

**Department of Recreation, Parks and Cultural Activities
Park and Recreation Commission
Regular Meeting
Thursday, January 15, 2009
7:30 P.M.
Mount Vernon Recreation Center
2701 Commonwealth Avenue**

Commissioners

Judy Guse-Noritake, Chair
Rich Brune
William Cromley
David Dexter
Ripley Forbes
Bob Moir
Kaj Vetter
Commissioners – Excused Absences
Henry Brooks
Matthew Coda

Staff

Kirk Kincannon (RPCA)
Roger Blakeley (RPCA)
William Chesley (RPCA)
Ron Kagawa (RPCA)
Judy Lo (RPCA)
Jack Browand (RPCA)
Paul Lombardi (RPCA)
Walter Powell (RPCA)
Lance Mallamo (Office of Historic Alexandria)

AGENDA

- I. Welcome**
- II. Approval of Summary Minutes From the December 11, 2008 Meeting**
- III. Staff Update and Discussion on Fort Ward Park**
- IV. Staff Update on Potomac Yards Development**
- V. Review of Del Ray Pocket Park Design**
- VI. Parking Lot at Commonwealth Avenue**
- VII. Review of Van Dorn Plan**
- VIII. Review of Matrix Study**
- IX. Director's Report**
- X. Reports From Commissioners**
- XI. Adjournment**

I. WELCOME

- Chair called the meeting to order at 7:30pm

II. APPROVAL OF SUMMARY MINUTES FROM DECEMBER 11, 2008 MEETING

- By unanimous voice vote a motion by Mr. Dexter, seconded by Mr. Brune, to approve the minutes was approved.

III. STAFF UPDATE AND DISCUSSION ON FORT WARD PARK – Blakeley

Follow-up Action: Complete staff PowerPoint briefing, “Fort Ward Facility Study and Recommendations”, presented for discussion and feedback to be posted to City web site.

Follow-up Action: RPCA to arrange two public meetings for February to discuss the recommendations presented in the staff briefing.

- **Chair’s introduction**
 - Staff briefing follows previous discussions considering ideas to address Fort Ward Park usage problems, including concerns raised by the park’s neighbors.
 - Fort Ward both an important historical and recreational City resource.
 - A Joint Commission-City Council work session is a possibility at some point in time.
 - RPCA staff briefing presented previously for discussion and Commission feedback at the meeting was not being developed as a final work product – but as an RPCA discussion tool to be used by staff when discussing Fort Ward with interested stakeholders, including the neighboring community, civic associations, history buffs, and all others with an interest in this park.
- **Briefing highlights** - outreach process, issues and next steps - Roger Blakeley
 - Goals and interim solutions for current Fort Ward problems reviewed.
 - Developing community informed consent via public outreach is RPCA’s goal.
 - Lance Mallamo (Office of Historic Alexandria, OHA) was present to discuss Fort Ward issues within his office’s jurisdiction.
 - This is a City park, a regional destination, and a site of substantial historical significance.
 - Fort Ward’s mission needs to be better defined, balancing varied interests.
 - Initiating true master plan which would encompass the uses and management of all of the larger City parks together (including Ft. Ward). Such a comprehensive effort which we would anticipate could be targeted to be undertaken about five years in the future;

- Interim actions will be needed at Ft. Ward and perhaps in other parks as well during the interim five year period.
- Historically significant sites survey needs to be undertaken:
 - Additional historical resources may be discovered once OHA begins its historical evaluation of the Park site.
 - Park planning will be adjusted to reflect any new historic finds, as was done with Freedmen's Cemetery, both in the interim and would be incorporated in a broader master plan effort.
- RPCA maintains the Civil War-era Oakland Baptist Church Cemetery, though not City property.
- Proximity of Marlboro Estates to Fort Ward was pointed out.
- Range of current park uses was reviewed – including casual recreational uses, neighborhood use, schools' use (including historic Alexandria discussions, summer school programs, amphitheater use, field trips and athletic field and courts use), adult use until 10 p.m. nightly, receptions, tours, Fort Ward Museum, large-attendance historic re-enactments, concerts, pavilions reserved for gatherings, and City arboretum (City's most diverse collection of trees).
- Maintenance issues such as drainage problems and restroom upgrades noted.
- Data on crimes reported to the police within and near the park were reviewed.
- Potential interim solutions addressing issues such as overcrowding, noise and other issues were reviewed.
- Highlights of RPCA's 2007-2009 Fort Ward Park improvements:
 - Park Manager Walter Powell, director of a six-person staff and formerly with the Police Department, was introduced.
 - Reviewed steps taken to facilitate improved maintenance, ADA compliance, and improved control of visitors and activities at Fort Ward
 - RPCA now works together with OHA on the park.
 - Improvements to the horticulture area.
 - Enhanced neighborhood privacy provided via added shade cloth and plantings obstructing neighborhood views from the park
- Improved reservation and rental policies are being developed
 - Revenue from Fort Ward would be reduced as stricter limits on usage are implemented, but RPCA will have greater control of park activities and impact on the neighborhood would be reduced.
 - Adding picnic shelters would concentrate groups in pre-set areas, ending practice of letting groups spread out randomly within the broad park area. Enforcement would be necessary
- **Discussion:**
 - The need to move forward with to a Parks Master Plan in about five years including Fort Ward along with the other large parks in the City– was agreed upon.

