

CITY OF ALEXANDRIA, VIRGINIA

Park and Recreation Commission

Thursday, January 21, 2010, 7:30 p.m.

**Charles Houston Recreation Center
901 Wythe Street, Alexandria VA**

Commission Members: Judy Guse-Noritake, Chairperson. Henry S. Brooks, Rich Brune, Mathew Coda, William Cromley, Ripley Forbes, Clark (Stephen) Mercer, David Dexter, Robert Moir. Absent: Kaj Vetter.

RPCA Staff: James Spengler, Director, Roger Blakeley, Jack Browand, Ron Kagawa, Laura Durham, Mary Stephenson, Robin DeShields. Absent: William Chesley, Alisa Carrel.

MINUTES

I. Welcome:

- The Chair, opened the meeting at 7:30 p.m. and welcomed staff. The Chair announced that Kaj Vetter's term has ended and he will not reapply for another term on the Commission. The Chair sent a message to Mr. Vetter thanking him for his service on the Commission.

II. Approval of Summary Minutes from the November 19, 2009 meeting & Public Hearing.

- Mr. Cromley asked that a correction be made to pg. 5; the comments re: adult soccer was actually made by Mr. Forbes. The public comments from the November 19th P.H. on fee increases were updated for the record. **Henry Brooks moved** to approve the minutes as corrected and amended. Ripley Forbes seconded the motion. The updated minutes will be reposted to the City's website.

III. Division Updates:

Note: A Full Copy of each staff Report was posted to the City's Website in advance. To view staff reports go to www.alexandriava.gov/Recreation- go to Commissions & Committees

A. Recreation Programs and Services Update – report by William Chesley

- Mr. Chesley was absent (see Staff Report). Mr. Spengler asked if there were any questions or comments on the report. He pointed out that the impact for the strategy being used for the Recreation Centers has been misinterpreted by OMB. The department of RPCA was requested to make reductions to its budget for the past two years by over 5 million dollars. One of the strategies used to cope with the reductions was to implement Regional Recreation Centers. Instead of spending money on extending staff hrs. at the smaller Recreation Centers i.e. Charles Barrett and Patrick Henry, they would close at 6:00 p.m. when the after school programs end. Staff would move to the larger Rec. Centers, i.e., Charles Houston to help staff these. The smaller centers would be opened only if there were scheduled youth sports programs being held. The Department of RPCA went this route due to financial reasons; it was not their planned strategy. **Mr. Cromley** asked if the Regional Center approach was the cheapest way to go or if it would be more cost effective to close certain Rec. Centers every other day, as the libraries are doing. **Mr. Spengler-** in speaking with the community, the number one program provided through the Recreation Centers is the Out-of-School-Time program. Parents need coverage Monday-Friday to help with afterschool care. **Chair-**the report notes that enrollment is down by 34%. Mr. Spengler responded that this could be due to a variety of factors, introduction of the new fee last year, the economy, etc. The board discussed ideas to

offset the declining enrollment and/or increase revenues such as increase use for adult sports users or youth sports, and/or bringing in other groups at the smaller Centers.

- Comments: Chair Judy Guse-Noritake:
 - **Charles Houston Room and Gymnasium Dedication Ceremony**- The Chair announced that the Charles Houston Room Naming Dedication Ceremony will be held on February 27, 2010 in the afternoon as confirmed by Jack Browand.
 - **Early Morning Fitness Program Registration**- the Chair said that according to the report, registration for classes is currently not meeting program goals (pg. 3). She asked if this program will be continued and asked what the shortfall was. Mr. Spengler will check with Mr. Chesley for further info and an update will be provided.
- B. **Operations & Park Planning Monthly Report**- Roger Blakeley
 - **See Staff Report**. Mr. Brooks commented that staff did a great job during the recent December snow storm. Mr. Blakeley and staff discussed the recent snow operations in December. There were no other questions or comments.
- C. **Office on the Arts Update** –report by Alisa Carrel
 - **See Staff Report**. The board reviewed the written report provided by Ms. Carrel. There were no questions or comments.

