JANUARY 20, 2015**

The North Little Rock Parks and Recreation Commission meeting was called to order by Mrs. Vicki Stephens at 5:00 p.m., on January 20, 2015, at the North Little Rock Community Center.

**Commission Members Present:** Tom Davis, Charles Jones, Otistene Smith and Vicki Stephens. Randall Bradley had to work, Neil Bryant was out of town and Bruce Waller was sick.

**Staff Members Present:** Bob Rhoads, Jan Eberle-Wilkins, Jason Rhodes, Tina Worrell, Jeff Caplinger, Ian Hope, Shep, Jennie Cunningham and Paula Jones.

**Others Present:** City Council members Debi Ross and Beth White, Jackson Hilliard, Jackson Conner, Laura Hilliard, Caroline Conner, Michelle Conner, Garrick Conner, Brian Copher, Keith Jones, Ron Gray, Georgiana Gray, Mike Worthy, Larry Freeman, Carol Rogers, Brad Shock, Shelly Shock, DeAnn Hubberd and Doug Trantham.

**Vote for Excused or Unexcused Absentees:** Mrs. Stephens asked that a motion be made to excuse Randall Bradley, Neil Bryant and Bruce Waller from this commission meeting.

Mr. Charles Jones made a motion, seconded by Mrs. Smith, to excuse these members from the meeting. All voted aye and motion passed unanimously.

**Disposition of Minutes:** Mrs. Stephens presented minutes of the November 17, 2014, Parks and Recreation Commission meeting. There was no December 2014 commission meeting.

Mr. Davis made a motion, seconded by Mr. Charles Jones, to accept the minutes as presented. All voted aye and motion passed unanimously.

**Presentation-North Little Rock Middle School East Initiative Program:** Jackson Hilliard and Jackson Conner came before the commission stating they are working to build an Americans with Disabilities Act playground between the rocket slide and center stage area in Burns Park. Their plan includes applying for grants, contacting corporations for donations with signs of acknowledgement, and selling bricks to individuals to keep costs down. The structure cost will be \$400,000.

Mrs. Smith said they have done a wonderful job and has been watching them for a while.

Mr. Rhoads said they will be working on this project from middle school through high school. They are not asking for money, but saying they are going to go out and raise the funds.

Mr. Conner said they are fundraising now and no completion date has been set. Construction will begin when the money is raised.

Mr. Charles Jones asked what inspired them, as this is impressive.

Mr. Conner said that his mother had been involved in a project like this before and there is currently no playground like it in the area.

Mrs. Stephens thanked them and said the department will do what they can to help with this project.

**Policy for Firing Rockets in Burns Park:** Mr. Caplinger stated that in the past year, a few individuals have been launching model rockets in the park (primarily at the Burns Park Soccer Complex) without notification to park staff. They have been using parking lots and grass fields as launch sites. Some of these rockets have engines big enough to launch rockets a few hundred to close to 2,000 feet into the air and land anywhere from the Arkansas River, to another soccer field, to Mr. Pfeifer's private property adjacent to Burns Park. The city has neither specific policy nor municipal code regarding model rockets. In many areas, the fire department handles model rocket issues.

**Policy for Firing Rockets in Burns Park (continued):** After discussing this with the North Little Rock Fire Department, they are allowing parks and recreation staff to handle the model rocket issues on their behalf. Staff has researched and reviewed policies from other communities and found various ways they have handled the issue. Staff has discussed and received input from model rocket enthusiasts in central Arkansas and neighboring property owner

Staff wants to allow the use of model rockets from specific locations in Burns Park and by use of a permit. There will be a one-time application and \$25 fee (originally recommended at \$50). This permit can be renewed yearly with an application review and renewal fee of \$25. A free launch permit will be required for actual launch dates and times (weekdays and some weekends during daylight hours). A group/special launch permit will be available for larger size rockets and rocketry events.

Staff has been in contact with the North Little Rock Airport and they do not have issues with rockets being launched using size "C" or smaller engines. Distance from the airport is okay for size "A" through "C" engines. Also, they spoke with an education representative from Estes Rocket Company, per Brian Copher's request. Once the representative from Estes Rocket Company understood the property limitations, they have no issue with the proposed policy and complimented staff on the research and understanding of the hobby.

Staff also spoke with the Federal Aviation Administration District expert on model rockets. Based on the distance from the two (2) local airports, they would only get involved if the rockets were Class II or above (much larger than the department would allow), and it is up to the department to determine any restrictions on Class 1 model rockets. Staff additionally asked about drones (quadcopters, etc.) and the Federal Aviation Administration District is still working on their (own) policy regarding these.

