

Countywide Recreation and Parks Advisory Board | 2425 Reedie Drive – 10th Floor
Monday, March 18, 2024

Board members present: Aravind Banda, Amy Beal, Yolanda Goettsch, Ryan Holeywell, Kelli Hudson, Ann Horton, Hannah Hutton, Michael Jacknis, Duncan Mullis, John Plate, Michael Ricci, Robin Sparer, Melanie Stickle, Robero Taissa, Ed Krauze

Board members absent: Gustavo Delgado Gislene Tasayco, Carmen Berrios

Staff present: Gary Burnett, Adriane Clutter, Janet Dixon, Jason Fasteau, Tonya Gilchrest, Greg Kellner, Robin Riley

Ex-Officio members present: Derek Ross,

Guests present: Mark Farrow (spelling?), Wendy Calhoun

- The meeting started at 6:32 pm. Quorum established.
- Reviewed and approved March 2024 agenda. John Plate motions. Duncan Mullis seconds.
 - Melanie Stickle asked about listing absent members in agenda minutes. Michael Jacknis suggested listing absent members. Melanie requested revising the February minutes to note absent members.
 - Ann Horton motioned to approve February minutes, pending revisions to note absent members. John Plate seconded.
- Jason Fasteau outlined the county budget timeline (see attached presentation).
 - Public hearings are scheduled for April 8-9, which several board members have signed up for
- Presentation by Parks – Gary Burnett
 - The CE's proposed budget totals a \$12 million increase, with the bulk of that focused on staff and retirement compensation costs. Burnett said the budget gap totals \$4 million between the department's request and the proposed budget. The department is searching for non-recommended cuts to close that gap.
 - Major known commitments are among the items not fully funded in the CE's budget. Burnett said parks did not get funding for operating budget increases (OBI), such as increased operating costs for new park expansions/renovations.
 - As an example, Burnett said that since the department doesn't use pesticides, it uses a 'foam stream' which is a combination of wheat-based hot foam and steam to kill weeds. It only lasts 4 to 6 weeks. The department has requested additional machines which are now 'off the table' based on the CE's proposed budget.
 - Burnett said the department is working on its advocacy statements to line up advocates to speak at hearings - for in person, online, and in writing. Gary

expects to have advocacy statements for public use by March 22 but did not want to discuss items until then to ensure consistent messaging. “The cuts are a little deeper this year than last year,” he said. Gary said the department anticipates sending emails to 1,400-1,5000 advocates requesting they show up to advocate for funding.

- Robin Sparer asked where summer youth employment fits into the budget situation. Gary Burnett said most comes from the Enterprise division, which is self-funded.
 - Kelli Hudson asked about other years in which the department has had a budget gap. Burnett stated that this year’s budget has larger cuts than the department has experienced historically. The budget increase is 6% compared to 8% for other departments, he said.
 - Hannah Hutton inquired whether advocacy is likely to restore some of the funding gap. Burnett stated that the department hopes to get \$1.5 million to \$2 million in additional funding beyond what is in the CE’s proposed budget.
 - Ed Krazuer asked how the department balances niche advocacy. Gary said the department highlights for advocates the talking points that have the biggest, broadest impact. Burnett says, “Almost anything helps us; we are looking for people who are passionate about parks.”
- Presentation by Recreation – Robin Riley
 - Riley said while the department didn’t receive everything it asked for, it “did okay” in the CE’s budget.
 - Riley highlighted several big wins in the new budget including:
 - Growth of the senior neighborhoods program in the new budget by \$108,000 (it currently only has \$4,000 in operating funds). She also highlighted the resurgence of seniors in recreation facilities, which the CE budget addresses with additional funding.
 - Added the Excel Beyond The Bell program to recreation sites
 - Added new components to high school RecZone program
 - The Barbecue Bonanza for seniors program was not included in previous budgets but is now planned for September.
 - The Kennedy-Shriver pool will be closed for 27 months, affecting the Rockville-Montgomery Swim Club (which has 350 athletes). During that period, the county will rent swimming lanes for the next 2.5 years from the JCC, Montgomery College in Rockville, and the City of Gaithersburg. The budget includes funding for that work.
 - The department did not get funding for a youth development program manager—the only thing not included in the CE budget that the department felt it truly needed. Riley explained that the CE budget seeks to avoid growing staff except on a limited basis.
 - The CE’s budget did not include funding for an electronic platform to manage health forms used in youth programs that the department sought.

- Riley said the Damascus Senior Center would close in December for renovations. The department unsuccessfully sought budget for additional temporary space, but FEMA funds will be available for it.
- Everything else in the department's budget was maintained, including programs added midyear. Adrienne Clutter: "We're trying to navigate uncertainty. We are one piece of a big puzzle. There's a responsibility for us to not be unrealistic when we put those requests in."
- Ed Krauze asked if this is a good moment to push for more funding for marketing parks and recreation. Riley said the department's entire marketing budget is just \$40,000.
- Melanie Stickle asked about the advocacy campaign. Riley said the department would reach out to the community and leverage relationships to advocate for it.
- Work Session – budget discussion and advocacy plan
 - Ryan Holeywell asked for clarification on the exact ask of county leaders regarding the two departments' budgets. Melanie Stickle said the ask is to fully fund both departments' budgets, and in particular, emphasize that recreation programs can't be cut to fund parks.
 - Kelli Hudson suggested a message that reminds people how much we all love parks and recreation. Kelli also asked about the youth mental health crisis. Gary Burnett warned that youth programs and senior programs are on the chopping block.
 - John Plate asked whether there are other departments with synergistic needs that could join advocacy. Gary Burnett said the parks department is working with sports for advocacy.
 - Ryan Holeywell asked about specific targets for advocacy. Melanie Stickle said it is the PHP committee.
 - Ed Krauze reminded the committee of the importance of advocating for both parks and recreation and not supporting one over the other. Krauze also suggested an interest in organizing a lobby day.
- Action items (7:40 p.m.)
 - Ryan Holeywell said that at a minimum, everyone should send a message to their representative on the county council.
 - Melanie Stickle sought help from the board in writing the letter. Kelli Hudson and Michael Ricci agreed to help.
 - Robera Tasissa indicated he's open to testifying in support of the budget.
 - Riley suggested creating an employee recognition ad hoc committee. Ryan Holeywell, Duncan Mullis and Aravind Banda agreed to participate.
 - The board agreed to move the Countywide Recreation & Parks Advisory Board meeting scheduled for 4/8 to 4/15.
- The meeting adjourned at approximately 8 p.m.