

City of Alexandria, Virginia
PARK AND RECREATION COMMISSION

Regular Meeting
Thursday, April 17, 2014, 7:00 p.m.
Charles Houston Community Center
901 Wythe Street
Alexandria, Virginia 22314

P&RC Members Present:

Judy Guse-Noritake; Chair, Judith Coleman, Vice Chair; Jennifer Atkins; Gina Baum; Stephen Beggs; Alexis Browand; Rich Brune; William Cromley; Ripley Forbes, Secretary; Brian McPherson.

Excused Absence: Emma Schutzius

RPCA Staff Present: James Spengler, Director; William Chesley, Deputy Director, Recreation Services; Dinesh Tiwari, Deputy Director, Park Operations; Jack Browand, Division Chief, Marketing, Special Events and Waterfront Operations; Ron Kagawa, Division Chief, Park Planning, Design and Capital Projects; Laura Durham, Principal Planner, Open Space Coordinator; Dana Wedeles, Park Planner, Bethany Znidersic, Park Planner, Mac Slover, Director of Sports.

Guests: Jerry King, Vice Chair, Bicycle and Pedestrian Committee (BPAC). Bill Rivers, Advocates for Alexandria Aquatics

Summary Minutes

I. Call to Order by Chair, Judy Noritake:

The meeting convened at 7:03 p.m. and welcomed new Commissioner Alexis Browand, a junior at T.C. Williams High School recently appointed as a youth representative on the Commission.

II. Approval of Summary Minutes: February 20, 2014 and March 20, 2014

MOTION: Brune moved and Forbes seconded that the February 20, 2014 minutes be approved. The motion was approved by unanimous voice vote. Commissioners deferred consideration of the March 20, 2014 minutes until the next meeting.

III. Election of Officers:

Chair Noritake announced this was her last meeting as a member of the Commission after having served 22 years as a Commissioner. **MOTION:** McPherson moved and Brune seconded that Jennifer Atkins and Judith Coleman be nominated to serve as Commission co-chairs. The motion passed by unanimous voice vote. Chair Noritake invited nominations for the position of Commission Secretary. **MOTION:** Forbes moved and Baum seconded that Rich Brune be nominated to serve as Secretary. The motion passed by unanimous voice vote.

Chair Noritake recommended that the Park and Recreation Commission and the Youth Sports Advisory Board elect their officers annually, in April of each year.

Items for Information and discussion:

IV. Division Updates: To view full copies of staff reports go to (<http://alexandriava.gov/uploadedFiles/recreation/info/PRCCOMBINEDREPORTSAPRIL172014.pdf>).

A. Recreation Programs and Service Update - William Chesley, Deputy Director Athletic Facilities Community Allocation Policy. See Staff Report.

Deputy Director Chesley presented for Commission review and endorsement, the Athletic Facilities Community Allocation Policy, originally approved in April 2013. The purpose of the “Policy” is to help ensure “fair and equitable use of athletic facilities”. Chesley reviewed a few updates to the 2013 policy but said it was largely unchanged. He commended the Youth Sports Advisory Board (YSAB), chaired by Jim Gibson, for its work on the policy, and said the YSAB had unanimously endorsed the 2014 policy as proposed by staff. He said RPCA plans to present the policy for Commission review each spring.

Discussion:

Chair Noritake said the Commission continues to be concerned about the need to have more field time available for adult sports. She asked for an update on the condition of the two athletic fields at Jones Point Park. Kagawa said the National Park Service (NPS) owns, maintains and operates the fields and had accepted the quality of the contractor’s work on the fields but the fields are in poor condition. He said they continue to have drainage problems and poor soil quality has prevented grass seeding from taking. Kagawa said staff has contacted NPS about the problems but NPS said it has no funds available to correct the problems. NPS said it will reseed the fields. Kagawa said it is staff’s position that the fields need to be fully reconstructed. Chair Noritake said the City should use all means available to ensure that NPS fulfills its commitment made in the Environmental Impact Statement (EIS), including a lawsuit if needed. She asked staff for a two-page summary assessing the fields’ condition. Chair Noritake asked staff to provide this summary assessment to Congressman Moran with a request he take action this year to ensure NPS implements its EIS commitment.