IV. **Park Planning Updates:**

- A. **RP&CA- Park Planning, Design & Capital Development Division Redirection of Work Efforts to Focus on Core Activities - Ron Kagawa.**
 - **See Staff Report**. - The role of reviewing private developments plans will be transferred to the City's Department of Planning and Zoning, where it used to be. The result will be a significant savings of staff time (25%). This will allow RPCA Park Planning staff to focus on core programs and to look at developing an overall Park Master Plan for the first time in the City's history. The memo articulates the process. The first part is doing an inventory of where things are now, what shape the parks are in and progress from there; the second is developing park standards. **The Chair** - said the third part, Master Planning, will provide a forward-looking way to manage public land and department resources, and will help answer a lot of questions that are coming to the Commission which should be answered from a broad prospective.
 - The Chair and staff discussed the need to review/update the **Recreational Needs Assessment**, done in 2002. Chair-the demographics in the East and West ends of the City have changed substantially. Henry Brooks- said the original report was very comprehensive- the focus if the report is updated should be how to transfer the needs of the community into plans for various neighborhoods and into actual actions in terms of opportunities for recreation and parks. The Chair said it will be important when the report is updated to ask the right questions, in order to get the right information. **She encouraged staff & Commission Members to review the report prior to the Retreat, and said it is available on-line.**
 - **Mr. Kagawa**- RPCA staff will maintain the department's interest in reviewing open space plans. Staff is committed to completing any pending obligations and projects. Chair- it is important for staff to maintain close working relationships with Planning & Zoning staff. Laura Durham –RPCA staff will have regular monthly meetings with Planning and Zoning development staff.
- B. **Update on Design & Construction at Ben Brenman Park Fields -Ron Kagawa**
 - **See Staff Report**- Mr. Kagawa provided a brief update on the status of the Ben Brenman synthetic turf field conversion project. **Parking Concerns**- At the public hearing on

October 15, 2009 some members of the community expressed concerns about the need to improve parking at Ben Brenman field. **Mr. Kagawa** reported that staff has undertaken a parking analysis to look at existing parking conditions at various times in the park and how they can be improved. Part of the analysis will be looking at changing behavior patterns for drop-offs-and pickups. Staff discussed several options to help improve the parking. It was suggested that staff look at the parking situation in the daytime as well as in the evening. **Chair**-at the work session with City Council on 1/12/10 on athletic fields, Council was okay with most of the plan, but wanted the parking issues addressed. All options should be explored within the framework of maximizing what we already have, and coming up with additional solutions. Open space will not be taken for additional parking spaces. Mr. Kagawa -the project is on target for construction this summer.

C. Mary S. Stephenson Professional AICP Certification Achieved.

- The Chair, Commissioners and RPCA staff congratulated Mary Stephenson for her achievement in passing her certification exams as a professional planner.

D. Freedman's Cemetery Project Update - Mary Stephenson

- See Staff Report- Preliminary Plan will be presented to the Steering Committee on 2/3/09. At that point the design will be available to the public.
- It was noted that some people who spoke at our previous hearing were not in favor of using the word "Contraband" with "Freedman's Cemetery", but prefer "Freedman's Cemetery". Mary- said she is not sure if the name issue will be addressed here it may be dealt with in another forum. **Mr. Cromley** - said that the larger issue is if any of the site will be considered parkland or if it will be just be a memorial area.
- **Action Item:** The Chair asked Bob Moir to be the new P&RC liaison for this group, since Kaj Vetter has resigned from the P&RC.
- The Chair asked for an update at the P&RC next meeting.

V. Open Space Update - Laura Durham

A. Update on Design & Construction of Pocket Parks at 1-7 East Del Ray & 48 S. Early Street-See Staff Report.

- Ms. Durham- the highlights of the report are that both Pocket Parks will be underway, with implementation and construction expected by the end of the summer 2010.

