

Countywide Recreation and Parks Advisory Board

2425 Reddie Drive – 10th Floor

Monday, April 10, 2023

April Minutes

Board Members: Felecia Wilson, Brenda Bonazelli, Alison Gillespie, Dave Pullen, Chris Nasti, John Plate, *Donald Hawkins*, Aravind Banda, Yolanda Goettsch, Michael Ricci, Melanie Stickel, Robera Tasissa

Guest: Mark Pharoah

Staff: Gary Burnett, Darren Flusche, Janet Dixon, Jason Fasteau, Adriane Clutter, and Melanie Sasse

Ex-Officio: Ramona Bell Pearson

Welcome and Call to Order – Dave Pullen

- The meeting started at 6:47pm
- Dave Pullen welcomed board members and staff

Review and Approve Agenda

- Motion made by Dave Pullen to approve the agenda. Seconded. Approved.

Review and Approve February and March minutes

- Request made to amend the February minutes to clarify minutes recorded for Ramona Bell Pearson on the CUPF presentation under ex-officio. The minutes read “Montgomery County cannot permit private events” – it should be Montgomery County *Public Schools*. Ramona clarified that private events are allowed at government buildings.
- Motion made by Dave Pullen to approve the February minutes with the amendment as stated above. Seconded. Approved.
- Motion made by Dave Pullen to approve the March minutes. Seconded. Approved.

Appointment of Nominating Committee

Officers for next term

Elections in May

- If you would like to be an officer next year, please let the board members know. Elections will take place in May.

Member input/updates on Community Happenings and Events

Ex-Officio Reports

- Community Use of Public Facilities – Ramona Bell Pearson
 - CUPF Subsidy programs have been very successful – they are back up to pre-covid levels of use.
 - The Silver Spring Civic fund has been exhausted. There is grant funding available after July 2023 which the public can apply for to help cover permitting fees. Grant money is prioritized for the local community and to provide assistance where it is needed. If the event is fee-based/ticketed or alcohol is served, they are not given priority – it has to be a public/non-profit type of event to qualify for grant consideration.
 - User Guides: CUPF identified a need to have all of the information available for permitting public facilities in one central location. The website now has a “Community Use Bridge” for ease of access.
 - Michael Ricci asked a question regarding the private groups that rent space for basketball tournaments, leagues, etc. at MCPS locations. They charge for entry, why are they able to do this? Ramona replies it is because the events are open to the public to attend. They are aware there are some groups who rent the space and make money selling tickets. CUPF is working to remedy situations such as this.

Parks Budget Overview – Nancy Steen

- Montgomery Parks is a Bi-County agency, which reports to both County Governments and the County Planning Boards. There are also joint Commission meetings with the boards of both counties.
- Montgomery Parks’ budget is funded 85% from property taxes. Parks’ has a unique scenario in that the guaranteed tax rate is slightly lower than the actual rate, so there is competition between departments in the County to divide remaining budget available in the general fund. The County’s budget must be balanced – funding cannot be added as the federal government does. When the budget is cut, savings must be identified to balance the budget.
- The largest portion of the Parks’ budget is for personnel. In addition, Operating Expenses including supplies/materials and services/charges, Debt service, and Grants make up a majority of the budget.
- With the cost of living increasing, and with challenges in filling vacancies and competition in the job market, Parks’ staffing expenses/compensation have increased. This funding is vital to continued operations.
- For the FY24 budget request, out of the \$9M requested, Parks was awarded \$4,691,253. This unfortunately is not enough to cover compensation, nor inflationary increases of supplies.
- Non-recommend reductions have been identified, and Parks will ask the Council to restore a portion of the budget to cover critical items.
- Parks’ Tier One funding covers the major known commitments, inflationary increase to supplies and operating budget impact of existing facilities. It is vital to Park operations to have this funding restored.
- Darren Flusche: A talking point if anyone is willing to testify or support parks with the Council: Parks are critical to our lives. Please fund the Parks budget.
- Allison Gillespie: Parks are peoples backyards, and they are the link to our quality of life and budgetary cuts to this resource impact low-income families very hard. She plans to comment at the Council meeting in support of restoring the Parks budget.
- Dave Pullen sent out a letter of support for the Parks Budget for review by the members of the Countywide Recreation and Advisory Board. If you have any comments on the letter, please get

back to Dave by close of business on Thursday with any comments so they can send it to the Council quickly.

Parks Report – Gary Burnett

- There was a question about how we determine when/if Parks will cancel a planned event (i.e. the recent cancellation of the Ale Trail event, which was cancelled due to weather). Weather impacts safety and can also cause damage to park grounds. If the grass is wet, event vehicles tear up the mud and grass when taken over it, and it causes extensive damage to fields, open areas and other grounds. We watch the forecast and discuss potential cancellations internally and have to make a call within enough time to give appropriate notice. We try very hard to make events happen when they are scheduled, but sometimes the weather makes it too difficult and the decision has to be made to cancel.

Recreation Report – Adriane Clutter

Budget update:

- Montgomery Recreation Department is facing a \$2 Million dollar reduction. There are some similarities between the Rec budget and that of Parks, but a significant difference is that any revenue Recreation earns does not go back to the department but instead to the County's General Fund.
- The County Executive gave the non-profit community a 3% increase, as well as several enhancements to the Rec Department to increase after-school activities and programs, primarily for middle school-aged children. They prioritize Title 1 schools for these programs, but they look at demographics, test scores, populations, students receiving ESOL and specialty services factors, as well as if the school is ready to receive the program.
- Greater need for Teen Works program that helps young people get their first employment. They received more funding to support this program.
- The area of 55+ communities is their fastest growing population, outpacing other areas. Recreation will push for additional amenities in the budget for this population to support and entice people to stay in our communities as they age.
- Free In 23 has been very successful. At current count, 31,470 memberships have come in for this program.
- CIP budget forums are ongoing to collect input on future Recreation priorities.
- Staffing gaps are closing. Vacancies have almost been cut in half. The department has had many job fairs and is making progress, but is still actively recruiting.
- There are many upcoming events – please check out our website for dates and details.
- Subscribe to our newsletter online.
- Any testimony you can provide to support our budget with the council is appreciated.
- A question was raised regarding the gym memberships and if people have kept coming after signing up for the membership.
 - Response: Yes, they have. The overall numbers are much increased over prior years. They are still coming in elevated numbers as of this April.

Other Comments:

Allison Gillespie testified in favor of the Little Falls Parkway proposal by Montgomery Parks. The summary is that Little Falls Parkway is 4 lanes – two in each direction. There have been several fatalities there due to cars speeding. To prevent that, Parks has done studies and recommends reducing it to two lanes and making a linear park. It's a less expensive way to make the road safer. The Parks' Department achieved Vision Zero, which is no fatalities, with the pilot. There has been a lot of resistance from residents there to make this suggested change. Parks should be lauded because they have worked to make a very dangerous road much safer. This is a no-brainer for safer streets. It will also match the design of Sligo and Beach Drive as well.

Mark Pharoh appreciated the Enterprise presentations to the CWRB in the past. They shared things like their rates and their accomplishments. It's neat to have something in the community that isn't funded by any tax payer dollars – they support their program through their own revenue. Gary will ask Christy Turnbull to come out to a future meeting. Adriane suggests we have a cyclical schedule of having different department groups report out at the board meetings.

Action Items

- Please provide any comments on budget testimony letter back to Dave Pullen by Thursday COB.
- If you would like to be a Countywide Recreation and Parks Advisory Board officer next year, please let one of the board members know. Elections will take place in May.

Adjourn

Motion to adjourn at 7:59. Seconded. Approved.