

City of Alexandria, Virginia
Park and Recreation Commission

REGULAR MEETING
Thursday, September 15, 2011, 7:00 p.m.
Charles Houston Community Center
901 Wythe Street
Alexandria, Virginia

Commission Members: Chairperson, Judy Guse-Noritake, Gina Baum, Richard Brune, William Cromley, Ripley Forbes, Bob Moir, Jeffrey Murphy. Absent: Clark Mercer, John Sullivan, Mollie Timmons.

RPCA Staff: Director James Spengler, Deputy Director Recreation Services William Chesley, Acting Deputy Director Operations Jack Browand, Cheryl Lawrence, Acting Director Special Events/Marina, Ron Kagawa, Division Chief Park Planning and Capital Projects, Dana Wedeles, Park Planner, Robin DeShields, Executive Assistant. Absent: Alisa Carrel, Director Office on the Arts/Arts Commission.

Summary Minutes

I. Call to Order by Chair: the meeting was called to order at 7:10 p.m.

II. Approval of Summary Minutes from June 16, 2011, July 21, 2011:

Minutes of June 16, 2011- Robert Moir motioned to approve the minutes. Richard Brune seconded the motion. All were in favor, the minutes were approved.

Minutes of July 21, 2011- Richard Brune motioned to approve the minutes. Robert Moir seconded the motion. All were in favor, the minutes were approved. Ms. DeShields noted that a correction was made to Catharine Puskar's name and company.

III. Division Updates: To View Full Staff Reports go to:

www.alexandriava.gov/Recreation/Commission reports.

A. **Recreation Programs and Service Update** -William Chesley, Deputy Director - See Staff Report. Commissioner Moir congratulated Mr. Chesley on the increase in the number of youth participants in all the various sports programs; he cited a 40% increase in women's field hockey alone.

B. **Operations Report** – Jack Browand, Acting Deputy Director Operations - See Staff Report.

Mr. Browand gave a brief report on the recent emergency operations events. There were three recent events: an earthquake, Hurricane Irene, and Tropical Storm Lee. Mr. Browand said that most requests were related to trees. Debris was picked up the following week. There was a lot of damage due to flooding in Dora Kelly Park, which is occurring more frequently. RPCA will work with T&ES to develop some permanent long-term improvements to the unpaved portion of the walk/bike trail. There are two small areas along the Dora Kelly Park that are soft trail. T&ES has did a good job removing debris and is working on fixing erosion problems. One concrete slab was undermined by almost one-half. RPCA will develop signs for posting on the trailheads warning pedestrians of the possibly of high water rising quickly. Barcroft Dam was open 33% which contributed to flooding. Later the dam was opened up to mid-40% water high. At the height of the storm - near Holmes Run, water was about one foot high

from the top. The plan is to install signs along all trailheads from Holmes Run Parkway to Chambliss Street. Chair Noritake agreed that it would be a good idea to install caution signs along the trails, where water can rise fast.

- C. **Office of the Arts Update** – report by Alisa Carrel-See Staff Report. Mr. Spengler, Director, RPCA provided an update on the **Contrabands & Freedman’s Cemetery Memorial Sculpture**: A Request for Qualifications (RFQ) for public artwork went out August 19, deadline is October 17. Mr. Kagawa said once RFQ process is completed, construction would begin in November.
- Arlandria Community Building** - Chair Noritake, reported that the Tenants & Workers United youth group recently held a Poets Club event. Once the stage is built, at the site formerly known as the “Duron building”, the P&RC should invite the children to perform there along with other groups. The Chair expressed concern that some documents show the building’s name as the “Four Mile Run Community Center”. She said that staff and Arts groups, should avoid using this name until a final name for the building is decided by the City’s Naming Committee.

Other discussion: Urban Deck gardens near I-95 G.W. Parkway:

In response to a question from the Chair, Mr. Kagawa said the plantings on the Urban Deck have been deteriorating for years due to a lack of irrigation. The plants installed during the construction have died, and have all been removed, with the exception of a few trees. The Chair asked why is this RPCA’s responsibility and not that of the NPS. Mr. Kagawa responded that maintenance of the Urban Deck is a part of the FHWA/VDOT Settlement Agreement for the Woodrow Wilson Bridge. The project was accepted by the City in 2007.

