

MINUTES

Parks and Recreation Board

Tuesday, August 18, 2009

7:00 PM, Town Barn

PRESENT: Chair Bryant Warren, Vice Chair Steven Whitlow, Mary Donegan, Mike Gering, Kevin McKenna, Emily McNally, and Vicky Wilson.

ABSENT: Robb English, Nancy Esperson, and Jennifer Weaver, absences excused.

STAFF: Planner Stephanie Trueblood.

ITEM 1: Call to Order, Roll Call, and Confirmation of a Quorum.

Chair Bryant Warren called the meeting to order at 7:02 p.m. Planner Stephanie Trueblood called the roll and confirmed the presence of a quorum.

ITEM 2: Consideration of changes or adjustments to the agenda.

No changes or adjustments were made to the Agenda.

ITEM 3: Approval of minutes from July 21, 2009

MOTION/

VOTE: **Mr. McKenna** moved to approve the minutes of the July 21, 2009 meeting as submitted. **Ms. McNally** seconded. The vote was unanimous.

ITEM 4: Reports and Updates:

- **Town Board:** Mr. Gering stated the last meeting was the Town Board workshop in July, noting the Town Board would not meet in August. He said at that meeting the Town Board had discussed the smoking ban request that was initiated by the Parks and Recreation Board, and the discussion had broadened to consider a ban on smoking on all Town-owned property. Mr. Gering said on January 2, a new State statute would be in effect that would enable the Town to do that. He said the Town Board had not reached any conclusion by had directed the staff to bring the Board two or more options for consideration at the September meeting.

Mr. Gering said at the Transportation Advisory Committee meeting last week the Congestion Management and Air Quality program grant funding was discussed and that 14 projects were proposed, one of which was for Hillsborough. He said due to the rating of the impact on air quality, Hillsborough ranked 14th which did not put it in a favorable position. Mr. Gering said that Tom King and Aspen Price had made a compelling argument that pulled them up a few positions and allowed them to split what Cary was asking for at #4, so that the Town would get \$225,000 for the construction of Riverwalk Phase II. He said unfortunately those dollars were programmed for

2017, but that was up to negotiation each year so they may be able to see those funds sooner.

- **Planning Board:** Mr. Whitlow said that the Planning Board had not met since the last Parks and Recreation Board meeting, but they had held a Joint Public Hearing with the Town Board.

Mr. Gering said that the Planning Board had brought forward to the Town Board a recommendation to institute a moratorium on development to allow staff time to do the Zoning Ordinance rewrite, which was planned to be a 12 to 18 month intensive process. He said a public hearing was held with much feedback, and the case was made to find ways to complete the rewrite without a moratorium. Mr. Gering said staff had then come up with a list of options that would allow them to get the work done on schedule without having a moratorium, but a negative consequence was that there would be less responsiveness to the public by staff for development applications. He said the conclusion was that a moratorium was not needed.

Ms. Trueblood said the impact that might have on the Parks and Recreation Board was that the Planning staff would have less time to spend on everyday issues, noting that likely at least two days a week would be devoted entirely to the Zoning Ordinance rewrite process. She said she believed that as long as they stayed focused and tackled issues in an organized manner, she did not believe they would see much impact.

Mr. Warren said that the UNC Hospitals development proposal was discussed at the public hearing, but that hearing had been continued until Thursday.

- **Orange County:** Mr. English was not present so no update was provided.
- **Walkable Hillsborough Coalition:** Ms. Esperson was not present so no update was provided.
- **Park Stewards:**
 1. Gold Park – Mr. McKenna said that the park looked good, noting that the dog park area would soon have more mulch added. He said the pressure at the water fountains continued to be good, but noted that some of the plants in the bio-retention area were dying.
 2. Mayo Park and downtown sidewalks – Ms. Trueblood said that Mayo Park was not normally a park they reported on, but it would eventually have an information kiosk and a bench added and so needed a steward assigned to it. She said the Nancy Esperson had been assigned Mayo Park and the downtown sidewalks.

3. Murray Street Park – Ms. Donegan said she had visited the park and there were no issues to report.
4. Turnip Patch Park – Ms. Weaver was not present so not report was provided.
5. Hillsborough Heights Park, Kings Highway Park – Mr. Warren said that Hillsborough Heights looked fine although there was grass growing through the mulch at his last visit. He said at Kings Highway Park, it appeared that vehicles were driving beyond the area the Scouts had cleared for parking. Mr. Warren said the boards appeared to be torn out and there were fresh tracks beyond the parking area. He said that park was still heavily overgrown in that the trails were getting difficult to follow.

