

City of Alexandria, Virginia

PARK AND RECREATION COMMISSION

Thursday, September 19, 2013, 7:00 p.m.

Patrick Henry Recreation Center

4643 Taney Avenue

Alexandria, Virginia 22304

PRC Members Present: Judith Coleman, Vice Chair, Jennifer Atkins, Gina Baum, Stephen Beggs, Rich Brune, Ripley Forbes, Brian McPherson, and Emma Schutzius.

Excused Absences: Judy Guse- Noritake, Chair, and William Cromley.

RPCA Staff Present: Director James B. Spengler, Dinesh Tiwari, Deputy Director, Park Operations, Jack Browand, Division Chief Marketing, Special Events and Waterfront Operations, Ron Kagawa, Division Chief, Park Planning, Design, Capital Projects, Laura Durham, Open Space Coordinator, David Ghezzi, Architect, Robin DeShields, Executive Assistant.

Guests: Anna Bellefuller, Kathleen Burns, Dale Carson, Judy Cooper, Carol James, Mary Sloper, Bette Jo Sullivan.

Summary Minutes

I. Call to Order: Vice Chair, Judith Coleman called the meeting to order at 7:10 p.m.

II. Public Hearing on 5325 Polk Avenue Park Plan- See Staff Report and Draft Plan. Laura Durham, Principal Planner and Open Space Coordinator gave the presentation. Staff is requesting that the P&RC consider approval of the plan for the new natural area/park. Durham said updates on the property were provided to the Park and Recreation Commission (P&RC) over the past year. The Beauregard Rezoning Advisory Group (BRAG), nominated the property for acquisition with federal funds to mitigate loss of open space in the West End due to the Base Realignment and Closure Act (BRAC). The property was acquired by the City in December 2012 after the City's FY14 budget process; however staff was unable to request funds for improvements at that time. In February 2013, RPCA staff held a public park planning meeting to discuss future improvements to the site. The Plan was developed in response to comments received at the public meeting, by email, and at the Ribbon Cutting held in June. The goal is to preserve and protect the natural integrity of site, which is one of the highest points in the City. The site has a steep slope, lots of trees (including Chinquapin Oaks), some pre-dating the Civil War, and there is abundant wildlife. The Plan provides improved access into site, along with improvements to the existing driveway- going up to old house site, using 6-ft. flexi- pave rubberized/permeable surface. Staff is unable to make the area ADA compliant due to the steep slope. Improvements will be done to make it easier to access the site. Both sides/shoulders of flexi-pave will have gravel to allow park maintenance vehicles to access site. Additionally, a bollard has been placed at the site to limit unauthorized vehicular access. Another main element is the large area to accommodate general seating as well as educational and interpretive programs; knee walls will serve as seating. Minor grading will be done to level out area where the old house used to be to create a natural classroom area. This is considered Phase I- shaded view shed of park- currently a little overgrown with poison ivy will be cleared; trail will be improved. If project is approved a budget request will be submitted for FY15.

Phase II- will involve secondary trails - what is shown is not the final location. Field testing will be done –conceptual plan currently. Phase II will also include more benches and the Overlook.

Durham asked if there were any questions or comments.

Baum asked for further description of the proposed Overlook. Kagawa said the Overlook area will include a small paved area with benches, oriented towards the best view shed, looking out to South & West areas of City.

McPherson asked if parking would be considered an issue at site, and if street parking will be a concern near entrance. Durham said that the site is considered a neighborhood park, and that the City doesn't provide street parking for neighborhood parks. The majority of users currently walk to park, and there is some street parking. Polk Elementary School staff is interested in doing some programming for children at the site. Staff will work with community to resolve any issues should they occur.

Vice Chair Coleman acknowledged guests and asked that persons requesting to speak complete a Speaker Request Form. She noted that an email was received by RPCA staff (Chesley) from Donald M. Buch, a former member Beauregard Rezoning Advisory Group (BRAG). His full comments will be entered into the public record. Mr. Buch said "he does not disagree that the Polk location was the best of the pickings we had to choose from." He further states that what is done with the site needs to benefit the maximum possible number of Alexandria residents, not just those who live within easy walking distance of the site, and that there is a need for improved parking.

Public Discussion Period.

1. **Bette Jo Sullivan, Alexandria Virginia:** She was on the Urban Forestry Study Commission, and was pleased to see this plan. She is interested in the permeable paths and preservation of trees. She said that some trees and shrubs need undergrowth trimmed. She hopes the paths will remain walkable. There are three schools in a close proximity, and that neighbors are interested in helping maintain park.