- D. **Park Planning Updates** - Ron Kagawa, Division Chief Park Planning, Dana Wedeles, Park Planner- **SEE STAFF REPORTS.**
- i. **Divisional Updates:** See Staff Report.
 - ii. **Updates on Aquatics Master Plan, and the Needs Assessment** - See Staff Report.
 - iii. **Update on the Beauregard Corridor Plan** – The Chair said the cost for a field here is estimated to be between \$4-5 million. It appears the broader neighborhood will support the field. The Beauregard Stakeholders Group held a meeting last Monday. The Chair suggested that Planning and Zoning staff meet with the “Friends of Dora Kelly Park” before the plan proceeds much further, to look at the field footprint, and to discuss the potential loss of trees. The Chair asked that RPCA staff follow-up with P&Z to discuss.

Director Spengler said an improved field is being considered as part of a Developers Contribution. The field may be improved on the lower Francis C. Hammond site, with the potential for artificial turf with lights. The Chair said that the lower Hammond field has a sewer easement, and some infrastructure problems, which delayed this project in the past.

Upper Francis C. Hammond Middle School field- the Chair noted that the request for lights for the Upper Hammond field will go before the BZA on October 13. The BZA will review a technical issue regarding the authority of the Planning Commission to approve the lighting. Residents are challenging the City’s determination that ACPS could submit a request to install field lights, which requires a modification to the current set-back, requiring a SUP and not a site plan. There is also concern about light spillover into areas of the adjacent residential neighborhood. Mr. Kagawa said that the main basis of the appeal is

that the setback is different from what was voted on by the Planning Commission.

Judy Noritake, Chair of the P&RC and Cheryl Gorsuch, Chair of the School Board (or designee) will attend the meeting.

In response to a question from Mr. Forbes regarding the chronology, and next steps, Mr. Kagawa said if the BZA denies the challenge; it would go before City Council in November.

ACPS is working on soliciting the field construction project. Construction may happen next spring. The Chair said that the field will be installed in the spring, regardless of the decision on the lights.

iv. **Open Space discussion - Gen-On Energy site (formerly Mirant)** - Chair Judy Guse-Noritake:

The Chair and group discussed the GenOn Energy (formerly Mirant) site. The City and GenOn have agreed to close the station by October 2012, or as soon as possible after that date. The Plan has been in operation since 1949. The Chair said redevelopment of the plant was put out by a non-profit given a grant by the gas industry. Since the Open Space Plan was completed 10 years ago, there has been a slight push to move from coal burning to natural gas. Project was included in Open Space Plan. Plan came out that included two fields –to be donated on the Daingerfield Island portion of site. The land is owned by the National Park Service, property is owned by Pepco. In order to do any changes to this site, the project would have to undergo a federal review process similar to that done at Jones Point Park. Developing fields in this area will be difficult to achieve. Regarding possible inclusion of the Gen On site as part of the redevelopment of the Waterfront Plan. The Chair said that once the Plant is gone, an environmental assessment would need to be done to see if this site can be built on. The site may need to be hard capped similar to N. Potomac Yards field site.

William Cromley and Gina Baum- met with the Mayor today to discuss the Waterfront SAP. The Waterfront Work Group agrees that the GenOn Energy site should not be included as part of the Waterfront SAP.

Chair- As staff is out in the community and speaking with elected officials they should reach an agreement to put a marker down to hold green open space there. Then development by P&Z should go in.

Action Item- the Chair will draft a letter requesting that when this site is redeveloped, that it include open space and a field.

- v. **Jones Point Park Update**- See Staff Report.
Mr. Kagawa noted that last Tuesday, the JPP Liaison group held a meeting. The meeting went very well; no citizens were in attendance.
- vi. **George Mason Elementary School Field Restoration** - See Staff Report.
- vii. **Miracle Field Update**- See Staff Report. A rubberized synthetic diamond field will be built at the City's Lee Center for use by youth and adults with physical and mental disabilities. Dana Wedeles, Park Planner RPCA said that the project is in the engineering and design phase - bid in December. Fundraising for the project is well underway with \$60,000 raised so far (See flier distributed). The season for the Miracle League of Alexandria begins Saturday- the last game will be held October 27. An SUP for lights is being submitted to P&Z –application

deadline is Tuesday. The Planning Commission will hear this item on December 6. The project goes before City Council December 20.

Commissioner Moir complimented staff on their fundraising efforts. Staff is still awaiting a response from the Harmon Killebrew baseball foundation, on how much will be donated in his memory. Ms. Wedeles said in the interim, the project will proceed as if full funding is needed. The Washington Nationals will host an “Alexandria Night” at National stadium on September 24. Tickets are available for all RPCA, Therapeutic Recreation youth and adults.

viii. **Park Construction Projects Update June - September** - See Staff Report.