Ms. Trueblood said that Public Works had sprayed for poison ivy at Kings Highway Park, but there were no funds budgeted for removing overgrowth. She said that could possibly be addressed in the next budget process.

- **Staff Updates:** Ms. Trueblood said she had emailed the Board to inform them of Eric Oliver's resignation from the Board of Adjustment because he was leaving Town. She said what that meant for this Board was that the Friends of the Hillsborough Parks organization that Mr. Oliver was working to form would be affected. Ms. Trueblood said they had held an informational meeting in June and Mr. Oliver had put together a PowerPoint presentation on Hillsborough parks, but no one attended except for Nancy Esperson. She said there was not a lot the Board could do, but there were things they as individuals could do as far as being advocates for the parks. Ms. Trueblood said they had lost their advocate for a Friends organization with Mr. Oliver's leaving, but hopefully someone with an interest in Town parks would step up eventually and continue Mr. Oliver's work.

Ms. Trueblood said this fall the Town's Website would be updated with new abilities added, including having the park reservation form available on line. She said much of the information on parks and recreation would be easier to find with a lot of new information provided.

Mr. Whitlow asked was a Google map provided so that people could find Hillsborough parks. Ms. Trueblood said not at present, but that was on the horizon for some future upgrade.

Ms. Trueblood said the Wayfinding Plan had been approved by the Town Board, and they had liked it so much they had asked staff to find ways to implement it sooner than scheduled. She said staff was going back to the Town Board in September with some options to do that.

Ms. Trueblood said that the Historic District Commission had two interesting applications last month, one of which was for the First Baptist Church on King Street. She said the Church had installed a patio with benches, picnic tables and a fountain but had done so without a Certificate of Appropriateness, so they had had to come before the HDC to request a COA. Ms. Trueblood said the application had been denied because the benches and picnic tables were not made of compatible materials, and the HDC required that those items be replaced with either metal or wood. She said the HDC had cited the Connectivity Plan recommendation for the urbanscape bench as an example of a compatible bench. Ms. Trueblood said that same night the Orange County Parks and Recreation Department had before the HDC an application for a COA to install plastic picnic tables, benches, and trash cans at the Farmers Market pavilion, and the HDC approved that COA with the conditions that the trash cans and benches be made of wood or metal, and that the picnic table could be reinforced with some other material. She said those two actions were important because the HDC had set a precedent that any park amenities in the historic district would have to be of compatible materials as cited in the Connectivity Plan and the Downtown Streetscape plan.

Ms. Trueblood said that Hillsborough Heights was on the Public Works schedule to be closed down so that it could be sprayed, and Ken Hines had asked if there was someone on this Board who would be willing to weed the flower beds since they were shorthanded and had no one to assign to that. She reminded the Board that the flower beds were a volunteer planting that the neighborhood association had undertaken along with some members of a local church.

Mr. Warren asked if the Garden Club could be asked to do that. Ms. Trueblood said they had already contacted them as well as the neighborhood association and others, with no luck.

Ms. Trueblood said she continued to work with Piedmont Parks regarding the sun shades at Gold Park. She said they were very close to being able to close out the contract on Gold Park with just a very few small items left to address. Ms. Trueblood said regarding NC Railroad, the letter from the Mayor discussed at the last meeting had been sent but no response had been received. She said they hoped to have some word soon, and she would update the Board at that time.

Ms. Trueblood said the fence and stop signs had been installed at Hillsborough Heights Park, so there was now a fence to prevent children from running out into the road. She added that the poison ivy was removed from Kings Highway Park.

Ms. Trueblood said that Friday announcements would be made regarding PARTF grants, so she would be in Raleigh to learn about funding requests for Fairview Park and Riverwalk.

ITEM 5: Hear and discuss proposal by Max Preston for creating a ‘Speakers Corner’ in Town.

Max Preston, a resident of Wake Street and former member of the HDC, described his proposal to create a Speakers Corner in Hillsborough. He provided information on how his proposal had come about, noting that such Speakers Corners were popular in Britain. Mr. Preston said the Corners were used to discuss politics, religion, community issues, and any subject that was deemed pertinent. He said that a Speakers Corner could be used to relate the history of the Town through stories and poetry, to discuss current issues, to provide information regarding community events, and to present opposing views.