Commissioner Baum asked how the schools use of site will be managed. Durham said that the Department of RPCA has partnerships with ACPS, and through RPCA's Natural Resource Division. If ACPS wants to use site they would need to contact RPCA first. The timing for improvements is dependent on funding being approved in the FY15 CIP budget. If funded in July 2014, Phase I could begin; construction could occur late 2014 or early 2015. There are some volunteer projects occurring now. On September 28, a volunteer community day will be held; some projects will involve invasive plant removal, and basic management of site.

2. **Kathleen Burns, Alexandria, Virginia:** Ms. Burns commended RPCA staff for their work on the project. She said that some neighbors have worked thirteen years to save this parcel from development because it would have taken away many mature trees some which pre-date the Civil War, and created erosion and flooding problems. This is a great community asset. Neighbors insisted the BRAG view the site from the top to be able to judge the merits of this site. She's encouraged that there are a number of groups and organizations interested in working with the park. She would like to have a path in the park. The minimal improvements that are proposed to the site are okay. The project helps preserve open space in the West End. They are pleased the P&RC has taken a strong supportive stand.

3. **Judy Cooper, Alexandria, Virginia:** She's very pleased the property was acquired by City. She's concerned about the proposed road, gravel and the Lookout Point. These improvements will require removal of more trees, and may destroy habitat. She asked if potential path would create another entryway, and if so this might create a problem. She's concerned about how people and workers will access site and how this might affect the habitat, and potential erosion issues.

Durham said the entrance path is on the existing driveway, and that another potential path is being explored, but due to necessary grading for that path, the area will be field tested first. Staff is working with Rod Simmons, Naturalist. The plan is to preserve trees, some undergrowth and invasive plants will be removed. Where the pink trails are shown will be field tested and verified to avoid removal of trees. There will be some disturbance for approximately 1-2 weeks while trail is installed. Goal is to preserve wildlife. Trees shown are existing trees- staff is working with existing canopy. A field test will be done to preserve trees and try not to create erosion. Staff will be on hand to manage project and work.

4. **Carol James, Alexandria, Virginia:** She's a neighbor of Polk –attended dedication ceremony. This is a historic moment; seldom do people question policies in place. This parcel was zoned for a huge multi-story development. By right owner had right to build it out. When zoning was put in place decades ago when it was part of Fairfax County-it was not good environmental use. The City collectively put money aside and worked for years to obtain this site. She commends the City for preserving the land. She shared that the Blandly Experimental Farms, Boyce Virginia has a beautiful Overlook structure that staff may want to take a look at.

Durham asked that Ms. James forward information on the Blandly Experimental Farms Overlook to staff. In response to her question about adjacent property owners making donations to a possible conservation easement, Durham said the City partners with the Northern Virginia Conservation Trust (NVCT) who is working with the property owner to see if there is a way to protect buffer area.

5. **Dale Carson, Alexandria, Virginia:** he lives at Polk and Pegram. He believes parking will not be an issue. Said occasionally people park there to go to the schools, but this is generally not an issue. He asked what the distance is from the Overlook to his neighbor's residence, privacy concerns.

Durham said staff will work with neighbors to protect privacy; this is part of the field testing.

Vice Chair Coleman, asked if there were any more questions.

Kathleen Burns: regarding concerns about parking, she asked if all City parks are supposed to be closed from 8 p.m. to 8 a.m. with restrictions on overnight parking – they didn't put any daytime restrictions – she's in District 12 they don't expect a massive influx of people.

McPherson said he doesn't see it as a problem just wanted to point it out.

Vice Chair Coleman asked what is the desired action from the Commission. Durham said that staff is seeking approval of the Polk Avenue Park Plan, so that they can formally request funding from City Council, and that any changes can be brought back to the Commission.

Coleman asked if there were any further comments, there being none the public hearing was closed. Coleman asked if there was a motion.

Action: Brune motioned to accept the Polk Avenue Park Plan. Beggs seconded the motion. All were in favor. The motion passed.

REGULAR MEETING

Items for Action:

III. Approval of Summary Minutes: June 20, 2013, July 18, 2013:

Vice Chair Coleman asked if there were any changes to the minutes, there were none. McPherson moved to approve the minutes of June 20, and July 18, 2013. Brune Seconded. All were in favor. The minutes were approved.