E. **Marketing, Public Relations & Special Events** – Cheryl Lawrence- See Staff Report. The Chair noted that the recent King St. Art Festival went very well.

IV. **Director’s Report** - James Spengler (verbal updates):

A. **Update Ft. Ward Park New Stakeholders Advisory Committee** - September 14, was the first meeting of the new Ft. Ward group. Tom Fulton was elected Chair, Glen Euster was elected Vice Chair; the Secretary position is open. Meetings will be held the second Wednesday of each month. The group reviewed the Charge of Work- roles and responsibilities will be determined. An update was given on what RPCA, T&ES, OHA, and General Services were doing. A signed MOU has been completed for Ft. Ward Park (see RPCA website –Ft. Ward). The major change is that all historical area mowing will be now being handled by OHA. Commissioners Moir and Forbes, members of the former Ft. Ward committee, attended the meeting. The group is still seeking two members, one at large member, and one from the P&RC.

B. **Update on Waterfront Special Task Force**- A public hearing was held September 14; over 100 people attended Jack Browand and Laura Durham of RPCA attended. There were no impacts for RPCA. The next meeting will cover the marina, open space, history, and art, and involve RPCA. The Chair presented the P&RC’s position on the Waterfront SAP. Information was largely taken from letters previously submitted to City Council by the P&RC. Nine other organizations presented their positions as well. The Chair addressed the need for additional open space, stating there is a need to be careful of how much open space we can afford, where it is, and the cost to maintain it. A priority is to purchase open space at the foot of King St., in order to establish a continuous waterfront walk. The Old Dominion Boat Club (ODBC) parking lot may cost \$2-4 million if acquired by City.

Ms. Baum- reported that a suggestion was given to include a kayak boat launching area along the waterfront. The group discussed that there are already kayak boat launching areas proposed, one at Windmill Hill Park, and another under the Woodrow Wilson Bridge.

Action Item: The Chair asked Mr. Kagawa to communicate the locations of proposed kayak boat launches to the new work group.

Mr. Spengler said the waterfront work group is on target to complete their review by November.

V. **Report from Commissioners** (verbal updates):

A. **Waterfront Committee** - William Cromley. The Chair said that the testimony given last evening about the Waterfront SAP by the committee was good. Mr. Cromley said that Peter Pennington, Chair WC, represents the group well. Nate Macek, Chair of the Waterfront Committee was appointed to the new special Waterfront group.

- B. **Youth Sports Committee** – Jeffrey Murphy reported that Jim Gibson, Chair YSC spoke about the committee becoming more multidimensional, and not just focusing all their efforts on fields. The committee should look more at the positive impact that sports have on youth.

Group discussed that fees in Alexandria have been historically low; people are starting to understand the need to increase fees. Moir- some families have left Alexandria football to play in other expensive leagues, there is a perception of better opportunity and value. Mr. Chesley- in football is a matter of a philosophical issue, some coaches desired their independence and joined a league in order to support equipment costs - team members were assessed a fee to play. A number of the children who participate on those teams don't live in the City.

Action Item- the Chair asked for a written report back on RPCA fee policy.

Jeff Murphy- said that youth sports continue to grow, and therefore children will still need adequate fields on which to play.

Mr. Forbes- although participation in sports is increasing in some areas, there is a large drop off rate for children past 12 years of age- he would challenge the YSC to find out why? Many children are being lost at a time when they need sports the most. He asked that the sports groups review the rosters and to look at this trend. In addition, Mr. Forbes said there are few places for children who have not been participating early on in organized sports to become involved. He suggested working with ACPS to establish more intermural sports program on-site at the schools.

Brune- has a survey been sent to parents of children who drop out to find out why.

Moir- his experience with surveys, is that many eighth graders transition to play high school sports. Some older children make a decision between baseball and lacrosse; other children play multiple sports. He agrees with Mr. Forbes that a whole segment of children are being lost at a certain age, particularly where parental influence on chosen activities diminishes.

The Chair – encouraged staff to look closer at the numbers, and age categories; including trends among tween age groups.

Moir- ACPS at the middle schools has been starting intramural sports program as an alternative, programs are currently held at Hammond. This will reach many children in the sixth - eighth grade and help them become involved in activities after school, and remove the competitive nature of sports.

Murphy- he supports the idea of increasing participation in intermural sports. The games are usually held right after school, and bus transportation is provided home for children, making it convenient. Students can sign up for the program at the start of the school year and walk-in. The programs run two days a week. They try to hold during off- season, so that T.C. Williams H.S. coaches can work with the children.