B. Update on Open Space Planning for the Mt. Vernon Properties and Duron Building Reuse. See Staff Report.

- A kick-off meeting with the Arlandria Action Plan Advisory Group is scheduled for 2/17/10, from 6:30 p.m. to 8:30 p.m., at Cora Kelly Recreation Center. A meeting was held this evening of the coalition of local architects. There is a lot of support for looking at adaptive re-use of the Duron building. City management supports moving forward with the project and it will be presented to the community for public input. **Action Item: The Chair will arrange to have a brief PowerPoint presentation on the Duron Bldg. at the next meeting, this to be added to the agenda.**

C. Commonwealth Avenue Open Space (VEPCO) - (discussion item)

- Discussion: The Chair has been receiving emails from community members who are interested in seeing something done with the site soon. There have been requests to have a dog park put there and some people have expressed concerns about crime if the lot is left vacant. **Laura Durham**- when the site was acquired, City Council made it clear that it was to be kept as open space with minimal improvements at this time. Staff is working with community police officer to address potential safety concerns.
- **The Chair**- stated that the site does not meet the criteria for a dog park, according to the Dog Park Master Plan.
- Over the years they have looked at the whole of the community and established guidelines for parks because there is not enough open space in the City. Alexandria

currently has more dog parks than any place in the metropolitan area. Requests for dog park areas are increasing, when open space is available.

- Chair- the people at Tarleton and Holmes Run want to convert a tot lot that is being relocated for use as a dog park. Laura Durham- the residents want to leave the fence up and use the space as a dog park.
- Chair-when The Dog Park Master plan was done by the Parks and Recreation Commission, it was not about dog parks as much as it was about welcoming dogs into our parks in a way that was compatible. We need go back and take a look and see how we can do more for dogs in private developments as they come on line. Until then, staff should let people know that the P&RC is going to revisit and make recommendations to the Dog Park Master Plan as a whole, in the near future.
Ripley Forbes- feels the P&RC should be open to addressing the concerns of this local community regarding use of the new area, in conjunction with looking at the broader issues across the City. If a dog park is not appropriate then staff and the Commission need to explore options for what might be appropriate in the near term.
- **Mr. Cromley** asked if people can use the park now to walk their dogs. The Chair responded that people can walk dogs anyplace in the City as long as they are on a leash. Mr. Cromley said he understands the Chair's point that temporary uses sometimes end up being permanent.
- The Chair said there are three other potential requests for news dog park uses in the City and these need to be addressed in the context of a re-examination of the dog park master plan.
- **Action: The Chair and Ms. Durham will touch base with the community members again and try to come up with other options for use of the site.** Laura Durham said this is a learning curve for RPCA staff in terms of open space acquisition and interim use of acquired open space property/parks.
- **Chair-** said that Elizabeth Wright, who lives near Tarleton Park, has asked if someone from the P&RC can attend the Holmes Run Civic Assoc. meeting in March. Commissioner David Dexter agreed to attend. The Chair will coordinate the meeting and provide the details.

D. Re-establishment of the Open Space Advisory Group- (discussion item).

- Laura Durham -The group was established as a two year Ad Hoc group by City Council in February 2007, and the group is therefore currently inactive. Commissioner Dave Dexter was on the advisory group and chaired the meetings. The group was involved in reviewing new sites and working on outreach. In July, 2009, the funding source for open space acquisition was eliminated by the City due to budget constraints. With the dislvement of the Open Space Fund, any new acquisition will be of the sites that have already been identified by the group, the previous Open Space Steering Committee, or by the City's Small Area Plans. While the need for review of potential open space sites is no longer a priority (due to funding), staff is looking to see how re-establishing the group, or in another form, may help staff in reaching other goals in the Open Space Master Plan. Staff is seeking guidance from the P&RC in making a recommendation on how to handle this.
- **David Dexter,** said the original Charter that was approved was vague; a lot of time was spent trying to define their role. The Chair asked Mr. Dexter to think about defining the group's role for the future. Ms. Durham said the more articulate staff can be the purpose of the group the more helpful it will be. **David Dexter-re: BRAC development,** the Army is obligated to give the City between 2-6 acres of open space. The value of the land can be spent for open space. This would be an important

reason to have the Open Space Advisory Group in place. It will be important to lay out what the group's role will be in the future.