Mrs. Smith questioned why engine sizes up through "G" are listed in the proposed agreement. She thought rocket sizes ("A through C") would be restricted to the city property only and not larger to involve other property.

Mr. Caplinger stated that for general launches, this agreement is talking about rockets no larger than a "C". If they want to launch a larger size, it would require more space and considered an event, which would involve Gene Pfeifer's property.

Mrs. Stephens said Mr. Pfeifer does not want these rockets on his land.

Mrs. Smith said she thought the staff was talking about launching size "C" engines or below only, so it would be restricted to city property only. She did not realize that larger size engines were going to be considered.

Mr. Caplinger said there are some people that would want to launch the larger size rockets and that is why a special event agreement is being considered.

Mrs. Stephens said she has a concern with rockets larger than a "C", as Mr. Pfeifer does not want these on his property.

Mr. Charles Jones stated that if the airport did not have a problem with these rockets, does Mr. Caplinger have this statement in writing.

Mr. Caplinger said he believes he has that statement in writing in an email and he would check it.

**Policy for Firing Rockets in Burns Park (continued):** Mr. Davis asked if the \$25 application fee covered supervision for these events.

Mr. Caplinger said the \$25 is an administration fee to cover handling of the permits.

Mrs. Stephens said the events will not be specially supervised, but the park ranger will be driving by in general.

Mr. Caplinger said that there will be no special supervision. Once the applicant pays his \$25 fee, they will get authorization then call the reservation office to schedule a time for their launch. All activities scheduled will be reviewed to make sure the requested launch date will not interfere with those events. The reservation office will then notify Mr. Caplinger and park ranger to let them know. No one will be there to specifically monitor the launch.

Mr. Charles Jones asked if any of the rockets would be on Mr. Pfeifer's land.

Mrs. Stephens said they would not go to Mr. Pfeifer's land if the engine size is a "C" or below.

Mr. Caplinger stated that the National Association of Rocketry recommends a minimum 400 sq. foot diameter area for use of a size "C" or smaller engine. The proposed Burns Park area is 500 sq. feet in diameter and could include a size "D" engine. When the rocket goes up it should come down in that 400 sq. or 500 sq. foot diameter. There are instances that the rocket may go outside of the area when the parachute or other things go wrong. That is why the size "D" engine has been reduced to a "C" size.

Mrs. Smith asked if special events with the larger size engines would take the rockets to the Pfeifer property.

Mr. Caplinger said if there is a chance that they will go to the Pfeifer property and Mr. Pfeifer would have to give permission before the event. These events are on a case-by-case basis.

Mr. Keith Jones said that the rockets are extremely safe, made of lightweight materials and the idea to allow this event should be encouraged and not discouraged. The fee is not a good idea as this is a hobby. He offered to talk to the staff and others interested if needed to help make this happen to meet the goals and objectives, without requiring someone to get a license ahead of time. He thinks Mr. Pfeifer would be willing to listen to facts regarding this. It is a great sport.

Mr. Brian Copher said he agrees with the quote that states conformity is the jailer of freedom and the enemy of growth. He thinks regulations can be looked at the same way, He does not like rules and less rules are always best. This hobby has already been approved by three (3) sets of Federal regulations that govern it. There is no loud noise when the rockets are launched. The area can be controlled by size and design of the parachute. They just want a place to blast the rockets.

Mrs. Stephens said she would feel better if there was an organized association affiliated with these events. There will be those trying to launch these rockets and not be familiar with them. Based on Mr. Copher's statement at another meeting, the rocket can change paths if the wind or other factors are not just right. The department has to oversee everyone like walkers, cyclists, children and others that use the park. It would be great to find a place for this hobby, but the area has to stay safe and everyone that uses the park needs to be considered. She wants to work to see if a compromise can be reached where everyone stays safe in the park but those wanting to launch the rockets could enjoy their hobby also.

**Policy for Firing Rockets in Burns Park (continued):** Mr. Rhoads stated that the permit fee is for the scheduling time by the staff. Once approved, all a person has to do is send an email to the reservations office and the staff would reply letting them know if their requested date is available.

Mrs. Smith said she would like to see further discussion and explain how this can be done safely.

Mrs. Smith made a motion, seconded by Mr. Charles Jones, to table this item until the next regularly scheduled commission meeting. All voted aye and motion passed unanimously.