Items for Information and discussion:

- IV. **Update- Unsolicited Proposal from the St. James Group to build a sports and entertainment complex at Hensley Park, Eisenhower Avenue.** James Spengler, Director RPCA.
This is a follow-up item from the July 18, meeting- See Attached Memo of September 16, 2013 “Post Mortem in Regard to the St. James Group’s Unsolicited Proposal for Hensley Park.” The proposal was withdrawn by the St. James Group in early August due to land use restrictions. A portion of the Hensley Park was purchased with funds from the Federal, Land and Water Conservation Fund (LWCF). This information did not turn up in the initial title searches done by the City or the St. James Group.
- V. **Division Updates:** To view full Staff Reports go to <http://www.alexandriava.gov/uploadedFiles/recreation/info/COMBINEDFILEPRCMEETINGSEPTEMBER192013.pdf>

Item #V-D was discussed first.

- A. **Recreation Programs and Service Update** - William Chesley, Deputy Director (absent). **See Staff Report.**
- B. **Park Operations Report** – Dinesh Tiwari, Deputy Director. **See Staff Report.**
Atkins said that she liked the pictures and descriptions contained in report. Regarding small maintenance items, she asked if RPCA goes around to all parks to access what needs to be done, or if items are brought forward by the public. Tiwari said staff is proactive, and recently instituted a routine inspections program. Coleman thanked Kagawa for a good summer at the Ben Brenman Park Pond. Baum asked a follow-up question about Chinquapin locker rooms. Kagawa- this will be discussed at re-opening locker rooms were redone. Spengler suggested installing a picture board of items remodeled.
- C. **Marketing, Special Events, Waterfront Operations** - Jack Browand, Division Chief- **See Staff Report.** Browand said a landscape design community meeting, featuring Laurie Olin, is scheduled for October 15; this is the 1st of multiple community meetings regarding landscape design for the Waterfront. A Joint meeting of the Waterfront and Park and Recreation Commissions will be held in March 2014 to specifically discuss landscape design. Coleman asked about status of the Old Dominion Boat Club (ODBC) parking lot issue. Browand said the City has made a compromise offer to the ODBC which is still pending.
- D. **Park Planning, Design & Capital Development Reports** – Ron Kagawa, Division Chief and Team- **See Staff Reports.**
1. Active Park Projects including Capital Improvement Projects (CIP) – Update of Selected Projects:
 2. Active Capital Facilities Maintenance Projects (CFMP)-Update of Selected Projects.
 3. **Chinquapin HVAC Renovation – Progress Update Memorandum:** Kagawa said an RFP for a feasibility study for Chinquapin has been released to public. A Pre-proposal conference was held yesterday; proposals are due back by October 11. McPherson asked how outdoor pool registration went over the

summer during renovation of Chinquapin. Spengler said registrations declined by about 50%. Favorable comments were received regarding the extension of hours at the Old Town Pool. Spengler said an update on the Aquatics study will be provided to City Council next Tuesday. City Council will also review the “GreenPlay” Cost Recovery and Resource Allocation, Policy, proposed by RPCA, and Capital Allocations for fall projects. “GreenPlay” was scheduled to go to Council sooner but was postponed due to their schedule. The Director and City Manager, recently held individual meetings with Councilmember’s and briefed them on the policy. A background report was provided that, showed for the region, the City’s Recreation Department is at 13% cost recovery, the next lowest is 24%, and Herndon is highest at 70% cost recovery. Some areas focus on families with more discretionary income.

4. 5345 Polk Avenue Park – Staff Update Memorandum- this item was discussed earlier – See Item II.

Potomac Yards Update- Vice Chair Coleman said the Park and Recreation Commission has been asked to write a letter to the Planning Commission about resiting the Dominion substation from Four Mile Run in Alexandria to the substation on Glebe Rd. in Arlington. Coleman said that the Chair of the P&RC supports this, and that this item goes before the Planning Commission, October 1. Durham said there was previous discussion, but no letter was done to her knowledge since this item was not scheduled for Planning Commission at that time. Vice Chair, Coleman asked if there is a motion.

Action: Brune motioned that the Park and Recreation Commission accept the proposal to move the power plant, and write a letter endorsing this to the Planning Commission. McPherson seconded. All were in favor- the motion passed.

