

FAIRFIELD PARKS AND RECREATION BOARD

MINUTES

TUESDAY, NOVEMBER 10, 2009

The monthly meeting of the Fairfield Parks and Recreation Board was conducted on Tuesday, November 10, 2009 at the Fairfield Community Arts Center. Chair Carol Oler called the meeting to order at 5:27 PM. Board members in attendance were: Carol Oler, Bob Myron, Doug Meece, Bob Breen and Dick Wood. Board Members Tim Meyers and Don Hassler were excused. Staff members present were: Jim Bell, Parks & Recreation Director; Bob Schappacher, Parks Facilities Manager; Heidi Schiller, Community Arts Center Manager; Cindi Lewellyn, Recreation Manager; Ben Strickler, Parks Events Manager; and Cyndi Kreke, Secretary.

Audience members in attendance were: Helen Mullen, Maria Mullen and Sergeant Don Garrett.

COMMENTS FROM THE AUDIENCE:

Helen Mullen addressed the Board regarding the rules and regulations regarding City Employees and Officials from participating in city sponsored events; specifically the annual Fairfield Idol Contest. Under the current rules, contestants cannot be related to City employees and/or officials. Ms. Mullen is the daughter of Maria Mullen who is an employee in the City's Development Services Department. Ms. Mullen requested that the Board consider amending this rule. She expressed her desire to participate in the contest and does not feel that it is fair that she is excluded because she is related to an employee who does not work for the Parks and Recreation Department.

The Board complimented Ms. Mullen on her passion and willingness to come before the Board to express her concerns. Carol Oler, speaking on behalf of the Board, explained to Ms. Mullen that the rules were discussed at length before being implemented. It is the consideration of the Board that the rules should stand as they are written. It is common practice that employees and their relatives are excluded from participating in contests that are hosted by their employers. The Board thanked Ms. Mullen for attending the meeting and hoped that she understood their decision.

Sergeant Don Garrett, Fairfield Police Department, was present at the request of the Board to review the roles of the Park Rangers and the Police Officers within the parks system, particularly in the Village Green/Town Center area. Sergeant Garrett stated that he has been the Sergeant in charge of the Park Rangers for about two months, since shift reorganization; but he had served previously in that capacity several years ago too; so he is familiar with the ranger situation.

Sergeant Garrett gave a short summary of what the Park Rangers and the Police Officers from his shift are doing about security around the Village Green Park/Town Center area and was asked his opinion on what can be done to reduce the perception that some visitors to the park get about young people gathering in groups there. Sergeant Garrett

explained some of the more common daily activities of the Park Rangers in handling patrol in the parks. The Park Rangers daily duties include patrolling of the Village Green Park as frequently as possible. Their duties also include deposit pickups from the golf courses, the Marsh Park fishing lake and the Aquatic Center and patrols of the other various parks in the city. The Board asked if the Rangers were doing bike patrols and Sergeant Garrett replied that currently no Rangers are doing bicycle patrol; since they were no longer qualified under the accreditation standards. The Rangers work together with responding Police Officers to handle complaints at the Village Green Park. With the two tiered system of rangers, Rangers McCune and Custard have limited police authority, but can detain persons until officers arrive; while Rangers Kraft and Greiner have full police authority. The Board asked if the staff was adequate and Sergeant Garrett thought that any future park expansions would place a burden on Park Rangers and Officers for patrol and enforcement (i.e. additional bike/hike paths, Marsh Park expansion, Black Bottom Park development).

The Board questioned the usage and effectiveness of the Village Green Park and Library outside camera/security system. Sergeant Garrett stated that the dispatchers can monitor the area by the video security cameras but the cameras do “freeze-up”, are sometimes in disrepair, coverage area inadequate, the picture quality is not good and some cameras do not have the ability to zoom in. The dispatchers generally notify Steve Collins, IT Network Analyst, of issues with the cameras, since Mr. Collins is the IT assigned to the Police Department. Since all the cameras are assigned to one monitor, the individual camera views are not large enough for the officers or dispatchers to see specifically what a person is doing. The Board asked if the problems with the security camera system was an equipment problem, IT problem or dispatch/training problem. Sergeant Garrett was unsure, but stated that the cameras had been helpful in several situations to identify trouble and to monitor the movements of juveniles in the Village Green area.

Sergeant Garrett stated that there is confusion among the officers and rangers as to the laws regarding the sidewalk around the Village Green Park and surrounding area. The sidewalk is a public sidewalk and therefore open to the citizens on skateboards as well as other pedestrians. He stated that the signage at Village Green Park is insufficient and should include signs at every entrance to the Park regarding the rules of the Park. Also there is no signage stating the hours of the park and per the current park rules all parks close at dusk. The Board members and Jim Bell stated that the dusk closing for parks is not intended to apply to the Village Green area, which is more of a town plaza area. Jim Bell stated that he would be in contact with the Law Director to investigate amending a park rule that would define the Village Green area as its own separate area and its operation hours. Jim Bell stated that the officers and rangers should use some common sense and if the juveniles are using the library terrace, the drained pond areas, amphitheater, stairs, etc., as a skate park or other non-designed activities. There are disorderly conduct rules within the park system that prohibit persons from engaging in conduct that inconveniences, annoys or alarms other persons within a park site. The Board and Sergeant Garrett discussed the juveniles congregating on the amphitheater stage and how to restrict access to the amphitheatre stage, since currently there was no rule prohibiting the juveniles from hanging out on the stage. Several means to discourage the youth were discussed (classical music, the use of decorative barrier chains/signage to prohibit access to the stage). The classical music on the library terrace was also

recommended by Sergeant Garrett. Sergeant Garrett and Bob Schappacher agreed that the damage in the library terrace area has decreased as this year has progressed.

