

**CITY OF ALEXANDRIA, VIRGINIA  
Park and Recreation Commission  
Regular Meeting  
Thursday, March 19, 2009  
7:30 p.m.  
Charles Houston Recreation Center  
901 Wythe Street**

**Commissioners**

Judy Guse-Noritake, Chair  
Kaj Vetter  
Richard Brune  
Matthew Coda  
William Cromley  
Ripley Forbes  
Robert Moir  
Clark (Stephen) Mercer

**Commissioners – Excused Absences**

Marshanika Rich  
David Dexter

**Staff**

Kirk Kincannon (RPCA)  
William Chesley (RPCA)  
Ron Kagawa (RPCA)  
John Noelle (RPCA) (Trees)  
Jack Browand (RPCA)  
Roger Blakeley (RPCA)

**AGENDA**

- I. Welcome**
- II. Approval of Summary Minutes from the January 15, 2009 Meeting**
- III. Approval of Summary Minutes from the February 19, 2009 Meeting**
- IV. Director’s Departure**
- V. Open Space Update**
- VI. Fort Ward Park - Staff Update and Discussion**
- VII. Four Mile Run Project - Staff Update – Mr. Kincannon**
- VIII. Waterfront Study - Updates**
- IX. Urban Forestry Master Plan**
- X. P& R Commission Awards**
- XI. Director’s Report**
- XII. Reports from Commissioners**
- XIII. Adjournment**

**I. WELCOME**

**II. APPROVAL OF SUMMARY MINUTES, JANUARY 15, 2009 MEETING**

**Action:** Minutes were approved by unanimous voice vote on a motion proposed by Mr. Brooks and seconded by Mr. Brune.

**III. APPROVAL OF SUMMARY MINUTES, FEBRUARY 19, 2009 MEETING**

**Action:** Minutes were approved by unanimous voice vote on a motion proposed by Mr. Moir and seconded by Mr. Brune.

- Chair introduced the Commission's newest member, Clark Mercer, noting he had served previously on the Commission as a student representative.

**Action:** Mr. Forbes resigned as PRC Commission representative on the Youth Policy Commission in favor of Mr. Mercer being appointed by PRC as their representative.

#### **IV. DIRECTOR'S DEPARTURE**

- Commissioners congratulated Mr. Kincannon for his recent appointment as director of Boulder, Colorado's Parks and Recreation Department, noting the groundwork that had been laid during his five years as Director, addressing many important needs such as synthetic athletic fields and tennis court upgrades.
- The Director thanked the Commissioners for their advice, support and collaboration which had enabled RPCA to move ahead in many important areas.
- Chair advised that a party is being planned for April 22 for the Director.

#### **V. OPEN SPACE UPDATE**

**Follow-up Action –RPCA to brief at April Commission meeting** the idea raised at Potomac Yard Planning Advisory Committee's recent public workshop re: converting the current athletic field site near Mount Vernon Ave. and Braddock Road to high density development, swapping it for an athletic field behind GW Middle School.

- **Budget:**
  - City Manager has proposed reducing the one percent Open Space fee on developments to 1/3 per cent. Actually, it's 1% of the real estate tax, NOT on developments...The 1/3 % will be used for the debt service on the existing Open Space Fund.
  - Open Space Fund currently has about \$10 million, enough to fund acquisition of the two Waterfront properties currently being discussed, and the development of the approved park plan for the 1 and 7 Del Ray Ave. and 48 South Early Street Pocket Parks. Director hoped that Council's 2010 budget will preserve this funding.
  - By April 27 RPCA will know its CIP, operations and maintenance budgets for the year.
  - It is hoped the budget will have sufficient funds for the Four Mile Run Master Plan process.
- **Chair reviewed key Open Space Fund accomplishments**
  - Open space fund created six years ago has achieved major accomplishments.
  - Acquiring Waterfront properties to be incorporated into the Waterfront planning process is perhaps the Fund's major achievement..

- Open space has been added to Mount Vernon.
- Two pocket parks have been approved.
- Though pocket park program funding will likely be cut, the program has met its original objectives..
- Chair noted that though the need for Open Space continues to grow, PRC will not, in the current crisis budget situation, protest the proposed Open Space funding cut in light of the very tough budget choices facing the City, affecting programs such as mental health services.
- **Accomplishments of City's six-year one percent Open Space Funding program**
  - The public, City Council, Planning Commission, Environmental Policy Commission all now recognize the need to preserve open space as re-development proceeds.
  - Braddock Road Small Area Plan, which includes a privately funded Open Space area, should serve as a model for other development projects.
  - Staff noted the importance of RPCA having sufficient staff to negotiate with developers re: their incorporating open space into proposed site plans.
- Staff advised Commissioners that there has been a misperception among some members of the community that staff study had proposed for discussion an idea to convert land currently used as an athletic field near GW Middle School, at Mount Vernon Ave. and Braddock Road., to high density development because of its proximity to Metro, and instead designate a larger parcel of land behind GW Middle School field for use as an athletic field. This 'swap' idea was suggested for consideration by a members of the public at a recent Potomac Yard Planning Advisory Group's public workshop, noting that PYPAG includes 25 residents and local developers.
  - Chair emphasized the need for such creative "out-of-the-box" thinking to identify ways to maximize available open space within the development process.
  - Commissioners plan to participate in any community discussions related to the PYPAC workshop's 'swap' idea, noted this idea is one of many options to be discussed, and recognized the idea has raised some concerns among residents.

