



WORTHINGTON PARKS AND RECREATION COMMISSION

Minutes of the Tuesday, November 17, 2020 Meeting

Note – This meeting was conducted virtually via Microsoft Teams.

Members Present - The members present were Dan Armitage, Laura Ball, Rachel DeNoewer, David Kessler, Alan McKnight, Michele Miller and Rob Wendling. City support staff Darren Hurley, Parks & Recreation Director, Celia Thornton, Recorder, and Ethan Barnhardt, City Management Assistant, were present. Lauren Lange and her husband, Jeff Lange, a Worthington Police Officer and former ODNR Ranger, also attended.

The minutes from the October 20, 2020 meeting were approved.

Deer Management Presentation – Mr. Hurley introduced Mr. Ethan Barnhardt, a staff member from City Administration, and shared that he tracks deer concerns, such as car accidents and lawn destruction, reported by residents and has conducted significant research into options for deer population management. Mr. Barnhardt said the City considers deer a citywide issue and thought it might be a good idea to share some information on deer control practices used by other local municipalities and see if the board had any input to share. Mr. Barnhardt proceeded to give a presentation on deer populations and management practices, which included hunting options, sterilization, birth control and residential feeding restrictions. Ms. DeNoewer wondered if the City should do more checking with MetroParks as she thinks they may have other, better solutions. She doesn't like any of the hunting options but does see some benefit to a no feeding policy. Mr. Wendling said that Gahanna had a very successful hunting program, but that it took a lot of time to get residents on board and he isn't sure Worthington has the same opportunity for hunting space. If considered, hunters would need to police themselves and make sure to not be field dressing deer in public view. Mr. Armitage suggested the City communicate with ODNR's Deer Program Administrator. He doesn't believe hunting alone will fix the problem, and certainly not without public support, and thinks landscape management might be a better solution. He also wondered why the City is concerned about deer as he doesn't see them to be a problem based on the data presented including low numbers of vehicular accidents reported. Mr. Kessler concurred and said residents should plant native plants that deer don't eat and then they won't be upset by deer feeding on their landscaping. Ms. DeNoewer, who lives along the Olentangy Parklands, pointed out that deer populations have increased dramatically in the past few years. She thinks it's wise for the City to be aware as it's only a matter of time until there are accidents or harmful deer/people interactions, and she doesn't believe this is a problem that will go away on its own. Ms. Ball said the deer present

issues for dog owners. Her dog jumps increasingly higher fences (that they keep installing) to get to deer. Her dog even chased a deer into the street where the deer was then hit by a car. There have also been negative deer/dog interactions and injuries in back yards. She thinks bow hunting is an interesting option and agrees with the no feeding policy. Ms. Thornton and Mr. Wendling shared that deer do a lot of damage to the urban forest. Mr. Wendling thinks education and feeding ordinances might be most effective in Worthington. Mr. Hurley then introduced Worthington Police Officer Jeff Lange, who previously spent seven and a half years working for ODNR. Officer Lange works third shift, so he sees many of the deer throughout the City at night. He said that while the City is showing relatively few car accidents as related to deer on paper, he believes that 95% of deer crashes are not reported, for a variety of reasons. He does believe feeding is a big issue in the City but wants the PRC to understand that an ordinance would need to include the exclusion of bird feeders, which could be a controversial issue. There are several herds in the City, and he does think they are relatively isolated and that not a lot of breeding between herds goes on, so birth control or sterilization may work well. After a little more discussion, the PRC opted to consider having further discussions on feeding restrictions and whether to make any recommendations to a future meeting.

Cost Recovery Study Recommendations – Mr. Hurley reviewed cost recovery charts and then overviewed staff's attempts to put all programs into the correct cost recovery categories. He noted that the word "new" denoted places where more work needs to be done to separate out specific programs from a wider category, such as our recreational preschool program from general preschool age programs. For this evening, Mr. Hurley just wanted general feedback on staff's recommendations so he could make any adjustments before bringing back for a more formal recommendation. There was a little discussion with Mr. McKnight asking questions about Griswold Personal Fitness and Mr. Wendling asking about the SilverSneakers program. Mr. Hurley asked the PRC to spend some time reviewing the charts between now and the first of the year. There will be one more chance to review program placement before staff requests a formal recommendation that would go to City Council. Ms. DeNoewer asked, in the few places where cost recovery was higher than expected, if the department was planning on reducing costs. Mr. Hurley responded that would not be the case unless there was some indication the programs were charging too much.

Park Projects Update

1. Selby Park Playground – Mr. Hurley said that playground survey results from Colonial Hills residents will be sent to consultants and that a survey will be given to Colonial Hills Elementary students in which they can circle pictures of the types of playground equipment they would like to have included. After receiving the surveys consultants will create two or three designs to put out for further public input. The design team is still deciding how to best do this safely during a pandemic. Mr. Hurley asked for PRC suggestions. Mr. McKnight suggested posting them at the Community Center, to which Mr. Hurley expressed some concern around building contact tracing procedures. Mr. Wendling thinks they could be put in Selby Shelter House for one-way viewing with limited people. There was agreement that some mix of in-person and online feedback might be safest and most effective.
2. McCord Park Renovations Phase One – Mr. Hurley shared that this project is back in progress. There is no more need for public input and the project will go out to bid this winter and should be under construction come spring.

COVID-19 Updates – The tree lighting ceremony has been modified to avoid large gatherings of people. The current plan is the tree will be re-lit every half hour from 6pm to 8pm so that people can stroll by and enjoy it on their own. Holiday music will be playing the entire time. Mr. Hurley also let the PRC know that the old tree was taken down due to disease and that a new one was planted in its place. Also, for the time being the Community Center will be staying open for fitness use, though

all programming has been canceled. A mask mandate is in place.

Other – PRC sometimes skips a formal December meeting, but Mr. Hurley requests that for the time being the Commission leave the meeting as an option since he may need to meet with them on our current park planning projects at McCord and Selby Parks prior to January.

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