



WORTHINGTON PARKS AND RECREATION COMMISSION

Minutes of the Tuesday, March 16, 2021 Meeting

Note – This meeting was conducted virtually via Microsoft Teams.

Members Present - The members present were Laura Ball, Rachel DeNoewer, Dave Kessler, Alan McKnight, and Michele Miller. City support staff Darren Hurley (Parks & Recreation Director) and Celia Thornton (Recorder) were also present, along with Kelly Shaw (7th grade Phoenix Middle School Student).

The minutes from the February 16, 2021 meeting were approved unanimously.

Mountain Biking Project Overview – Mr. Shaw has continued working with Parks & Recreation staff through the various questions and challenges of the project, and he and Mr. Hurley are bringing it back to the Parks and Recreation Commission (PRC) with more framing this evening. If approved, Mr. Hurley would like the PRC to make a recommendation to move forward dedicating the land for a trial period with the contingency that the department would enter into an agreement with the Central Ohio Mountain Biking Organization (COMBO), or a similar organization, to build and maintain the trail. There is no City funding allocated for the project at this time, but we are still searching for donations and grants. Mr. Hurley then brought up a Google Earth map of the area and said that there are a few issues to discuss, the first being a small potential for neighbor concerns or objections. He showed on the map that there is thick vegetation along the road on the trail side, and slight screening on the neighbor side of the road. The question to the PRC is whether we should send a letter to neighbors inviting them to a meeting to give feedback on the project prior to making a recommendation. Mr. Hurley said another consideration is we haven't gotten any public input on this project other than from Mr. Shaw and whether the Commission would prefer we do some surveying or seek input from the community on adding this amenity. Mr. McKnight doesn't want to get too far down the path on this project and then have neighbors complain to City Council that they weren't aware of the project. Having a feedback meeting may not change our plans but can be a good opportunity to educate and mediate any potential neighbor concerns. Ms. Ball agrees with Mr. McKnight and thinks we should send out notification to all neighbors within 150 to 300 feet of the project. Mr. McKnight thinks we should continue planning and moving forward, just plan on doing notification at some point during design of the project. He also asked if Mr. Hurley could outline the tree buffer on the map. Ms. Miller said she feels that Mr. Shaw is a good representative of the kid's perspective and that anecdotally there has been only positive feedback and support for the project. Mr. Hurley said he feels good about the environmental aspect of the project and City Arborists will be involved. The terrain is relatively clear under the trees, mostly taken up by honeysuckle, so there won't be the need to take down big trees, which would be a neighbor concern. Ms. Miller added that

keeping trees is important for the trail for the forest feel and shade for users. Mr. Hurley said that he feels the biggest outstanding issue is parking and just over-programming of an already busy park, but he believes the pattern of use of the facility will not monopolize too many spaces at one time. Mr. McKnight asked if this project would require a City ordinance or formal action. Mr. Hurley said it might result in a Council Resolution to document the dedication of land or it could require formal action to authorize the City Manager to enter into the agreement with COMBO. Mr. Hurley's last concern/issue is regarding staff time. Should COMBO back out of the project at any point, he would want wording that protects City staff from the obligation to maintain the area moving forward. If volunteer work dries up, then the area will be allowed to revert to its natural state. Mr. Hurley suggested the following recommendation language:

In the Olentangy Parklands, the wooded land north and west of West Wilson Bridge Road, south of the large soccer field, and east of the Olentangy Trail, be designated for trial development and usage of a mountain biking facility for two years with the following conditions:

- A. An agreement be reached and maintained with the Central Ohio Mountain Biking Organization (COMBO) or an organization with a similar mission to provide oversight, design and development assistance, and a volunteer base and to minimize resources required of the City to provide the facility.***
- B. During the trial period, no city capital funds (CIP) will go to the trail development allowing for an assessment of the needs and interest for this facility and for the City to assess how to prioritize alongside the projects already being planned.***
- C. All improvements during the trial period must be approved by city staff with special consideration given to the natural and environmental impacts of any work done in this area.***
- D. In the event the volunteer organization under agreement during this trial does not provide a safe and satisfactory facility for mountain biking, understanding development without funding will be gradual and move incrementally, the city after engagement and opportunities to address by the organization, will exercise its right to remove any added features and objects and restore the area to its natural state.***
- E. Staff will notify neighbors in the immediate area to gather input and address any concerns during the planning stages of the project.***

Ms. DeNoewer and Ms. Miller stated that they were ready to recommend the language as written. Mr. McKnight suggested that we add verbiage stating that the department will try to notify adjacent neighbors and work with them to address any concerns. Mr. Hurley added that to the language (see letter E) and asked if there were any other questions or concerns. Ms. DeNoewer made a motion to approve the drafted language. The motion was approved by all in attendance. Mr. Hurley said he had met with COMBO and will initiate a process to draft an agreement with them. He also congratulated Mr. Shaw and thanked him for bringing this project to the City and for all his hard work throughout the process.

Deer Population Presentation Follow Up – Mr. Hurley had asked city staff, Mr. Ethan Barnhart, for his follow up thoughts from the Commission's previous discussion and shared the following:

1. This concern is bigger than parks, so are we advocating for regulations applying just to parks or for the entire community?

2. Be aware that prohibiting just deer feeding isn't an adequate strategy, so the PRC needs to consider pet and bird feeding as well.
3. How do we enforce this? Is this an enforcement issue or more of a value statement and education campaign?

Mr. Hurley put the question to the Commission members, do they want education or legislation? He also said that he could forward samples of policies from other communities. Ms. DeNoewer was in favor of both, and asked if this would need to go to City Council? Mr. McKnight asked if there had been previous discussion at City Council about this issue and whether Mr. Hurley thought they had the appetite to pass legislation? Mr. Hurley said he might need to take their temperature on this issue and wondered if we may be outside of our area of focus making a recommendation that relates to private property. Ms. Miller said the parks are the homes for the deer and thought education and awareness might be the best way to start. She has seen the issue blowing up on social media and does think we have the responsibility to consider recommending regulations to parks. Mr. McKnight said this may be a broader issue than just deer, and could apply to feeding bread to geese, nuts to squirrels, etc. He also likes the education idea. Ms. Miller added coyotes to the list. Mr. Hurley said he could ask Council how comfortable they are with the PRC addressing or making a recommendation on this topic. Mr. McKnight asked if a formal recommendation was necessary, to which Mr. Hurley replied no. He suggested that he get a better sense of Council's thoughts and his staff could start with community education and would begin working on a campaign for the upcoming summer.

Park Projects Update – The Selby playground renovation was approved by City Council and the equipment has been ordered. Delivery is expected in mid-April and installation is slated for May.

McCord Park Renovations Phase One bidding has been approved but there is still some work being done on the final architectural documents, which include former PRC recommendations on the caboose and shelter areas.

COVID-19 Updates – Summer Camp information is out to the public and staff is waiting for further guidance to continue opening buildings and other programs. Plans are also underway to resume Concerts on the Green in some way this summer.

Other – Ms. Miller noted that Parks Crew had added mulch at the bottom of Tucker at the entry to the parklands and that it was well done and very nice.

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