**VI. FORT WARD PARK - STAFF UPDATE AND DISCUSSION – Kirk Kincannon**

**Hand-out:** Matrix "Fort Ward Park priorities and issues identified by community", distributed at March 18 Fort Ward public meeting

**Follow-up Action:** Post Fort Ward matrix to City web site.

**Follow-up Action:** Public comment period on RPCA's proposed Fort Ward proposals to close March 27.

**Follow-up Action:** Commissioners Moir and Brune to serve on Fort Ward Citizens Commission being set up by OHA.

**Follow-up Action:** RPCA Director to send City Council Fort Ward recommendations reflecting inputs from the three public meetings, including how to implement a phased plan to relocate RPCA park maintenance and horticultural operations away from the culturally significant areas, including those recently discovered African American family grave sites.

**Follow-up Action** Commission to send a letter to City Council supporting the need to develop a large parks master plan, an updated recreation needs assessment and restricting picnics in Fort Ward to groups not larger than 50 people, and endorsing the new field operations, including evening field hours.

- **Presentation Highlights**

- Reviewed the evolution of Fort Ward's activity focus, starting as a historic area in 1960s with picnic areas put in later during the 1970s.
- Reviewed current park operational uses – including overuse issues that create problems for the neighborhood.
- Reviewed active recreation uses.
- Reported that RPCA will begin shifting large picnic groups from Fort Ward to other parks, including City and Northern Virginia Parks Authority parks.
- Reviewed environmental and natural resource issues including the City arboretum, trees and landscaping, and drainage problems.
- Public meetings and input has produced significant information about African American, Native American and other Fort Ward historical and cultural sites.

- **Fort Ward's place in post-Civil War African American history.**

- Fort Ward will become more important as an African American historical site in light of oral histories recently gathered and family and Baptist Church grave sites, including the Jackson and Mason family grave sites and others.
- Oral histories are being gathered by the Office of Historic Alexandria (OHA) re: the Fort Ward community which lived there until the 1960s when the City and a developer bought the land.
- Working with the community, RPCA and OHA have identified new culturally significant historic sites (both African American and Native American),
- Information provided by community about historic Fort Ward produced a tremendous outpouring from family members whose ancestors are buried on this property, and they then provided even more information about the community.
- RPCA has now identified graves sites located at Fort Ward sites that have been used for park operation purposes.
- The park operations will now have to be relocated – in phases – away from these historically significant areas.

- **Other issues**

- Park planning - several years away - will be expensive and time consuming, even with volunteers as part of the process.

- Ways to increase volunteers' participation include creating an expanded "Friends of Fort Ward" whose responsibilities would including help with tasks such as maintaining trees and bushes, and monitoring picnic area use.
- **Possible Immediate Actions:**
  - Establish a staff/community working group.
  - Relocate maintenance facilities away from grave sites - at "a measured pace" that will let RPCA make sure that horticultural operations are not inadvertently located to another part of Fort Ward where grave sites might be later discovered.
  - Provide increased information to neighbors about park and nursery operations
  - A 2-week moratorium on processing reservations for picnic site rentals has been imposed, to let RPCA to identify which picnic sites may be near the historic grave site areas which have recently been identified with help from the community and family members.
- **Family members will be able to access their ancestors' grave sites located on Fort Ward land, many of which have been only recently discovered.**
  - Family members and Office of Historic Alexandria are working on details.
  - RPCA will insure that the African American grave sites are treated with the respect they are due, mark them with "culturally significant area" signs, and rope them off from the public to protect them.
- **Discussion:**
  - Director emphasized the need for both (a) interim measures to respond to current needs; and (b) planning for long-term planning and actions.
  - Director underscored the importance and value of information about the historic African American community and related family grave sites which the Fort Ward community and descendants of the those who had lived at Fort Ward have been bringing to RPCA and OHA in response to, and as part of, the Fort Ward public hearings. Some of the grave sites found are located outside the boundaries of the formal grave yard which had been located there. Director reviewed specific family grave sites identified so far.
  - In the prior two weeks four new oral histories had been given by descendants of Fort Ward's historic African American community.
  - It was agreed by all that Fort Ward use needs to be ratcheted back because it has gotten out of hand, creating problems both for the neighborhood and for park maintenance.
  - RPCA is ending alcohol use and amplified noise without prior RPCA Director's approving a permit for it.
  - Director emphasized that City's challenge is how to balance the need to respect Fort Ward's historic aspects such as the newly discovered family grave sites while determining how best to use the City's small number of large parks to respond to the City's current and growing needs.
  - Chair noted that the need to shift large party reservations from Fort Ward to other large parks underscores the importance of having a comprehensive master plan for the City's large parks.
  - Jazz Festival likely to move to either to Brenman or Waterfront Park.
  - Athletic field lights were not raised at the previous night's public meeting.

