

**MINUTES
REGULAR MEETING OF THE
SPRINGFIELD-GREENE COUNTY PARK BOARD
Friday, April 10, 2020
Via Tele-conference Call**

I. ROLL CALL

Ms. Carolyn Gerdes, Chair, called the meeting to order at 8:37 a.m.

Members Present (on call): Scott Bailes, Randy Blackwood, Mike Chiles, Carolyn Gerdes, Cynthia Lipscomb, Tammy Mast, Sidney Needem, Michele Risdal-Barnes

Members Absent: none

Park Board Staff Present (on call): Bob Belote, Tim Carpenter, Matt Coats, Mike Crocker, Jeff Cumley, Jenny Filmer Edwards, Jim Fisher, Anne-Mary McGrath, Karen Mellinger, Jerry Mitchell, Miles Park, Kim Reser, Diana Tyndall, Lana Woolsey

II. APPROVAL OF MINUTES

Ms. Michele Risdal-Barnes made a motion to approve the March 13, 2020, Park Board Minutes; seconded by Mr. Randy Blackwood. Motion was approved unanimously.

III. MISSOURI DEPARTMENT OF TRANSPORTATION GRANT ACCEPTANCE FOR NEW SENIOR/ACCESSIBLE VAN

Ms. Anne-Mary McGrath, Superintendent of Recreation, stated that we received confirmation that Parks had been awarded a grant from the Ozarks Transportation Organization and Missouri Department of Transportation through the Enhanced Mobility of Seniors and Individuals with Disabilities Program for an accessible vehicle. An additional vehicle will expand our program opportunities to serve the Recreation Division, but it will also benefit our other programs and departmental special events. The new accessible vehicle will provide safer and easier accessibility in the loading and unloading of wheelchairs and wider aisles. The grant provides 80 percent of the funding or \$57,670, with Parks responsible for 20 percent of the funding or \$11,534. The Northview staff has raised \$9,325 of the \$11,534 needed, and they will continue to fundraise until the goal amount is reached. Ms. Michele Risdal-Barnes made a motion to accept the OTO and MoDot grant; seconded by Mr. Randy Blackwood. Motion was approved unanimously.

IV. PARKS DEPARTMENT COVID-19 SITUATION UPDATE

Mr. Bob Belote, Director of Parks, provided a brief update on our department's efforts as related to the ongoing COVID-19/Coronavirus situation. He stated that we have worked closely with the Springfield-Greene County Health Department to ensure proper protocols to keep our parks, trails, and golf courses open. The SGCHD has been supportive of citizens participating in outside activities and consider it an essential function for achieving physical exercise, while

practicing physical distancing. Our Communications Team has included valuable resource links and developed a frequently asked questions fact sheet regarding the COVID-19 health updates and stay-at-home orders on our Parks website. Additionally, they have created a variety of “Parks Pick-Me-Up” videos with exercise activities, scavenger hunts, coloring pages, parks testimonials, and information about our parks and trails, while still strongly emphasizing appropriate health guidelines and physical distancing protocols. We have also posted signs reminding patrons to adhere to the health guidelines and physical distancing protocols while visiting our parks and trails. Park Rangers and staff are also recommending to groups about keeping their distance and disbursing crowds they see in the parks or on trails. Mr. Belote stated that currently pavilions are not available, playgrounds are taped off, water fountains remain turned off, and park restroom facilities that normally would be reopened for spring and summer activities, remain closed. We have increased our cleaning and disinfecting protocols at the four restroom sites that are open all-year round due to the demands of these high traffic parks. Mr. Jim Fisher, Assistant Director, stated that we have received positive feedback for keeping the golf courses open as this activity is considered to offer both mental and physical health benefits. We are diligently working to continue making visiting our golf courses available, while still abiding by the CDC guidelines.

Mr. Belote stated that as far as when other facilities will be allowed to open, we anticipate that it may be at least another 30 days. When we can open our other facilities and continue with programming may depend upon how many people are allowed to assemble in groups or within a facility at any one time. He mentioned that with the City’s hiring freeze, which included no hiring of part-time and seasonal employees, we are simply not ready to open many of our facilities. The City Manager has requested a list of essential hires for both full-time and part-time positions, so hopefully we will soon receive approval to hire for those positions to help us be prepared when we are allowed to continue with our daily operations even if it is at a limited capacity. Mr. Belote stated that as more information becomes available, we will continue to share it with the Park Board.

V. UTILIZATION OF SPECIAL ZOO/FOZ FUND

Mr. Belote stated that the Dickerson Park Zoo is currently closed due to the COVID-19 health situation, but we still have significant costs associated with animal care and the maintenance of the grounds. We have an auxiliary staff of 14 people, who are paid by the Friends of the Zoo and assist with the care and operation of the zoo. Without the daily admissions revenue, along with additional revenue from school field trips and special events, the ongoing maintenance and animal care cost grows increasingly hard to manage.