In response to Forbes’ question, Deputy Director Chesley said gym space is also covered by the Department’s Athletic Facilities Community Allocation Policy. Forbes said more attention needs to be given to how to balance conflicts between youth and adult sports requests for gym time, especially those for volleyball and basketball. Forbes said adult sports need to be better represented within the process that sets priorities among users. Commissioners said that because adult sports is not governed by an organized infrastructure similar to that governing youth sports, it can be more difficult to identify adult sports representatives to work with the City in developing a fair and equitable process to set usage priorities for requests from City residents. Director Spengler said the bias is currently towards youth sports when they conflict with adult sports requests. He said RPCA would welcome Commission ideas regarding whether and how

the City should revise how requests from adult and youth sports are prioritized. He said that, if needed, the policy can be amended.

MOTION: Atkins moved, and Brune seconded, that the Commission approve the Athletic Facilities Community Allocation Policy for 2014. The motion passed by unanimous voice vote.

B. *Park Operations Report – Dinesh Tiwari, Deputy Director - See Staff Report.*

Discussion:

The Commission discussed concerns about rubberized playground surfaces that were raised by City resident Liz Johnson in a letter. Chair Noritake said Johnson is a frequent user of Simpson Stadium Park and opposes the Citywide Parks Improvement Plan proposal to install rubber surfacing in playgrounds, especially in playgrounds used by young children of crawling age. Johnson's letter said natural surfaces should be used in these parks to reduce potential health risks from ingesting pellets that can break off from a rubber surface or, on hot days, chemicals released as gas from a rubber surface. The Chair said she advised Johnson the time to present concerns about individual parks is when details are being planned for individual parks. Wedeles responded by email to Ms. Johnson. She said many reports do not indicate health risks from rubber surfaces. She said the question of whether it might be possible to avoid having all the parks within a general area use rubberized surfaces could be considered during the playground planning process. Director Spengler said two sets of standards affect surfacing decisions: the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) requirement for a rubberized surface to ensure accessibility, and the American Society for Testing and Materials (ASTM) requirement to use materials with set levels of resiliency to cushion falls. The Chair said ADA requires only a portion of a playground to be accessible.

Atkins said City residents' donations for playgrounds during the recent Action for Alexandria fundraising day should be used as evidence to defend with Council playground funding in the Parks and Park Operations budgets. She said donations to build two playgrounds, one at Running Brook in the West End, and the other at Maury playground, were among the top five projects funded during the fundraising day.

Beggs asked if the need to shut down the fields on Route 1 for maintenance the previous year was an annual action. Deputy Director Tiwari said there were renovations made the previous year and staff regularly monitors field conditions and use. Baum asked if there was a way to reduce the heat level on the Witter field. The Chair said Witter's location near the Beltway might add to the field's heat. Forbes asked if irrigating fields in the morning might help cool them on hot days. Kagawa said irrigation's cooling affect lasts only about an hour and increases the humidity.

Director Spengler said the Potomac Yards fountain is expected to be turned on in early May.

C. *Marketing, Special Events, Waterfront Operations - Jack Browand, Division Chief. See Staff Report.*

Chair Noritake reported that a public meeting had been scheduled for May, 8, 2014 at which the Olin design team will present options for modifying the Waterfront design to reflect the City's recent agreement with the Old Dominion Boat Club (ODBC). Browand said the agreement

swaps the land ODBC currently owns for the City-owned Beachcombers site. He said details are still being negotiated but it is likely to be two to three years before any implementation actions are taken. He said ODBC will probably vacate its current clubhouse within five years and relocate to the Beachcombers site. He said a number of City determinations will be needed after ODBC leaves its current clubhouse, such as whether the site could be used as open space, whether any parts of the ODBC building might be determined to be historic and other decisions. Chair Noritake urged the Commission to press for a way to avoid clustering together all of the 45 surface parking spaces promised to ODBC at its new clubhouse site. She urged Commissioners to attend the May 8 public meeting.

Chair Noritake recommended that Planning and Zoning avoid proposing names for parks and open space during a park's design phase, as was done for "Fitzgerald Park" when it was proposed as part of the Waterfront Small Area Plan design.