- RPCA's long-term goal is to develop a master plan for large parks.
- Historically significant Native American sites have been identified.

## VII. STAFF UPDATE ON FOUR MILE RUN PROJECT

### Hand-out: Four Mile Run Design Guidelines

**Follow-up Action:** Chair to write a letter supporting the proposed design guidelines.

**Follow-up Action:** April 2 Community open house at Arlington's Parks and Recreation Building on Four Mile Run, 7-9 pm, with a presentation

- Chair encouraged Commissioners to attend the April 2 open house, noting there is a tight timeline for getting the design guidelines to the Planning Commission.
- Pedestrian Bridge Design competition is to be kicked off shortly and the Four Mile Run Guidelines are a foundation for the bridge design.
- Design competition for the bridge will be publicly solicited next fall, with the hope that by Thanksgiving proposals will be reviewed.
- Mr. Forbes reported that the bike trail **along Four Mile Run beneath 395 at Shirlington** is now open.

## VIII. WATERFRONT STUDY UPDATES

- **City working with EDAW consultants**, the landscape architecture, design, engineering, and ecological and environmental company.
  - Developing an analysis and proposals for the Waterfront.
  - Analysis to be done this summer.
- **Upcoming Meetings:**
  - April 23: Kick-off meeting; location to be determined.
  - April 30: Public comment from special interest groups; PRC members plan to attend.
- **Overview:**
  - Roles of the various City Commissions in the Waterfront Study not yet set.
  - RPCA's staff team includes those responsible for long-range planning and **Park/Marina** operations.
  - Chair suggested that as the Waterfront is developed three operational centers will need to be considered, including perhaps an RPCA operational site on the Waterfront.
  - The planning process will include many technical reviews.

## IX. URBAN FORESTRY MASTER PLAN – John Noelle, City Arborist (RPCA)

**Follow-up Action:** PRC members to receive full report.

**Follow-up Action:** RPCA to post Executive Summary to City Web site.

**Follow-up Action:** Commission to discuss the report at April Commission meeting.

- **Background:**
  - Urban canopy consists of all vegetation – on public, private and institutional land - contributing to shade in City.
  - Master Plan was initiated in response to concerns raised by Council Member Krupicka and former Vice Chair Andrew McDonald that City’s tree canopy was being reduced by tree removals on public and private property due to development, clearing for utility lines and other factors.
  - May 2004: City Manager recommended and Council approved a 13-member Urban Forestry Steering Committee to develop a Master Plan, including members from Parks & Recreation, Planning, EPC and Beautification commissions, seven citizen members, and Tree Stewards.
  - PRC Commissioner Brooks serves on the Steering Committee.
- **Work scope highlights**
  - Master Plan process since 2004 included public outreach to solicit public input identifying and prioritizing problems.
  - Urban forest’s health, quality, and density were quantified.
  - Investigated existing related City policies, operations and regulations, and public awareness and public outreach efforts.
  - Proposed new and revised ordinances and regulations to address identified needs.
  - Developed cost estimates for Master Plan recommendations.
- **Key challenges to be addressed include**
  - City canopy cover decreased from 37 percent in 2001 to 30 per cent 2007.
  - No City-wide management plan for trees.
  - No goals and objective performance measures.
  - RPCA program is reactive – responding to residents’ tree-related requests rather than implementing a systematic plan addressing canopy needs.
  - Virtually no public education re: how to preserve and enhance urban forest.
  - City Arborist budget fully consumed by responding to residents’ requests for situations requiring attention.
- **Highlights of report’s 52 recommendations**
  - Plant more trees; maintain new and current trees better, make management changes including moving from a reactive to proactive operation focused on the forest as a whole rather than responding to specific tree problems.
  - Goals considered ambitious but achievable by Arborist.
  - Create public education and outreach programs, including a Web site, to provide information on how residents can preserve and expand urban forest, including residents planting more trees on private property.
  - Fund an additional Virginia Cooperative Extension agent to provide volunteer programming services, expanding Alexandria’s role in Arlington-Alexandria Tree Stewards.
  - Develop a Master Plan for landscape, planting and maintenance.
  - Rededicate Fort Ward’s arboretum, improving its organization and promotion.
  - Provide public information identifying the trees within all City parks.
- **Estimated Costs of the proposals were reviewed.**
- **Discussion**