Mr. Crocker stated that in 1982 the Friends of the Zoo and the Park Board entered into a contract in which certain aspects of the zoo animal collection management was transferred to Friends of the Zoo. The agreement gave FOZ responsibility to acquire and dispose of animals, making the process more efficient. As part of this arrangement, an Animal Trust was established as an emergency animal replacement fund. Funds in excess of \$15,000 can be used for animals, maintenance, and improvements at the zoo at the request of Friends of the Zoo, with approval from the Park Board. The fund has been used in the past for zoo improvements, but not to purchase animals, as this is no longer a recommended practice in the animal world. Mr. Crocker stated that Friends of the Zoo is requesting an amendment to the trust agreement and approval

to use \$26,000 of the current fund, which currently has a balance of \$27,500, for maintenance of the animal collection due to the current COVID-19 health situation and closure of the Zoo until the health crisis subsides. Mr. Crocker stated that \$15,000 of this amount would be repaid. A written letter from the Friends of the Zoo President indicating their Board's approval of this amendment and use of the funds was included in the Park Board's packet for review. Mr. Randy Blackwood made the motion to approve the amendment to the trust agreement; seconded by Ms. Michele Risdal-Barnes. Motion was approved unanimously. Mr. Sidney Needem made the motion to authorize the Friends of the Zoo to use \$26,000 from the funds for maintenance of the animal collection and restore the fund to \$15,000; seconded by Ms. Cynthia Lipscomb. Motion was approved unanimously.

VI. BUDGET DISCUSSION: CURRENT YEAR UPDATE AND PROPOSED AMENDED FY 2020-21 PARKS BUDGET

Mr. Belote stated that he has been meeting with the City Manager's Office and the City Finance Department to discuss prospective adjustments to our FY 2020-21 Parks Budget given the anticipated drop in sales tax collection, which is projected to be approximately 20 percent, equating to nearly a million dollar loss for our Parks Budget. With these predictions, our proposed Amended Parks Budget for FY 2020-21 will be down an additional \$1.4 million dollars from our previously adopted budget. Some of the difference will be made up through City-proposed budget adjustments such as reductions to our contributions to the City's Insurance and Workers' Compensation Funds, along with forgoing employee merit steps and cost-of-living adjustments for the FY 2020-21 budget cycle due to the COVID-19 health situation. In addition to the loss of sales tax revenue, we anticipate a drop of nearly \$440,000 in revenue from our sports programs, leagues, and other recreation offerings. Mr. Belote also briefly reviewed several documents that were included in the Park Board's packet including the Budget Snapshot and Budget Summary. The amended proposed budget documents were also reviewed and discussed.

Mr. Belote mentioned that it is a good industry practice to have a reserve fund equaled to 8-10 percent of your parks budget, which would be approximately \$3,000,000 for us, but at this time, we have \$600,000 available. It is likely we will need to use our reserve funds, and then, replenish the fund beginning next year. We are tracking any COVID-19 related expenses for potential reimbursement.

We are hopeful that the revenue stream from parks sales tax will begin to pick up. When we can begin to operate again, we will need to really focus on the core services that a parks department should offer. The deferred maintenance items, along with catastrophic repairs that come with aging infrastructure, will still happen, and we will somehow have to cover these expenses within the resources we have available. Mr. Belote commented that there has been a lot of momentum from the FWD Springfield Comprehensive Plan, which has included citizen requests for more trails, outside and healthy lifestyle opportunities, and sports facilities, so perhaps there will be some reinvestment in our community resources. Mr. Belote stated that although the budget cuts are deep, we will maintain our core services and continue bringing families together through fun activities and events. Several Park Board members expressed their appreciation to the Parks staff for their detailed work in our amended budget proposal. The Board members also stated that they were hopeful that the public appreciates the efforts

made by Parks staff to continue offering core park services and the new creative ways we have developed for people to experience our great park system. Mr. Mike Chiles made the motion to approve the amended FY 2020-21 Parks Budget as presented; seconded by Ms. Michele Risdal-Barnes. Motion passed unanimously. Mr. Belote thanked the Park Board for their in-depth discussions regarding our budget and for their on-going support as we continue to navigate through the health crisis and financial uncertainty that it brings. We are hopeful we will see some relief in the next 30 days, but we will make the best of the situation until then.

VII. COMMITTEE REPORT

There were no Committee Reports to discuss.

VIII. DIRECTOR'S REPORT

Mr. Belote indicated that we would not have verbal reports from our Administrative team today due to time constraints, but their division written reports were included in the Board member's packets for review.

Mr. Randy Blackwood stated that he read every word of each report this month. At a time when it would be easier to not offer any activities, he was extremely proud of our dedicated park professionals who have been incredibly creative and developed new opportunities for our citizens to enjoy. The Parks Department is a tremendous resource within our community, and he is very proud of our efforts to continue operating as we can within approved guidelines.

IX. CHAIR'S REPORT

The Chair did not have a report.

X. UNFINISHED BUSINESS

There was no unfinished business to discuss.

XI. NEW BUSINESS

There was no new business to discuss.

XII. CALENDAR

a. Park Board Meeting: Friday, May 8, 2020, at 8:30 am, via teleconference call.

XIII. ADJOURNMENT

Mr. Sidney Needem made at motion to adjourn the meeting; seconded by Ms. Michele Risdal-Barnes. Motion was approved unanimously. The meeting adjourned at 9:43 a.m.