Mr. Preston said a Speakers Corner was a very interesting concept that tied in with the fact that they as a Town were one of the early wrestlers with the issue of free speech. He said it seemed to him that there should be a way to accomplish a Speakers Corner in Hillsborough, noting he believed it would be a draw for tourists visiting the Town.

Ms. Trueblood said when Mr. Preston had contacted her she had visualized the parks that might be appropriate for a Speakers Corner. She said when talking with Mr. Preston, it had appeared that the downtown in the more high density area would be more appropriate. Ms. Trueblood said the public space that existed in the Town Center was the old courthouse, the new courthouse, River Park, and the Public Market House. She said they had contacted Lori Taft at Orange County about the Public Market House and what type of activity would be permissible there. Ms. Trueblood said that Ms. Taft had indicated that it was a public space and would be available for reservations once the picnic tables were installed, and there were plans for a gazebo in River Park but that was currently unfunded.

Mr. Preston said his view was simply to have a corner designated for a “soap box” or platform/podium for people to use to exercise free speech. He said he believed it would attract tourists, and he had mentioned it to Elizabeth Woodman who had told him there was a Speakers Corner at Guilford College. Ms. Trueblood said there was an area on the UNC campus in Chapel Hill called The Pit, which essentially served the same purpose as a Speakers Corner because students could go there and talk to anyone who would listen.

Mr. Warren said if the Board were interested in providing a Speakers Corner, perhaps they could begin by using the Mayo Street Park, advertising it, and seeing what kind of interest they got and who might want to speak on issues. He said he believed the old courthouse steps or the Public Market House would be an ideal place, but wondered if they should begin with Mayo Park to judge the interest.

Ms. Donegan said one of the things that defined such locations in other areas was that there were no firearms and that police were usually present. She said she did not believe there was enough staff to do that, so inviting people to speak about controversial topics and not providing any sort of police protection may not be wise.

Mr. Warren said he would assume the designated area would only be used at certain times. Mr. Preston agreed, noting it could be that only Sunday afternoons would be available for reservations. He said he did believe there would have to be limitations or rules put in place.

Ms. McNally said as a test run, perhaps the organizers of Last Friday events would allow a podium to be placed somewhere, and the Town could advertise it and then judge its success or interest. She said then police would already be present.

Mr. Preston said he was thinking more of designating a permanent location from the outset, and then that location would be pressed into peoples' minds as time went on. He said he had not been thinking about a building, because a building would carry too much formality. Mr. Preston said one area that might be suitable would be the area behind the courthouse towards the river, as well as the old courthouse since it was an early part of the Town's history.

Mr. Whitlow agreed that Last Friday events might be a good test run to gauge interest, and if it worked once a month then it could be expanded. He said he would not want those speaking to have use of microphones, since the point was to draw people to the speaker. Ms. Trueblood said she believed it would be a good idea to attend an Orange County Parks and Recreation Board meeting and talk with them about the idea. She said Orange County did not control the space around the courthouse, but did control the space around the Public Market House. Ms. Trueblood said it was also a good idea to float the idea at the County level and see what type of interest there might be and then perhaps work together to achieve a Speakers Corner.

Mr. Warren said he agreed it would be a good idea to meet with the County, and also to talk with Robb English who was not present tonight but was the Chair of the County Parks and Recreation Board to see what his reaction was to the idea. He said the only problem he saw about using the Last Friday events was that there were so many other things going on at the same time. Mr. Preston said they would need to look at all the possible locations and judge interest before moving forward.

Mr. Warren said he believed it was a great idea and thanked Mr. Preston for bringing it forward.

ITEM 6: Review DRAFT Community Garden Survey and discuss data collection method.

Ms. Trueblood said that the Board had gathered information about community gardens at its last meeting, and believed it had been pointed out then that the only way to make a community garden successful was if you had a group of people dedicated to making it work other than Town officials and staff. She said they had worked to put together a survey that could be used by neighborhoods interested in having a community garden to judge their own level of support. Ms. Trueblood said she wanted to get the Board's feedback on the survey and also find out where the Board envisioned going with this topic. She said that Jennifer Carson from Cornwallis Hills was calling a meeting of her neighborhood to see if people were interested in using land available to the Homeowners' Association for a community garden. Ms. Trueblood said she had provided Ms. Carson with a copy of the draft survey so it could be used for that meeting.