Dana Wedeles- said at the next YSC meeting they will discuss the results of the Needs Assessment; they will zero in on sports and break down by age groups; under 10, and 10 to 18 years olds.

- C. **Four Mile Run** - Ripley Forbes - no report.
D. **Freedman's Cemetery** - Bob Moir- said the project is moving forward - See Item III-C.
E. **ACPS & Capital Improvements**- Judy Guse-Noritake. Cheryl Gorsuch is the new Chair of the Alexandria School Board, they recently met. Jefferson Houston is slated for redevelopment. ACPS has solicited a public RFP for an educational programming

consultant and also a project management firm. The Architecture/Engineering RFP has been advertised with responses due in October.

- Patrick Henry School- intent is to build a second school there, while maintaining the existing building for an undermined amount of time.
- Cora Kelly- discussed Cora Kelly-ACPS understands that it may not be able to rebuild on this site.
- John Adams- impact of the additional planned growth around school- school is at capacity-no additional school is planned for the West End at this time. An additional school may be discussed as part of the Beauregard Corridor Plan.
- The Chair said Ms. Gorsuch indicated that ACPS will continue to support Hammond Lights to be installed at that field location.

Landmark Mall Redevelopment- Director Spengler said that there is some movement on the Landmark Mall redevelopment site. **Action Item**- Staff will invite P&Z to a meeting soon for an update

- F. **Jones Point Park Liaison Group**- Judy Guse-Noritake. See previous discussion Item III-D-iv.
- G. **Community Gardens Policy- Next Steps**:-Judy Noritake. The Environmental Policy Commission (EPC) held a retreat last Saturday. They discussed the Eco City Plan, successes and failures. The P&RC may enlist the help of the EPC in drafting the City's community gardens policy. One issue is the use of public land for private gardens. The City is unable to turn over large areas of public land for private use. Gardens on private land is expanding, particularly in multi-family developments where lower income residents can benefit from gardens. The Chair recently received an email from a person on the commission who wants to start a community garden, in his condominium association. The Chair said that the City's Planning and Zoning Department will need to be involved in the gardens policy.
- Cromley- rooftop gardens are becoming hugely popular.
- Chair- community gardens should be discussed when we revisit the open space plan. A budget will be needed for irrigation. The Chair will follow-up on this item.

Additional Discussion/Updates:

Witter Fields Update- the Chair asked for an update on Witter field. Kagawa- was moving slow, but it is up to grade now. About 10 days behind projected spring date. Witter has two feet of extra fill on it. Site required 60K cubic yards of soil.

Jones Pont Park- North field- the Chair said work is progressing well, the north field has been seeded and is growing. The southern field is still muddy they are irrigating. Kagawa- said field will be irrigated they are using cool season grass, which is not the best.

Adult Sports Programs Update- Mr. Chesley reported that at the July P&RC meeting he and Mac Slover, Director of Sports, presented a new plan and future endeavors. They will incorporate information from the recently completed Needs Assessment.

City of Alexandria Budget season begins soon- City Council will meet in October. The P&RC should attend and speak about getting money back for the Open Space Fund. Open space, and trails were listed as high priorities in the recently completed Needs Assessment. The Chair asked the RPCA Director to address the fields and lights issues, and what is coming on-line. Mr. Kagawa said the next field is identified for 2017.

Director Spengler said the focus had been on rectangular fields, we may want to look at baseball and softball fields now.

Director- another need that was highlighted with the completion of the Needs Assessment, which came up last night at City Council, was the desire for more Farmers Markets in Alexandria. The group discussed seeking guidance in designing spaces specifically for Alexandria's Farmers market, i.e. parking areas in a park etc.

Chair- reported that the Northern Virginia Chapter of the AIA- has an architect that designs Farmers Markets spaces. If a specific design is developed for farmers markets- staff need to ensure traditional farmers markets are also included. One potential space for designated farmer's market designed space- would be along the City's border near Arlington.

Wedeles- The West End seems to have a need for more farmers' markets- only 50% of need is met currently according to the Needs Assessment. Jack Browand said that there is currently a farmers market at Southern Towers.

Action: The Chair suggested staff contact the AIA Office on Patrick Street to obtain more information.

VI. Agenda Items for October 2011 meeting and location. Proposed agenda for October: Aquatics Master Plan, Citizen CIP Request Process, Friends Groups discussion. Location TBD- Chinquapin Center, or T.C. Williams H.S.

VII. Adjournment: The meeting was adjourned at 8:22 p.m.

At the close of the meeting, the Commission will take comments on any other topic from the public. None requested.