Sergeant Garrett stated that he, the Rangers, and the Police Officers frequently talk with the skateboarders and the kids had a few ideas. Sergeant Garrett thought that several of the skateboarders may have come to the meeting this evening to discuss their ideas; but it appeared that none had decided to attend. Sergeant Garrett stated that the current skate park is in the City of Hamilton and was designed primarily as a skateboard/roller skate area. The Fairfield Officers/Rangers have no authority at that facility. Per the skateboarders the BMX bikes that have taken over the facility and therefore most skateboarder do not use the skate park. There are signs restricting the hours that the BMX bikes can use the facility; but the Hamilton Police Department does not regularly patrol the skate park. Jim Bell stated that per a meeting with HPD, early in the skate park operation, HPD had installed a hidden security camera, near the Nuxhall Driving Range, that focused on the skate park for HPD viewing. The skateboarder were frustrated, since there is a dedicated BMX track in Joyce Park. The skateboarders had suggested that placing some limited grinding rails, steps and curbing specifically for the skaters to use at another Fairfield park site would move most of the skaters away from Village Green. Jim Bell stated that several park systems had built a “street course” as described and if the Board wanted to investigate this option, staff would make some inquiries. The skaters had suggested the Aquatic Center parking lot or other outlying parks areas. The skaters also suggested that locking skate board racks, similar to bike racks, be installed in the Village Green area, then the kids would not have to always carry their skateboards into building such as the library or CAC.

The Board questioned the perception that the Village Green area being unsafe, due to the large groups of juveniles that congregate in the area; from the dismissal of school until after dark. The City and the Parks Board has made a large investment in this area and if it is perceived that the area has been “taken over”, then families will go elsewhere. Sergeant Garrett stated that discussions that the perception of the kids being trouble makers is more of an issue than actual criminal activity. The general public tend to see the kids in the park, grouped together and then the people avoid coming back or contact the police. Many working parents tend to use the area (library, park CAC) as a “safe” area for their kids to hang out with friends, until they can be picked up after work. Others see that some kids have skateboards and then assume all of the kids at the park are causing problems. There was a consensus from the Board to be progressive at reducing actually criminal activity at Village Green area, investigate other constructive alternative at other venues for the kids’ activities and reduce the misuse of the park areas. The Board stated that it wants to ensure that there are enough Park Rangers available to handle the city’s current and future needs; and would broach that subject with their Council-Board representative.

The Board thanked Sergeant Garrett for attending the meeting and felt that the discussions were very productive and insightful.

MINTUES FROM THE PREVIOUS MEETING:

A motion was made and seconded to approve the minutes from the October 13, 2009 meeting. The October 2009 minutes were approved as presented.

REPORT FROM THE DIRECTOR:

Operations Reports: Jim Bell reviewed the September 2009 operations reports for revenues, expenses, and participation/programming numbers from the Golf Courses, Community Arts Center and the Recreation programs (attached).

2009 CIP Review: Jim Bell reviewed the 2009 Capital Improvements projects and stated that the Department had completed approximately \$1,100,000.00 in projects (report attached). Jim Bell also reviewed the 2010-2013 CIP, which the Board had approved in Fall 2008. Jim Bell asked that the Board review these projects prior to the December Board meeting, in order to prioritize the projects in preparation for the submission of the 2010-2014 CIP.

2009 Cycle Cross Review: Jim Bell discussed the 2009 Cycle-Cross event at Harbin Park in October and the subsequent citizen comments. The Board concurred that the event was a positive for the community and felt that the negative comments were unjustified and in the minority. The Board had received far more positive comments than negative comments.

REPORTS OF AD HOC COMMITTEES:

City Council Update: None

Planning Commission Update: None

Environmental Commission Update: Bob Breen stated that the last Environmental Commission meeting was cancelled due to lack of quorum. The Environmental Commission was in the process of reviewing its 2009 objectives and the Tree City USA re-certification application. Bob Breen commented upon the vacancies within the Environmental Commission (2 seats). Jim Bell stated that he had sent correspondences to the Spring 2009 Board/Commission applicants, which were not selected, informing them of the vacancies.

Cultural Arts Advisory Commission Update: Bob Myron reported on the up-coming Footlighters production (The Best Christmas Pageant Ever) and the previous weekend's events at the CAC. Bob Myron stated that Heidi Schiller had reported upon the 2010 schedule for the CAC.

OLD BUSINESS: None

NEW BUSINESS: None

EXECUTIVE SESSION: None

The Parks and Recreation Board meeting adjourned at 7:17 PM. The next monthly meeting of the Board is scheduled to be held at 5:30 PM on December 8, 2009 at the Community Arts Center.

Cyndi A Kreke
Secretary