VI. Director's Report – James Spengler

A. City Council Strategic Planning Update-: Mr. Spengler gave an update on the City Council strategic planning process and said the process is coming to an end. He reviewed each of the 7 Strategic Goal areas; and highlighted those activities that will directly impact the Department of RPCA Department (**See Staff Report for details**). City Council may hold a public hearing for adoption of the City's Strategic Plan by the end of February 2010. The plan covers a short term period of 3-5 years. Additional information can be found on-line, under City Council strategic plan.

B. Patrick Henry School/Recreation Center (See Staff Report).

The Director provided an update on the proposed plans for renovation of Patrick Henry School/Recreation Center. Spengler- The ACPS planning process is underway, school enrollment in Alexandria is expected to increase. This will impact the early age groups, and also enrollment at T.C. Williams H.S. going forward. The school has worked on a CIP Program to include placing renovated and new schools to handle capacity issue.

- The first site impacted will be Patrick Henry Recreation Center. The P&RC has worked for many years on a plan for the renovation & expansion of the Center. A Scope of Work was developed in 2008 to increase the square footage from 7,900 sq ft. to approx. 13,000 sq. The gym size would remain the same; additional classrooms, a fitness room and an art room would be added. The Community desires to be able to use the facility for programs during the daytime and evening hrs. The Scope of Work provides two options, both show that in the future there would be a full-size gym attached to the building.
- The schools plans to build a new 100,000 sq. ft. K-8th grade facility, for opening by the fall of 2013- similar to the K-8 format at John Adams School. An initial discussion was held with the school facility staff. If capacity projections are correct, in the near future they may be taking down the existing Patrick Henry School. This would impact use of the fields- which may be inoperable for a few years. Once P.H. is taken down a decision will need to be made whether to leave the existing Rec. Center up during the construction process and/or how and if to connect it to the auxiliary gym.
- The City's OMB in the CIP process is attempting to set policy for the School and Park Commission setting the Patrick Henry Scoping is at 6.1 Million the schools need at least 20 mil. They budgeted 23 million budget in the CIP for combined facility.
- **Spengler-** In the next few months the P&RC will need to weigh in with a statement on behalf of the community on what they want to see as the policy for the new facility. The Chair and Henry Brooks said that options should not be compromised, it is important that the project be done right the first time.
- The Chair and staff discussed the best way to get Planning and Zoning, the Schools and the Recreation needs all together into one comprehensive planning process. This is important since the CIP for the City for the next 15 years, focuses mostly on the schools because the buildings are old. The group discussed what would be the best way for the Parks and Recreation Commission to become involved in the process and to establish strong ongoing ties with the School Board.
- The P&RC discussed having a representative from the School Board on the Commission, or having a member from the P&RC attend School Board meetings, in order to work together collaboratively on issues. One challenge cited with this is that both groups meet on some of the same Thursdays.
- Jefferson Houston site-staff discussed the Jefferson Houston site as another upcoming large project, where public/private partnership would be important.
- Cromley- The plan is to put density there because it is by the Metro.

- **Action Item:** The Chair-said the first step would be for her to speak with the Chair of the School Board. Additionally, she will arrange to meeting with the Chair of the Planning and Zoning Commission, Mr. John Komoroski.
- Mr. Spengler said he will keep the group informed on the progress.

C. **P&RC Retreat Update:**

- The Chair and staff reviewed the survey results for the retreat. The results were amended to include information from Mr. Forbes as received at the meeting. **The Retreat will be held on Saturday, March 6, 2010 from 8:00 a.m. to 12:00 noon**, at a location to be determined.
- The Chair commented that items #9 & #10 of the survey comments-pertain to procedural issues that can be discussed at a later time.
- **Action Item:** The Director RPCA and Chair will review the list of suggested topics and prioritize the list, with input from the Commissioners.

