



## **WORTHINGTON PARKS AND RECREATION COMMISSION**

### **Minutes of the Tuesday, September 15, 2020 Meeting**

**Note** – This meeting was conducted virtually via Microsoft Teams.

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

The minutes from the July 21, 2020 meeting were approved.

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

- a. Park Openings** – Parks are almost fully operational. Soccer and field hockey are underway, and baseball and softball have been on-going. Overall, the parks have experienced heavy usage with people looking to do things outside during COVID-19. Our Parks staff have been doing their best to keep maintenance levels high while still short staffed with the cuts to seasonal staff. Full-time recreation staff have been assisting with watering, landscaping and some field work which has helped significantly. Mr. Wendling asked if there were still no non-resident park rentals. Mr. Hurley said that in general there are no non-resident field rentals, as staff are focusing resources on Worthington Youth Booster activities and other resident and regular field uses. We are not currently doing any facility rentals indoors or at Selby Park.
- b. Community Center Re-Opening Progress** – The Community Center remains open on a limited basis. Usage is steady, but light, and staff will keep assessing use as days get shorter and temperatures drop. The pool opened on September 8, but this may be temporary. The pipe project was thought complete but testing once phase one was completed led to the discovery of a second leak in another section of the original piping. Mr. Hurley explained that this will result in more digging (through the day camp shelter area and into the building) and pipe replacement. This second phase will cost an additional \$135,000 for a full replacement and may result in an additional pool shut down for several weeks, depending on outside air temperatures. Once phase two is finished the pool will re-open more fully and staff will assess hours based on cost and usage. There are still no facility or

room rentals. Mr. McKnight asked how the pandemic has affected membership. Mr. Hurley explained that memberships were extended for the closure (from the middle of March to June), and that people have been given the options of keeping their pass suspended, or canceling, if they don't feel it's safe to return to the building. He also said that while revenue was down, these losses have been off set by savings, so the overall net loss isn't as bad as it may seem. By the end of August in 2019 the Community Center had brought in \$1.7 million in revenues. In that same time frame for 2020 revenue was \$831,000. Expenditures for 2019 (end of August) were \$3.7 million and in 2020 were at \$3 million. By not filling staff positions, furloughing part-time staff, and with other saving measures, the department only has a gap of \$144,000. Mr. Armitage noted that the building is almost empty during the times he comes to workout. Mr. Hurley and the commission discussed the need for another video on Community Center safety practices to encourage members and other patrons to return. Mr. Kessler asked if the locker rooms reopened with the pool. Mr. Hurley said they had not fully reopened. At this time, staff are asking guests to wear their swimming suits into the building, enter the pool through the Fishbowl, use an assigned bench for belongings, and exit through the locker rooms (using them to change clothes), but showering, lockers, etc. are still off limits due to cleaning and spacing concerns.

- c. **Griswold Center Status** - The Griswold Center is still closed, but the Governor announced that senior centers can reopen on September 21. The guidelines for re-opening have been published and will be challenging to meet. They include COVID mandatory testing of staff prior to opening and on a regular, on-going basis. Staff is assessing these, and all guidelines, to understand whether they can be met, whether the facility can be made safe enough and whether seniors are ready to return. The Griswold Center will not open on Sept. 21, but if staff feels they can meet the standards it could possibly reopen in October.
- d. **Programming & Events** – Staff is working on adding programming for October through December and are prioritizing which programs get the limited space with one gym down and spacing requirements. Program registration will occur monthly to maintain flexibility and will be heavily marketed once staff is ready. Events continue to be a challenge with the rule prohibiting a gathering of more than ten. The Marketing Team did manage to have some virtual Patriot's Day activities and is currently assessing Halloween and the Tree Lighting Ceremony. Mr. McKnight suggested the possibility of a concert, such as was done at the McConnell Center. Mr. Hurley said that staff is aware of provisions for drive-ins and has looked at that as an option, but also is wary of putting the City in a difficult position by appearing to orchestrate large gatherings. Mr. Hurley also shared that most part-time staff are still furloughed and that only a few staff that can be paid for by added revenue are working. Staff is looking ahead to 2021 and trying to predict future participation and revenue numbers.

**McCord Park Renovations/Playground** – City Council will soon be discussing all tabled CIP projects as the budget process starts. Mr. Hurley has clearly communicated that Phase 1 of the McCord Park Renovation Plan is a priority and that the Parks Commission and staff would like to see it completed in 2021. At a minimum, the playground must be addressed as it cannot open in 2021 given safety concerns. Options for the playground are:

1. Replace the playground at the beginning of 2021, or as early as weather allows.
2. Shut it down and remove the equipment until it can be replaced.
3. Seek funding to replace the playground as designed (as far as possible).
4. Deviate from the phase one plan and replace the playground using the current footprint.

5. Wait through October for clarity from Council (best case scenario is a funded phase one that addresses both the playground and the train observation area). This is Mr. Hurley's recommendation. If by the end of October there still isn't clear funding in place, then the commission can push for a direct replacement of the playground.

The Commission spent time discussing the pros and cons of all the options. Mr. Hurley promised to let them know if there is a need for a motion at the October meeting. Ms. Miller then said that the Covid signs placed along the Olentangy Trail had disappeared and Ms. Thornton promised to replace them. Ms. Miller also suggested printing more and putting them in all the parks. Mr. Wendling asked about the trail bridge replacements. Mr. Hurley replied that this is still on staff's radar but is difficult to pursue with the budget shortfall.

**Cost Recovery Study/Recommendations** – Staff is resuming work on the cost study and will be coming to the Commission next month with recommendations on where programs should fall in the pyramid. The Commission's role is to slot existing programs into the pyramid where members feel appropriate and recommend that to City Council. Any programs that exist in one slot but are recommended in another would then go through a process to see if staff can get them into the right slot by assessing expenses, fees or program structure and make corresponding adjustments or acknowledge that the program cannot meet the cost recovery goal and will have to determine whether to keep or retire the program. Mr. Hurley said he would resend the pyramid levels and encouraged Commission members to refresh their memories of the study and its initial results.

**Other** – The City's income tax revenue is better than early predictions suggested, which is good news for the overall budget situation. As discussed earlier, department revenues are down which is still a challenge moving into 2021.

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