



WORTHINGTON PARKS AND RECREATION COMMISSION

Minutes of the Tuesday, June 16, 2020 Meeting

Note – This meeting was conducted virtually via Microsoft Teams.

Members Present - The members present were Laura Ball, Rachel DeNoewer, David Kessler, Alan McKnight, Michele Miller and Rob Wendling. City support staff Darren Hurley, Parks & Recreation Director, and Celia Thornton, Recorder, were also present.

The minutes from the February 18, 2020 meeting were approved.

COVID-19 Updates – Mr. Hurley gave a status update on each of the areas below.

- a. Park Openings** - Parks and trails have remained open to the public. Playgrounds have been closed but are re-opening for use. Restrooms will be opening and will be on a daily cleaning schedule. Basketball Courts will not be opening as it is considered a contact sport. Ms. Miller inquired about placing port-a-johns at park locations. Mr. Hurley said he would like the Commission's input on this subject. Parks Crew doesn't have the manpower to keep them clean, and the cost to have the Port-a-John company do it isn't feasible. At this point the department hasn't received many complaints and it helps shorten times at park locations, particularly the dog park, which may shorten exposure opportunities. Mr. Wendling asked if the skate park was open. Mr. Hurley replied that it just opened. The group briefly discussed the large amount of people utilizing the Olentangy Trail. Ms. Miller suggested that she's a big fan of trail etiquette being posted in general, but also thinks it would be a good idea to post additional COVID safety signage along the trail. Mr. Hurley promised to take these recommendations to the Bike & Pedestrian Advisory Board but cautioned that even with signage user behavior is difficult to change. Mr. Wendling agreed saying he'd heard lots of complaints regarding no mask usage or proper distancing on the trail. Mr. Hurley responded that based on Columbus Public Health recommendations he's hesitant to recommend wearing masks to people while working out due to health concerns.
- b. Community Center Re-Opening Progress** - Mr. Hurley complimented staff on their hard work to get the Community Center back up and running while following all the new health and safety guidelines. Staff are wearing masks and users are asked to when not actively working out. Ms. Miller commented that this seems in line with all the other gyms. Mr. Hurley noted that we've had a few requests that masks be worn at all times (including while working out) by the high-risk group, but that he's explained that the science doesn't support this as a beneficial option. Mr. Hurley also explained that HVAC was

optimized as much as possible to bring in fresh air, though opening windows and doors are not options. All small personal fans had to be removed, but large ceiling fans will stay in use. As a next step staff hopes to open the pool area. The guidelines are set and staff ready to go once current pool maintenance issues have been resolved. He expects to open aquatics for lap lane and water aerobics usage, but the leisure pool will remain closed to children for the time being.

- c. **Griswold Center Status** - The Griswold Center is not open and will not do so until the orders from the Governor and Ohio Public Health allow senior centers to reopen. Like the Community Center, staff are staying prepared with best practices so we can respond quickly if we can open.
- d. **Programming** - Staff have been offering virtual programs and events. Mr. McKnight inquired about participation numbers. Mr. Hurley promised to email the number of programs and participants to the Commission before the next meeting.

Budget and Operations and Project Impacts – Mr. Hurley shared some of the budget challenges being faced by the city and the department. The city relies heavily on income tax collection and with the rising unemployment rate there is concern about significant impacts to the city's revenues this year and possibly into future years. In addition, Parks and Recreation revenues are way down as a result of the facility and park closures. Until we can obtain more clarity, the city is taking a very conservative approach to expenditures including delaying several CIP projects and cutting many operating budget items. The Commission then discussed the Community Center parking lot re-paving project and progress. Mr. Kessler asked what could be done about the current McCord Park playground if the funding was pulled for the McCord Park Project. He noted that it was in very bad shape and questioned whether funding could be found this year to at least replace the playground where it is. Mr. Hurley agreed that the safety surface was in bad shape but said that Parks Crew assures him that the equipment is safe, if not attractive. Mr. Hurley said he would be pushing for a decision this fall to see if at least the playground could move ahead, and the caboose. Mr. Kessler stated he'd like the playground re-done for next year's use. Mr. Hurley indicated he has made it clear to city administration and City Council that we might have to close the playground in 2021 if it hasn't been replaced. Mr. Hurley also shared that the Olentangy River flooding had caused significant damage to parks, especially on the Olentangy Trail (particularly under the S.R. 161 bridge). Additionally, Perry, Snouffer, Linworth and Godown Parks sustained damage during the previous week's storms. Parks Crew will be cleaning up the damage as quickly as staffing levels and access to the chipper (shared with the Service Department) will allow. Mr. McKnight asked if there was new information or discussion regarding Worthington's outdoor pool and plans for a joint recreation district. Mr. Hurley said that was currently on hold. Ms. Ball asked if the NE Gateway project was still moving forward. Mr. Hurley said that because it was partially paid for with federal funding that project will continue as planned and will include trail connections across the railroad tracks on East Wilson Bridge Road and into McCord Park.

Other - Ms. Thornton gave a brief status update on the Community Gardens at McCord and Snouffer Parks. Garden revenue is \$1,230. There are 32 gardeners at McCord Park and seven at Snouffer. Ms. Miller suggested that the department investigate creating small mountain biking trails at the Olentangy Parklands. She feels there is a good place for this south of the skate park in the woods where small obstacles could be added. This could be a starting point for small children and their parents into the sport. Mr. Kessler complimented Parks & Recreation staff and said he thinks they are doing a great job.

Being no further business, the motion for the meeting to adjourn was granted.