

Park Commission Meeting Minutes
4th Quarter FY 2019-20
Virtual Meeting via MS Teams
August 6, 2020
4:15 p.m.

Call to Order and Roll Call

The 4th Quarter meeting was called to order at 4:22 p.m. by Zac Gall, Chair of the Park Commission, with commission members present via MS Teams as follows: Shawn Brimer, Diane Kyser, and advisory member Roger Hershey. Commission Members Gail Price and Jolie Austin were absent. Eric Urfer, Director; Morris Heide, Assistant Director; Mike Hicks, Parks & Grounds Manager; Jodi Wynn, Recreation Manager; and Tamara Bennetzen, Staff Assistant; were present representing Parks/Recreation/Tourism Department staff and Steve Wagner with City7 was present to live stream the meeting.

Approval of Previous Meeting Minutes

Minutes of the April 23, 2020 meeting were approved as written. Diane moved and Roger seconded.

Chair Comments

Chair Zac Gall encouraged everyone to take a look at the bridge work on 24 Highway into the Truman Library; he commented that it was vastly improved and looks very nice. He then commented that in taking a look at parks in general, it seems like some of the temporary barrier fencing around playgrounds is staying up.

Director's Report

- PRT and Arena Status
 - PRT Facilities, Programs, & Staffing Status: Director Urfer asked Managers Jodi Wynn and Mike Hicks to provide updates on their divisions. Mike stated that they are having many issues with homeless camps; during this last quarter they removed 21 camps, removed 64 graffiti incidents, and cleared 46 vandalism issues. He added that they are struggling to keep up with mowing due to rain and crews pulled to replace playground fencing, sometimes three times per day. Additionally, due to COVID-19 budget cuts, they had to cut contracts and restrict seasonal staff which has also hampered ability to keep up with mowing. Park Maintenance installed a pad, grill, and picnic tables at Fairmount Park. Facility maintenance crews have been busy keeping facilities running. Eric reiterated the issues they've encountered, and asked for patience as they try to make headway and get caught up. Roger said he was at George Owens today for the first time and he was pleasantly surprised that it looked better than he expected and a group of people were headed to the lake for fishing. Eric said GONP has had a resurgence of activity since COVID hit. Jodi said they are seeing a lot of new people, and are preparing for the hummingbird festival and hope to have an event that allows for social distancing. Jodi said a little over 1,200 people went through the park in July. Palmer Center is still closed for people to come in and use the facility; 10,260 meals have been delivered to homes for meal participants; and staff has made over 900 wellness calls. TMB and Sermon have opened back up and are offering modified programming. Traffic is down, but people are coming back. The Farmers Market has been going since May and is now walk up rather than drive-thru; over 1,200 people came through the Farmers Market in July. All the facilities are doing temp checks and masks. Diane asked when Palmer might reopen; Jodi explained that MARC has encouraged facilities not to reopen and rather continue with home delivered meal programs. Eric said they are following MARC guidance and staying in contact with other area centers to stay in sync with each other as far as reopening. Eric then explained that Tourism sites are closed for the remainder of the season due to staffing, as the majority of volunteers being at risk to COVID, as well as budget constraints, as Transient Guest Tax is down 57%.

- ESF6: Director Urfer provided an update on ESF6. He explained that PRT staff is continuing to serve in that roll in a couple of ways, including: food distribution through UDSA, in partnership with Volunteer KC, which served over 4,000 families in Independence in June. They expect to find out on August 24 if there will be additional food distribution events in September. PRT also helped with coordination and logistics of Jackson County's mask distribution event at the Cable Dahmer Arena. PRT may also be asked to host a donation site for PPE including masks, disinfecting wipes, etc. If so, they would be a receiving site and distribution and plan to use the Palmer Center at this point. Diane asked what types of PPE the schools are needing; Eric said they're not sure and will find out when they start getting calls for donations. Diane asked if they use volunteers for distribution; Eric said yes – wayfinding/traffic control volunteers are from EOC, and for food distribution they are utilizing Volunteer KC and ancillary volunteers from ESF6. Diane said she hasn't seen any requests for volunteers, to which Eric responded that they are going through those organizations for volunteers that have been trained and prepped up for these types of tasks. Zac asked about CARES act funding and asked if the PRT department is going to apply for that for tourism. Eric said they only qualify for a certain segment of that funding and have received only \$59,000 of the \$15 Million for marketing; but, they are lobbying for additional funding.
- Budget Discussion
 - 19-20 Budget Position: Eric explained that going into the 4th Quarter is when the State of Emergency was declared and all facilities and programs were shut down. We were forced to cut \$1 Million of an \$8 Million budget. Eric reviewed each Cost Center within the PRT department. There were no questions.
 - 20-21 Approved Budget: Eric asked Morris to go through the new budget year approved budget. Each Fund's revenue, operating, and capital were reviewed in detail for the past two fiscal year actuals and the approved budget for 2020-21. Morris explained the General Fund – now Health & Recreation Fund, and Eric explained the Transient Guest Tax Fund. Roger asked about staffing; as far as levels and morale. Eric explained that they are starting to bring back some part time staff and just filled one full time staff vacancy, but they are still way down on seasonal workers and contractors. For Recreation, there are three or four full time positions vacant and there are many part time positions vacant. For Tourism, all but two of the NFTM staff are vacant; fortunately, they were vacant going into the pandemic, so they didn't have to let anyone go. From a morale perspective, Eric stated it's tough right now. Staff is tired, working overtime and pulling duties outside of their normal scope; rules change daily causing a constant flow of information and action. From a patron standpoint, there are a lot of people supporting us, but there are a lot of people upset and complaining; but, Eric has told staff not to take it personally, everyone is just upset and generally frustrated with the current pandemic. Eric has advised staff to stay away from social media and not take things personally. Roger asked that Eric let staff know that the Park Commission asks about it and wants staff to know they appreciate their hard work and dedication. Roger asked about staff relationship with Council; Eric said there are some complaints coming through the City Manager's or Mayor's office that are being addressed accordingly.

Old Business

Upcoming meeting schedule – Zac discussed and asked if the 4:15 time is what we hope to continue. Roger said he would defer to the employed members of the Commission. No one had any issues. Roger and Diane are both fine with the dates and the time. Tamara will go ahead and send appointments for the next three meetings.

New Business

None. Roger asked if there is anything the Commission can do to help staff. Eric said he appreciates the kind words and encourages everyone to go shopping. Zac encouraged everyone to shop local at stores that are anchored in our community. Eric mentioned that the State is looking to include sales tax on online retailers like Wayfair in the near future and that it would certainly help if that were passed.

Adjournment

With no other business appearing before the Park Commission, this meeting was adjourned at 5:27 p.m.