- Actions re: the larger City parks impact their neighboring communities balanced against growing demands for these resources;
- Any action to reduce one park's use will likely affect the usage of other parks.
- No funds for City-wide Parks Master Planning will be available for at least 5 years. Professional services will need to be contracted to execute such an effort.
- RPCA and OHA were urged to begin, in advance of the Master Plan process, preparatory actions needed for a Master Plan to move forward, e.g., a detailed historical and archeological review and defining what makes Fort. Ward different and how its mission should reflect this.
- Fort Ward – as with the Waterfront – is considered to be a City-wide park.
 - Public outreach should include all stakeholders using and affected by the park, those renting space there, Boards, Commissions, BAR and others.

IV. STAFF UPDATE ON POTOMAC YARDS DEVELOPMENT – Ron Kagawa.

• **Highlights:**

- Current financial crisis has caused the developer to cease work on the project; RPCA is discussing with developer how to proceed on work re: the two planned synthetic turf athletic fields.
 - Note: Previous agreement had been for City to pay the cost difference between a natural field and an artificial turf field.
- Developer has suggested building one field now, another later, raising RPCA concerns that economies of scale would not be realized.
- There was consensus that City needs to have two usable fields; current issue is now what the timeframe will be for completing work on them.
- Developer likely to present his preferred revised option to City Council.
- A community workshop on the Potomac Yards redevelopment is being held Saturday morning, January 31, with the Potomac Yard Planning Advisory Group (PYPAG), at George Washington Middle School.

V. REVIEW OF DEL RAY POCKET PARK DESIGN – Judy Lo

Follow-up Actions: Finalized design will be posted to City web site, conveyed to David Fromm, Del Ray Civic Association president, and placed in St. Elmo's.

- Chair reported that several appreciative e-mails were received from residents re: RPCA and Commission time devoted to hearing community concerns.
- Staffed briefed Commission on design revisions for the play area made in response to the previous month's Commission discussion.
 - To enhance the play area security the new design creates choke points and areas that enable adult oversight.

- Boulder seat wall has been removed and replaced with a seating wall, an area conducive for adults to sit, park strollers, use as a raised platform for chess games and other activities. Plantings would be included.
- Barrier rail would be 36" high.
- Standard City benches and garbage cans will be used.
- Spinner bowls have been replaced by a log seesaw (a hybrid between a teeter totter and a spring see saw, to be custom designed).

Action: Commission approved by unanimous voice vote a motion offered by Rich Brune and seconded by David Dexter to approve the revised pocket park design.

VI. PARKING LOT AT COMMONWEALTH Avenue – Roger Blakeley

Follow-up Action: Chair will draft a letter to City Council conveying the Commission consensus that the Commission's preference would be (a) to return the full parking lot site eventually to the open space for which it is designated, and that (b) in the interim the lot's number of parking spaces should be reduced by perhaps by one-third to one-half in the near future, that funding would need to be provided to RPCA for this parking lot modification, and a public process should be designed to facilitate returning as large a portion of the lot as possible to its intended use as park and open space.