VII. **Reports From Commissioners** (verbal reports)

- **Ft. Ward Ad Hoc Advisory Committee** - Members: Bob Moir, Ripley Forbes, and Rich Brune. **Mr. Brune** reported that the 1st Ft. Ward Advisory Meeting was held on 1/26/10, a secretary was elected. The group discussed the P&RC attending a meeting to inform the History Group on what is going on there. The group is working on establishing a Mission Statement. Commissioners discussed trying to bring the group up-to-date to let them know that there is now a guard on duty during the weekends now at Ft. Ward Park.
- **Youth Policy Commission** – Clark Mercer
 - RPF for grants going out. They are working on developing criteria for the proposed grants.
- **Waterfront Committee** - Henry Brooks
 - The Waterfront meeting was held last Tuesday, January 14, 2010.
 - The Old Town Civic Association presented its waterfront plan. It showed different aspects of what City's is looking at. The OTCA feels that there is a need to strengthen businesses along King St. first, before starting to invest in businesses off King St.
 - **Mr. Cromley** said people want community development along the Waterfront for two reasons: to create vibrancy and also the development helps pays for the Waterfront improvements. **Henry Brooks-** said he can present the City's Waterfront plan at the next meeting. **Action Item: The Chair asked Roger Blakeley if he would send PDF of the plan to the P&RC members.**
- **Youth Sports Committee** - Bob Moir
 - Mr. Moir, was unable to attend the recent Youth Sports meeting. His understanding is that fields were discussed. He stated that the numbers for participations have increased in all sports areas. Mr. Spengler reported that meeting was mostly a discussion about the upcoming work session with City Council on 1/12/10 on athletic fields and the Urban Forestry report.
- **4- Mile Run-** Ripley Forbes
 - Bycling, skating, bike path.
 - Mr. Forbes- distributed several handouts and asked that Continuing of the Vision Process by the Department of Health - Coalition for Healthy Alexandria has developed metrics, Mr. Forbes-page three there are 12 metrics that apply to the P&RC,
 - Reduce measures

- Other Liaison reports:
- **Charles Houston Memorial Project**- William Cromley- the Charles Houston Memorial Project, is not meeting regularly now, finalists have been selected.
- **Freedman's Cemetery**- Robert Moir noted that he is the Liaison for this group.

Judy Guse-Noritake, Chairperson:

4 Mile Run Bridge Design Competition-The Chair asked for an update on the status of the 4-Mile Run Bridge Design Competition. Ron Kagawa-reported that the competition is closed; 44 responses were received. Public review will be held in the spring. An all day presentation, by the three finalists will be held on March 3/26/10 at the G. W. Masonic Temple.

Term of Commissioners: The Chair reported-the term for Kaj Vetta, Robert Moir, Ripley Forbes, and William Cromley, would be expiring soon. All but Kaj Vetta are reapplying. The Chair asked that a motion be made approving the sending of a letter reappointing all but Mr. Vetter for another term. **David Dexter moved** to approve a letter to the City Clerk supporting reappointing those reapplying to the Commission. **Rich Brune seconded** the motion. All were in favor. **Action Item:** The Chair will prepare and send a letter to the City Clerk for reappointment of said Commissioners. She noted that Mathew Coda will be graduating from high school soon, and there will be a need to recruit for both his position and the other vacant student position.

Other Business:

Charles Houston Awarded LEED Gold Certification- Ron Kagawa. Charles Houston Recreation Center, 901 Wythe St., Alexandria was awarded the LEED Goal Certification by America's Crown Communities 2009.

William Cromley-the **Alexandria Masters Soccer League** is having its winter season and just played their first game, it rained the entire day they didn't even notice. This is their first season on turf fields at Ft. Ward, it drains beautifully.

- VIII.** List of Upcoming Public Meetings - a list of upcoming meeting was distributed at the meeting.
- IX.** Adjournment: 9:30 p.m.