Mrs. Stephens asked for the staff and others to try and come to an agreement to make it safe for everyone.

**Association Annual Reports for 2014:** Mr. Caplinger said that 2014 annual reports for the associations are submitted. As a part of their agreement, they are to provide a previous years report at the beginning of each year, including selected copies of their bank statements. Mr. Larry Freeman with the North Little Rock Softball Association had handed his bank statements to him (Mr. Caplinger) right before this commission meeting and were not included in the commission folders.

Mr. Ron Gray with the Burns Park Athletic Association, thanked the commission for giving them the opportunity to have a program at Burns Park. He reported that they have grown by 20% from the previous year and had the first fall program. Mr. Gray introduced Mike Worthy who is also with the association.

Mr. Freeman with the North Little Rock Softball Association, said they mainly have church leagues. He thanked the commission for their support. Neither upgrades nor additions could be done last year due to not having a concession stand and entry fees had been lowered.

Mrs. Carol Rogers with the BMX, said they have planned improvements for this year. The asphalt installed is working great, the fence has helped with vandalism and they are planning to rebuild the track in May 2015.

Mr. Brad Shock with the Arkansas Soccer Club said the soccer fields are great.

Mrs. Smith made a motion, seconded by Mr. Charles Jones, to accept and file these four (4) association reports and have the staff review the North Little Rock Softball Association bank statements. All voted aye and motion passed unanimously.

Mr. Charles Jones said he appreciated Mr. Shock giving the youth the best opportunity to play soccer.

Mrs. Stephens said she agreed.

**Approval of Association Agreements for 2015:** Mr. Caplinger presented 2015 agreements for the Burns Park Athletic, North Little Rock Softball, Arkansas Soccer Club and Bonzai BMX associations.

Each of these new agreements reflect changes to dates needed for scheduling purposes. Agreements for the Burns Park Athletic Association and North Little Rock Softball now include their operation of food and beverage concessions at the appropriate complex. Department staff has meet with the association members and discussed the proposed agreements.

**Approval of Association Agreements for 2015:** Mr. Rhoads stated that the Arkansas Soccer Association agreement that is being approved will be short-term and will end July 31, 2015. A new agreement will be brought back for approval for August 1, 2015 through June 30, 2016 to fit the soccer calendar year.

Mrs. Smith made a motion, seconded by Mr. Davis, to execute these agreements with all dates and other changes presented. All voted aye and motion passed unanimously.

**Signage in Parkhill Parks:** Mr. Caplinger stated that the Parkhill Neighborhood Association would like to provide neighborhood park signage for Fearneyhough, Crestview and Idlewild parks to better match their neighborhood theme. The neighborhood association has provided many volunteer hours to improve particularly Fearneyhough and Crestwood parks, and has received a grant to construct the proposed signs.

Staff has worked closely with the association in developing the sign and recommends approval with the only consideration of at least minimally having North Little Rock Parks and Recreation listed as part of the structure or sign.

Mrs. DeAnn Hubberd reported that the signs are being paid for by a grant. A new vendor raised the prices and the association cannot pay for this addition. The city can pay to have this added if desired. Signs included are at Idlewild, Crestview and Fearneyhough parks. One (1) sign will be installed at each park.

Mrs. Stephens asked Mrs. Hubberd to get the cost to add "North Little Rock Parks and Recreation" to the three (3) signs and send to Mr. Caplinger.

Mrs. Hubberd agreed.

Mrs. Smith made a motion, seconded by Mr. Charles Jones, to accept the sign design and have Mr. Rhoads get back with the commission on the additional cost to add "North Little Rock Parks and Recreation". All voted aye and motion passed unanimously.

**Final Approval of Land Conversion:** Mr. Rhoads reported that land conversion of the 73.5 Burns Park acreage for the 52.5 Big Rock Quarry acreage was approved by the National Park Service. To finalize that conversion, staff is seeking final formal approval to accept the Big Rock Quarry into the Parks and Recreation parks inventory and to delete the 73.5 acres of Burns Park property from the inventory.

There is no immediate impact due to this exchange. The Request for Proposals for a lodge is being developed by the Economic Development Department. North Little Rock Planning will be working on rezoning of the Burns Park area to make a lodge possible.

Mr. Charles Jones made a motion, seconded by Mr. Davis, to accept this final land conversion approval. All voted aye and motion passed unanimously.