VI. Director’s Report - James Spengler –See Attachment: FY2015-2014 CIP Development- Short Title Submission by the Office of Management and Budget. Spengler reviewed items submitted for the Department of Recreation.

VII. PRC Annual Report Update. Browand said staff continues to work on the report; it should be available by October.

VIII. Reports from Commissioners (verbal updates):

- A. **Waterfront Commission - Gina Baum**. The Commission took Boat Tours to the S.E. Washington D.C. waterfront. Group viewed the entire area, and Laurie Olin’s Canal Park. The park is multi-purpose, and includes an ice rink, and also an area where dogs are not allowed, where babies and children can play freely; this may be a good idea for Alexandria. Browand reported on the Georgetown Boat Tour. He said they toured series of open parks with trails, water feature- splash park and water access. A letter of intent was signed for the Food Court, at the Alexandria Waterfront by a restaurant that will make use of the entire property. Robinson Terminal -bids were received for redevelopment of the site. Winning contract will included a 45 day feasibility study. Beachcombers Property renovation- three bids have been received and are being evaluated.
- B. **Youth Sport Committee**. Brian McPherson said the group has not met since July.
- C. **Four Mile Run** - Ripley Forbes- no updates.
- D. **Freedmen’s Cemetery**- the statue has been put up at the site.
- E. **ACPS & Capital Improvements** - Judy Guse-Noritake (absent).
- F. **Community Gardens Policy**- Judy Guse-Noritake (absent).
- G. **Ft. Ward** - Ripley Forbes: Forbes said the group continues to meet and discuss the Management Plan which covers the operations of the park for the next 10-20 years. The

plan blends cultural, historical and recreational elements. Rich Brune is now an at-large member. Group looking at proposal for grave stones, similar to those used at the Contrabands and Freedman's Cemetery. Durham said the marbleized sandstones were donated to the City. Durham said the draft plan is scheduled to go to the Ft. Ward Advisory Group in January 2014, and may come before the P&RC in February.

- H. **ACPS School Projects**- Judy Guse-Noritake (absent). See below.
- I. **Jefferson Houston School** – William Cromley (absent). See below.
- J. **Open Space** - Judy Guse-Noritake (absent). Laura Durham, Open Space Coordinator said RPCA staff will provide an update to City Council on what has been achieved over the last 10 years. Internally recommendations that was shared with P&RC. A public process in would be held fall.

The Director asked Kagawa to provide updates on ACPS school sites:

Jefferson Houston School – Kagawa said all excavation and foundation work has been completed, the Headstart building has been torn down, and parking logistics are underway. The project is on schedule. A Slaughter House was found- a cistern was found on site, the top of the cistern will be used as a historical reference on site. **Patrick Henry School** - ACPS is doing an analysis of the Education Specifications and is holding community meetings to get input for the new school. Staff is working with the City's General Services department on project phasing, etc., fields and a full-size gym. A community meeting will be held next Tuesday night. Commissioner McPherson and Chair Noritake are involved. McPherson suggested that the new school be built upwards to maximize space. Baum requested that Patrick Henry to be added to future agendas.

- K. **Braddock Plan Park**- Judy Guse-Noritake (absent) - no updates.

Other discussion:

Atkins said that tomorrow is people will take over parking spaces in the City and make them into little parks for the day and talk about the importance of open space. There will be several sites in Del Ray. She will use this as an opportunity to talk to people about City Parks. Potential spots are in front of St. Elmo's Coffee Shop, in front of the Pharmacy, and near Mt. Vernon Community School.

Baum commented on Witter Field, she said that the green rubberized pellets on the synthetic turf field get very hot, and asked if the pellets come in any other colors. Forbes said synthetic turf fields are inherently hot. Kagawa said that the field is slated to be irrigated. There has been experimentation with using different color pellets –without good results.

A question was asked how was pool attendance over the summer at the Warwick and Old Town Pools. Spengler said staff will provide numbers.

- IX. **Public Comments**: See Public Comments on Polk Avenue Project- Item II. There were no other public comments on other topics.
- X. **Agenda items for October 17, 2013, meeting and location**. Tentative location requested was Charles Houston Recreation Center. Proposed agenda items: ACPS tennis courts and lights at T.C. Williams (to P.C. in December), and Capital Bike share Group update.
- XI. **List of upcoming public meetings**. A list was distributed with the packet.

Brune motioned to adjourn the meeting: Forbes seconded. All were in favor. The meeting adjourned at 8:30 p.m.