Mr. Warren said he believed there was a lot of interest in community gardens, and believed they should finalize the survey and perhaps put it on the Website as well as distributing the survey at the Last Friday events. Ms. Trueblood said the data gained might be helpful to have as the Board discussed what type of recommendation they might want to make.

Mr. Gering said the new Website would provide a simple means to conduct your own polls, and the survey could be posted for citizens to respond to. Ms. Trueblood said traditionally when doing surveys, they made contact with the contact persons from each neighborhood organization as well as at events such as Last Friday. She said they normally had very good response to posting such surveys on the Website, and the new site would make it even easier for people to respond.

Mr. Warren said he believed they should put the survey out and see what kind of feedback they got. Ms. Trueblood said she believed the survey would help them identify which park districts had the most interest, noting that community gardens would not work everywhere. She said if the survey showed a lot of interest in a particular part of Town, then they could work to get those people together to create a community garden.

Mr. Whitlow wondered if it would help to add a blurb about what a community garden actually was so that people would understand. He also wondered if it would be worthwhile to leave the surveys in such places as Cup A Joes and the Weaver Street Market with some sort of ballot box for the surveys to be left in once they were completed.

Ms. Trueblood suggested waiting until the new website was up before sending out the survey.

Mr. Warren asked if the Board wanted to do that, or perhaps put off further discussion until February or March of next year. Ms. Trueblood said there was no rush, and the data could be collected over the next three months and that would allow her more time to pull it together and bring it back to the Board.

The Board agreed by consensus to allow staff to gather the data and bring it back early next year for discussion.

ITEM 7: Review staff recommended calendar and work plan for FY2010 and make edits.

Ms. Trueblood said there were certain things that needed to happen every year, one of which was a recommendation to the Town Board of a priority list of new park resources and park funding, which had to happen and be forwarded to the Town Board by January in order for it to be considered during budget discussions. She said that would mean the Board needed to be talking about that in the fall so that a request could be forwarded to the Town Board in time for those budget discussions. Ms. Trueblood said her suggestion was to schedule each year one or two meetings to form recommendations for the next budget cycle. She said she had put that on their schedule for October.

Ms. Trueblood said she also believed that the Master Plan should be updated once each year. She said they would need to look at that Plan to see what might be missing in relation to community gardens or other topics, so she had added that discussion to the September schedule. Ms. Trueblood reminded the Board that they usually took the months of November and December off each year since their meetings fell around the Thanksgiving and Christmas holidays.

Mr. Warren said he had no issues with the schedule, noting that taking November and December off would likely be helpful to Ms. Trueblood since she would be more involved in the Zoning Ordinance rewrite at that time. Ms. Trueblood said that was correct, and added that beginning with the new year the Board would likely want to consider meeting only every other month depending on how that rewrite was progressing.

Ms. Trueblood said that Planning Director Margaret Hauth had asked that this Board add to its schedule a discussion on a recommendation for maintenance-related spending as a part of the budget cycle. She said for instance, the Board could say that the sand was always low at Turnip Patch Park, which would allow her to then say to the Town Board that the Parks and Recreation Board had asked her to provide sand on a regular basis to that park. Ms. Trueblood said Ms. Hauth wanted maintenance issues to be dealt with by this Board, so recommendations should be provided.

Mr. Gering said one of the questions he would anticipate coming back from the Town Board was what the priorities were of the various expenditures, and that would be something this Board could really provide good feedback on. Ms.

Trueblood agreed, noting that at present there was a request to pave the path at Turnip Patch Park, a request for extra waste containers at Gold Park and Turnip Patch Park, a request for mulch at the dog park at Gold Park as well as sun shades for the play equipment, a request for additional waste containers and benches for the downtown, and of course all the Connectivity Plan recommendations that were considered a high priority, such as benches and sidewalks.

Ms. Trueblood provided the Board with copies of the pertinent pages from the FY 2010 budget and pointed out the parks budget for each park, which was not enough to cover items already identified. She said there was \$4,200 budgeted for maintenance at Gold Park, \$900 for Turnip Patch Park, \$700 for Murray Street Park, \$700 for Hillsborough Heights Park, \$1,000 for Kings Highway Park, and \$200 for downtown and Mayo Street Park. Ms. Trueblood said those dollars barely covered actual maintenance, noting that one bench was about \$950 and one trash receptacle was about \$850. She asked that the Board retain those sheets in their notebooks.

Ms. Trueblood said that the Board needed to have a realistic vision of priorities so that what they forwarded to the Town Board was something that could actually be accomplished.