- Commissioner Brooks was thanked for his work on the Urban Forestry Steering Committee.
- Implementing report recommendations would require a funding increase of approximately \$1,000,000 over the FY2009 budget (\$2,198,421).
- Staff noted that implementing a regular planned pruning schedule would reduce City's liability exposure from tree-related damage from low limbs.
- Draft report will, once approved by City manager, be sent to City Council.
- Master Plan study had cost \$38,000.
- Chair, a member of the State Board of Forestry, noted that she has for years raised concerns that Virginia's state plan does not address urban forestry adequately, focusing instead on rural forests issues, leaving local communities to create their own urban forestry plan from scratch. Recommended that the State provide via web site more detailed templates that local communities can use when developing their own local forestry plans.
- Staff advised that most local urban forestry plans do not include concrete detailed plans of the type included in Alexandria's draft report developed by the Steering Committee.
- Chair suggested that if Alexandria's urban forestry study could be uploaded to the State web site the study's recommendations could be used broadly throughout the state and help create a foundation for the State Board to request USDA funding for urban forestry initiatives.
- In response to Mr. Cromley's question, it was noted that the plan includes recommendations that can be implemented by residents since the City currently has no additional funding to implement new actions recommended.
- Priorities on the Matrix that have no "additional cost" noted were felt by Arborist as able to be absorbed, assuming adequate staff.
- Invasive species programs would be expanded via volunteers with the Arborist's office providing guidance.

## **X. PARK AND RECREATION COMMISSION AWARDS**

**Follow-up Action:** RPCA staff will develop a design for the award.

- Presented July 11, with the Commission approving nominees at its June meeting.
- Commissioners Dexter, Brune and Forbes volunteered to coordinate the task.
- City Arborist reported that RPCA will be conducting a tree sale at the Earth Day program, offering for example a tree for \$35 that would cost \$200 if bought privately.

## **XI. DIRECTOR'S REPORT**

**Follow-Up:** April PRC briefing on artificial turf fields in budget.

**Follow-Up:** RPCA to invite Commissioners to take part in its June 15-17 re-accreditation review.

- **Highlights:**

- Spring/summer programs: Brochure released; registration began March 16.
- On-line reservations for picnics, room reservations and other activities.
- Mr. Blakeley and Mr. Browand are working on many new IT enhancements to be implemented over the next 6 months.
- Youth basketball just finished – with finals held at Hammond Middle School the previous weekend.
- Cheerleading competition to be held at TC Williams HS April 18.
- Little League baseball starts April 29.
- Girl's softball begins April 23.
- New lights being installed at Lockett's Field because a wind storm micro-burst had brought the light polls down the previous month.
- **Ailing Infrastructure** – Repairs and upgrades to RPCA facilities still have not caught up with those identified as needing attention, though major upgrades have been made.
  - Charles Houston, Ramsey Center and others are now operational.
  - An additional Rec Center is still needed for West End residents and the best location needs to be identified.
  - Athletic fields' lighting polls are very old, such as those at Simpson and Four Mile Run. Funds have not yet been available for the identified upgrades. Minnie Howard's light improvements were only the first of needed improvements.
- **Re-accreditation** – RPCA's self-assessment to be completed in April and RPCA will have a June 15-17 visitation/review.

## **XII. REPORTS FROM COMMISSIONERS**

- **Ms. Noritake** – No report
- **Mr. Brooks**
  - Waterfront Committee has been briefed on Environmental Policy Committee's plans for Earth Day April 24.
  - Emphasized importance of Commissioners attending the Waterfront Study planning meeting since the consultant, EDAW, will be taking notes on comments.
- **Mr. Cromley** – No report.
- **Mr. Brune**
  - Noted that Mr. Dexter is in charge of 7 local West End civic associations.
  - Following Fort Ward and other West end developments.
- **Mr. Moir**
  - Baseball season opener coming up
  - Lacrosse season will see the field fully booked.
  - Concerned that any of the City's existing natural fields would be taken out of use, noting that the Brenman grass field is one of the nicest fields. (Mr. Forbes noted that soccer community does not agree.)
- **Mr. Coda** – No report. Liked the idea of the suggested GW field swap since the current field is old and in poor shape.

**XIII. ADJOURNMENT - 9: 35 p.m.**