- Commissioners discussed options to address issues raised by a petition received from community members re: current uses of the asphalt parking lot.
- Photos of the parking lot were distributed.
- Overview:
 - Parking lot is on land zoned for public open space.
 - Currently there are 26 spaces on the paved lot.
 - Lot is used as an informal commuter parking lot.
 - Approximately six spaces are regularly used by those in the neighborhood.
 - Chair had contacted some Commonwealth Baptist Church members and determined that no formal City agreement with the church exists to provide a parking lot for church use.
 - RPCA maintains piece of land by the dog park, though not owned by City.
 - RPCA actions in response to the petition include:
 - Signage publicizing banned uses for the parking lot has been installed.
 - Boats that were parked there have been ticketed and were removed.

VII. REVIEW OF VAN DORN PLAN – Kirk Kincannon

- **Highlights:**
 - Staff has been working on plan's development for five years.
 - Planning Commission to consider the Van Dorn plan in February.

- RPCA has succeeded in having a number of recreational aspects included in the plan, such as future athletic fields, open space, green space, a recreation center, trails connections, and passive areas.
- Staff emphasized the importance of including Van Dorn as a site for the West End rec center identified as being needed.
- Chair highlighted the importance of incorporating a structure/athletic field for adults, a field on top of a constructed building.

Follow-up Actions: (a) Send Commission letter to Planning Commission endorsing recreational components; and (b) Commissioners to review plan and submit comments.

VIII. REVIEW OF MATRIX STUDY – Director Kincannon

- Chair noted that while the study identified many areas where improvements could be made, the Matrix efficiency review’s scope did not include reviewing the substantial improvements implemented by RPCA within the past several years.
- Director reviewed highlights of his summary response to Matrix recommendations in “Efficiency and Best Practices Study”, comments presented to City Council and at December Commission meeting, including agreements with recommendations such as:
 - Adjusting horticultural service and maintenance levels throughout the City to create a more even and equitable service for City parks, schools and other sites outside the high maintenance Market Square and tourist areas.
 - Agreeing with Matrix recommendation to add 20 seasonal staff, but current budget cuts required letting 10 current seasonal staff go.
 - Expanding RPCA’s marketing of its services to the community, including the creation of a marketing strategic plan.
 - Adding a business analyst position for RPCA.
 - Administrative Division Chief position was recommended to be upgraded.
 - Evaluating each recreation center’s activities to develop a core programs and services in response to the community’s needs.
- **Budget constraints** - will limit RPCA ability to fill existing open positions or add staff in the foreseeable future.
- **Actions in progress**
 - RPCA positions have been merged to facilitate a more efficient organization responding to current RPCA needs, noting that when City’s hiring freeze is eventually ended a more efficient enhanced operational system will be result.
 - Operational improvements were discussed, Installing a more effective tree maintenance scheduling system.
 - RPCA had reduced a 15-month backlog in tree work by increasing the budget for tree work.
 - Developing with P&Z a Percent-for-Art program concept for public buildings.
 - Developed a public art master plan.

- Developing a special events policy.
- **Fiscal impact on implementing Matrix recommendations**
 - Over last three fiscal years RPCA had identified and implemented \$1.42 million of savings in the budget.
 - RPCA continues its ongoing actions identifying efficiency improvements and creating 21st RPCA practices and programs responding to anticipated community needs and fiscal constraints.
 - Unknowns: FY 2010 budget impact.
 - City Manager budget will be submitted to City Council on Feb 10, 2009.
 - Full impact of RPCA's proposed 15% budget cut for 2009 not yet known.
 - City Council is expected to approve budget on April 27, 2009.

Follow-up Action: City Council wants Commission comments on Matrix report to be considered at a future Council working session in March or April.

IX. DIRECTOR'S REPORT

- RPCA will be posting Commission agenda and approved meeting minutes to City web site beginning with the December 2008 meeting and public hearing. Handouts are already being posted to the Web site.
- Carlyle dog park nears completion of a fenced area; park will be City-owned and operated.
 - Further details will be provided at the February Commission meeting.
- Boothe Trail, last sliver of Cameron Station Trail from Ben Brenman to Boothe, expected this year, with its dedication to the City.

X. REPORTS FROM COMMISSIONERS

- **Mr. Forbes** - No report.
- **Ms. Noritake** – Waterfront planning process.
 - Planning Commission will run it, including open public meetings similar to those held re: Potomac Yards planning process.
 - No task force will be appointed.
 - EDAW planning consultants, the same team that worked on Land Bay K, have been hired.
- **Mr. Cromley** - Green building standards to be presented at January 28 public meeting at the Masonic Temple.

XI. ADJOURNMENT – 10 P.M.