**Capital Budget – Vestal Park Priorities:** Mr. Rhoads stated that at the last commission meeting, the capital budget for 2015 was amended by adding \$20,000 for Vestal Park improvements. \$15,000 was originally set aside in 2014 to do an outdoor basketball court with a fence.

**Capital Budget – Vestal Park Priorities (continued):** When construction began, some of the neighbors protested and construction was stopped. The commission had asked that the Baring Cross priorities be brought for their (commission) review and final approval of what the \$20,000 was to be spent.

Parks and Recreation staff went to two (2) Baring Cross Neighborhood Association meetings and worked with them to determine priority of need. The four (4) major items they desire are:

1. **Pavilion** \$ 50,000  
To serve a minimum of 50-75 people to include picnic tables, grill pads, landscape and sidewalk access
2. **Playground** \$ 75,000  
One (1) playground to serve children 6-12 years old, benches for parents, landscape and sidewalk access
3. **Multi-Purpose Concrete Area** \$ 20,000  
Area would include basketball, pickleball, volleyball and fencing to make it possible to lock.  
This amount is enough to do the pad, but probably not the fencing.
4. **Splash Pad** \$150,000  
Area for water, fun and play for children and adults.  
Includes landscape and benches.

Tentative plans would be for Habitat for Humanity and its volunteers to buy necessary materials and build the pavilion with amenities. They received a \$20,000 grant for improvement for use at Vestal Park.

The association proposed that Parks and Recreation go ahead and build the multi-purpose court since parks and recreation has set aside the money for that project, and because a playground costs so much more. Habitat for Humanity and the neighborhood association would seek grants and sponsorships for the playground. Their intent would be to raise the money.

Mr. Davis made a motion, seconded by Mr. Charles Jones, to approve the priorities and use of the \$20,000 capital money for the multi-purpose court. All voted aye and motion passed unanimously.

**Recurring Requests to Serve Alcohol in Parks:** Mr. Rhoads reported that in 2013, the commission approved a policy to allow the Director of Parks and Recreation to approve recurring requests to serve alcohol in the park. Commission asked for the request to be brought back each January for review. The Director was given permission to approve recurring requests for alcohol at special events, if for two (2) consecutive years, the commission approved prior request and the group had demonstrated the ability to properly and responsibly distribute alcohol. The only group that this policy has impacted is CARTI for its annual Tour De Rock bicycling event, and there were no problems. The commission reviewed this policy in January 2014 and extended it for another year.

Mr. Charles Jones made a motion to continue this policy. The motion died for lack of a second.

Mr. Charles Jones made a motion to table this item until the next regularly scheduled commission meeting. Mrs. Smith seconded the motion. All voted aye and motion passed unanimously.

**Director Reports:** Mr. Rhoads submitted director reports for the months of November and December 2014.

Mr. Rhoads stated that a Hamburger Tax breakdown will be brought to the next regularly scheduled commission meeting.

Mr. Rhoads reported that the top three (3) Facebook hits were comments and likes about the rocket slide, Mayor's Christmas card that included Ian Hope and Shep, and introduction of Shep to the public.

The city and department websites have been updated.

**Calendar of Events:** Mrs. Stephens stated that the next commission agenda deadline is Tuesday, February 3, 2015, at 2:00 p.m. Any items need to be called in by that date and time to the Parks and Recreation Administration Office.

The next regularly scheduled commission meeting is Tuesday, February 17, 2015, at 5:00 p.m. in the North Little Rock Community Center.

**Adjournment:** Mrs. Smith made a motion, seconded by Mr. Charles Jones, to adjourn at 6:03 p.m. All voted aye and the motion passed unanimously.

**Public Comments:** Mrs. Stephens opened the meeting for public comments.

Mr. Doug Trantham said he wants the disc golf course to be updated with new baskets and a new 18-hole course built on the outskirts of the soccer fields. He has a plan for this and will provide all material and labor.

Mrs. Stephens said it would be nice to have this for those that like to play disc golf, but there has to be some compensation to the department, as there is no money in the budget for this.

Mr. Caplinger said they have an unwritten agreement that this organization maintain and manage the Burns Park course.

Mrs. Stephens said for him to turn in a proposal to the staff and list how his organization would be helping the department monetarily. Also, there will be an upcoming public hearing for capital wants.

Mr. Charles Jones told him to put a dollar value on what they would be doing to benefit the park.

Mr. Trantham said he would do this and go to the upcoming public hearing.

Submitted by,

Otistene Smith, Secretary