

January 26, 2016 Parks Commission Meeting Minutes

Commissioners and staff present - Emily Boedecker, Bryan Pfeiffer, Carolyn Grodinsky, Bill Johnson, Geoff Beyer and Alec Ellsworth

Community members present – Danis Regal, Marilyn Mode, Fabienne Pattison, Sarah Swenson

Review meeting agenda

Emily raised the question as to whether there should be any amendments to the posted agenda and also noted that Bill had recently talked with Montpelier's Police Chief, Tony Facos, and that the commission could discuss this further as part of the agenda item on recent incidents in the park.

Approval of December 2016 minutes

Not all commissioner members had reviewed the prior month's proposed minutes so a copy of those minutes was circulated during the meeting among members and approval postponed until later in the meeting. The subject of minutes elicited a comment by community members that they had been unable to find a copy of the December minutes on the City's website. Emily explained that the minutes had in fact been timely posted but due to shortcomings in the present website's operation, the minutes could not be readily found.

At the end of the meeting the approval of minutes was again raised where upon Bill made a motion that the proposed minutes be approved and Carolyn seconded the motion and subsequently the commission voted unanimously to approve.

Signage in the Park

The commission then addressed the issue of creating larger canine conduct code signs, with the purpose of heightening awareness among dog owners of their responsibilities. Alec provided the commission with a mock-up of these signs, in three possible sizes. Alec stated that after discussions with the City's Public Works Department, metal signs similar to the mock-ups could be made but that there would be limited options in terms of the background color and lettering. After reviewing the sample signs, the commission members and Geoff discussed their preference as to the size of the signs and their possible location within the Park. After much discussion of the options, Carolyn made the motion that two medium sized signs (18" x 24") should be placed at the Winter Street and Hubbard Park Drive entrances and that a smaller sign (12" x 18" ???) be placed in the parking area of the field situated between the Old and New Shelters and that the signs have a white background with green lettering. The motion was eventually amended to make all three signs 18" x 24". Geoff also brought up the issue of posting Canine Conduct signs specific to North Branch River Park in locations in that park. The major distinction for the North Branch River Park signs would be that they would state the

commission's policy that all dogs should be on leash at all time in the park. The commission deferred further discussion of dog-related signage for North Branch River Park until Alec would be able to send a pdf mock-up of proposed sign to Commission members. This motion was seconded by Bill and subsequently unanimously approved.

Reducing dog related incidents in Hubbard Park, approval of language and format for Dog brochures

Bryan circulated sample brochures that the commission earlier approved in principle pending a few proposed changes. Geoff and then several community members proposed a number of additional changes to the brochure. After considerable discussion language changes were made to parts of the document after which Bill moved to approve the brochure as amended and Carolyn seconded that motion which was then unanimously approved by the commission. Bryan will be circulating the approved brochure to the commission and parks staff.

Police Chief Tony Facos and possible options for the regulation dogs in Montpelier

Emily began the discussion by asking Bill to relate to those present a recent discussion about options for disciplining problem dogs and their owners within the City's parks. Chief Facos' had been very helpful in explaining his understanding of options for controlling dog behavior. The Chief suggested that there probably were significant limits concerning discipline options along with who could enforce them given current State and City legal provisions. This would seem to greatly limit the corrective actions open to the commission and the Park's staff, though there would appear to be a few possible corrective options open to City's police and City Council. The commission then discussed the possibility of proposing changes to the City's current dog behavior ordinance that would allow the commission or Park staff to take a more active role in policing dog behavior in the parks but express concern that this would take staff away from other critical tasks.

For verification before approval of minutes: The commission voted to suggest the city council allow 1 or 2 incident reports from park staff and at least one direct report to the police department to make up the required three official reports for City Council to review the situation. Currently it takes 3 incident reports to the police to trigger any action.

Marilyn Mode shared with the commission some work she did examining the extent of dog behavior problems in Montpelier. Marilyn reviewed all complaints filed with the police between September 7, 2015 and January 24, 2016. She said that of the 2,953 complaints, 62 were dog related and there were two complaints involving dogs in Hubbard Park and they both involved the same incident. This lead a general discussion as to how the commission, staff and park users could identify dogs and their owners that repeatedly cause problems in Montpelier's parks. Also discussed were what options might be open to work with repeat offenders to avoid future issues.

Chief Facos had also noted that the City Council had directed him to provide the Council with a presentation on dog behavior issues in Montpelier at the Council's meeting on February 10. The Chief suggested he was open to having someone from the commission or Park's staff join him in this presentation. Carolyn volunteered to work with Chief Facos on this presentation.

Parks Fiscal Year 2017 Budget

Geoff was asked the status of the Park's budget within the City's overall FY 2017 proposed budget that would be voted at the upcoming City elections. Geoff's understanding was that the Park Department's proposed budget would once again be difficult to manage while at the same time maintaining Park services at their current level. In order to manage to the resources available through the proposed budget the Parks would have to raise an additional \$3,000 in grants, fees or other revenue sources on top of \$6,000 of budgeted grant money that will be required to balance both the FY 2017 budget as well as several past years' budgets. While there are possible revenue sources through which to secure this \$9,000 (which represents nearly 5 percent of the Parks total FY 2016 budgeted expenditures), there is considerable uncertainty as to the Parks Department's ability to achieve this budgetary goal. One helpful budget item noted by Geoff is that the City's Public Works Department gets \$1500 of state funding to maintain the main park road, which is what he had in mind when he was asked to find cuts and reduced the park budget line for roads

Commission members expressed significant concern that the Parks budget would once again be required to absorb another budget hit and voiced concern about whether it would be possible to maintain current service levels under the proposed FY 2017 budget.

Update on upcoming elections and the two vacant Parks Commission seats

Bill has submitted a petition to be placed on the ballot for the remaining two years of a vacated seat on the commission, but to date no other petitions have been filed with the City Clerk's office. One community member at the meeting, expressed an interest in filing for the five-year vacant seat. Assuming no other petitions are filed, after the election the Parks commission has the authority to appoint a qualified person to fill the five-year commission slot until next year's elections.

Parks report in the upcoming City Report and an invitation for City Manager Bill Fraser to attend the commission's February meeting

The Parks report was successfully completed and submitted for inclusion in the City's Annual Report (thanks to Geoff and Bryan) but barely in time. This is a task that in future years must be addressed in a more timely manner, completing it before January 1st will help avoid deadline problems.

Emily had exchanged emails with Bill Fraser in an attempt to get him to attend the commission's January meeting but due to time constraint Bill was unable to attend. Emily said

she would again extend an invitation to Bill to attend next month's meeting at which time it is hoped that the commission can discuss with Bill ways to better coordinate how Parks related issues are handled between the City Council and the commission and to attempt to improve communications between the Council and the commission.

Executive Session

The meeting agenda included an item for the commission to decide whether to enter into Executive Session to discuss the possible purchase of additional park land. Due to time constraints, this agenda item was tabled until a future meeting.

Meeting adjournment

At about 9:10 p.m. Bill moved that the meeting be adjourned and Carolyn seconded the motion and subsequently the commission voted unanimously to adjourn.