Mr. Warren said then the Board would need to not only provide the Town Board with recommendations but to prioritize those recommendations. Ms. Trueblood said that was correct, noting it was important to realize that if, for example, the Board said that mowing at Kings Highway Park was the priority, then that might bump other things off the list. She said there was no way to have everything they wanted, so the Board needed to prioritize their recommendations based on what the estimated cost was for the items being recommended. Ms. Trueblood said she could provide estimated costs for the Board so that they could put together a recommendation of what they truly expected and hoped would be accomplished during the next fiscal year.

Ms. Trueblood stated that every single penny budgeted for parks during the last fiscal year had been spent, and in some cases even more. She said she would try to get the actual FY 09 figures so that the Board could use them as a comparison when making recommendations and setting priorities for the next fiscal year.

Mr. Whitlow said if they had a Friends of Hillsborough Parks organization, then perhaps they could say to the Town Board that if they would fund one priority, then the Friends would provide the sand needed at a park, just as an example. Mr. Gering agreed that would be a powerful argument, that is that the Friends would provide a 50% match or that some private funding would be made available to supplement the parks budget.

Mr. Warren said it was an attractive offer to the Town when organizations or private funders were willing to help fund parks or anything else. Ms. Trueblood

agreed, noting there was really no way to accomplish everything they had set as recommendations without a Friends of Hillsborough Parks organization. She said what they were talking about now was specific to encumbering funds from the General Fund for parks.

Ms. Trueblood said unless there was some objection, she would continue with the schedule as provided until it made sense to revise it. There was no objection from the Board.

ITEM 8: Review staff recommended DRAFT Park Resources Request Form and make edits.

Ms. Trueblood said the Draft Park Resources Request form was a method to try to collect requests that came in so that they could be presented to the Board in a way that was similar for each request. She said the form could be provided on the Website, and they could do away with the idea of gathering signatures for each request and let just one person make a request. But, she said, it was her thought that the more signatures that were gathered for a request the more weight that would have as far as prioritizing it.

Mr. Whitlow said he did not believe there should be any restriction that someone had to live in a park district in order to make a request, noting that Hillsborough was small and someone could live very near a park but be in some other district. He said as well, he may live near a park but not frequent it because he preferred a park that was some distance away, and would like to have some say in what was in that park. Mr. Whitlow suggested removing that restriction from the form.

Mr. Whitlow said if there was a way to suggest to people that more signatures carried more weight that would be fine, but believed it was somewhat intimidating. Ms. Trueblood asked was he suggesting they remove the restriction regarding living within a park district and have it say that the request should have as many signatures in support as possible. Mr. Whitlow said yes, but he did not believe that if one person requested a slide in a park that it should not be considered. Ms. Trueblood agreed, noting that had never been the intention. Mr. Whitlow said the form came across as somewhat heavy-handed.

Mr. Warren said he would like to see them use the first part of the form to gather information about the request, and then if the Board needed additional information they could request it. He said if the request was for a park where there was a neighborhood watch, perhaps that group could provide some feedback as well. Ms. Trueblood said getting such groups to do the research rather than staff was much better, in that they would get better information about whether or not the request was something the neighborhood was interested in. Mr. Warren said if each Board member could contact its own neighborhood organization or watch group to find out if there was something that was needed would also lessen the burden on staff. He said as it was now, the form appeared to be somewhat intimidating and may be something a citizen may not want to tackle alone.

Mr. Whitlow suggested that a dollar amount for particular items be included, noting that if only a sign was needed then 40+ signatures may not be necessary in order to justify that. But, he said, if a slide as needed then it may require many more than 40 signatures since that was a big ticket item. Ms. Trueblood said the form could be done in any way the Board chose.

The Board agreed by consensus to proceed in the manner as discussed.

Other:

Ms. Trueblood said in thinking about the Gold Park steward sign-up sheet, she suggested that each Board member take a different month rather than signing up by weekend. She said then if someone could not go by one weekend they could ask another Board member or call her to do that. The Board agreed by consensus that each Board member would sign up to take a different month for Gold Park.

Ms. Trueblood passed out the finalized Community Connectivity Plan and asked the Board members to add that to their notebooks behind the Master Plan.

ITEM 9: Adjourn.

MOTION/

VOTE: **Mr. Whitlow** moved to adjourn the meeting at 8:25 p.m. **Ms. Wilson** seconded. The motion was adopted unanimously.