D. Park Planning, Design & Capital Development Reports – Ron Kagawa, Division Chief and Team. See Staff Reports.

Chair Noritake said that after the building at Pendleton and Henry Streets has come down an interim park will be put in place.

***E. Receive Neighborhood Park Planning Process and Timeline
See April 17, 2014 staff memo to Commission, available on City website.***

Ron Kagawa reviewed renovation work at Boothe Park. Completion is expected in summer 2014.

Kagawa said the Cameron Park development, by JBG Cos, will be considered by the Planning Commission at its May 6, 2014 meeting.

Wedeles reported that the Citywide Parks Improvement Plan is finalized and thanked the Commission for endorsing the plan. She said staff will now move ahead on planning for the 18 neighborhood parks, which range in size from a half-acre to 10 acres. Wedeles said RPCA will review the parks' existing conditions over the summer and expects community engagement to begin in fall 2014. She said staff looks forward to the Commission's early participation in this process as a liaison between staff and the community and will arrange dates for Commissioners to tour the parks within their districts.

Wedeles said Montgomery Park, in Park Planning District 1, is the only dog park close to the Waterfront. Chair Noritake urged people from District 1 to weigh in on plans to enhance Montgomery Park's dog park as fully as possible as a way to move dog use away from the Waterfront parks.

V. Reports from Commissioners (verbal updates):

A. Waterfront Commission - Gina Baum

Baum reported that the Waterfront Commission had been briefed about plans to expand the King Street Trolley service to accommodate user demand.

B. Youth Sport Committee - Brian McPherson

McPherson said the YSC meeting had been rescheduled to the second Monday in May 2014.

C. Four Mile Run – Judy Guse-Noritake

Chair Noritake, Co-chair of the Joint Four Mile Run Task Force (Task Force), said there would be a joint meeting of the Arlandria Action Plan Advisory Group and Four Mile Run Joint Task Force on April 23, 2014 to consider issues affecting the area. She said P&Z planned to discuss their initiatives affecting the area. Chair Noritake reported it looks like a major milestone is close to being achieved as the flow number for the Tidal Restoration Project has been successfully proposed by Senators Warner and Kaine for inclusion in the federal Water Resource Development Act being discussed by the House and Senate and is likely to be accepted. She thanked Liz Birnbaum, Arlington County Co-Chair of the Four Mile Run Task Force, for her crucial advocacy on this and thanked Virginia’s Senators for their work to make this happen. Chair Noritake said she will continue to serve as Co-Chair of the Four Mile Run Task Force after leaving the Commission.

D. Freedmen’s Cemetery.

Chair Noritake reported that stones are being installed in Freedmen’s Cemetery.

E. ACPS & Capital Improvements - Judy Guse-Noritake

(NOTE: See Jefferson Houston School report below)

F. Ft. Ward - Ripley Forbes

Chair Noritake reported that one of the Commission’s three positions on the Ad Hoc Fort Ward Park and Museum Area Stakeholder Advisory Group is vacant and invited recommendations for people to fill this vacancy. Brune said the group is working on identifying the three highest priorities among stakeholders for each of the five goals that have been identified.

G. ACPS School Projects-Judy Guse-Noritake - No report.

H. Jefferson Houston School - William Cromley

Cromley asked if the City will address potential asbestos abatement issues early in the renovation process so the Jefferson Houston Field (that will located be where the existing school currently resides) will be a part of the 2015 project completion. Kagawa said initial abatement work will begin in late May/June, 2014. He said Durant Center work is also moving forward.

I. Open Space - Judy Guse-Noritake

Chair Noritake said Laura Durham is preparing an open space document for Commission review in May or June that will then be sent to Council for action by the end of June 2014.

J. Braddock Plan Park- Judy Guse-Noritake

Previously discussed.

K. Patrick Henry School Update – Judy Guse-Noritake

Chair Noritake reported that planning for the Patrick Henry School renovation is moving forward and the design team is being hired. She said she will continue to represent the Commission on the Patrick Henry Community Engagement Committee as Chair emeritus.

L. Aquatics Update - Jennifer Atkins

Atkins asked Bill Rivers for an update. He reported Council had voted 7-0 to keep Warwick Pool open for summer 2014. He said a long-term solution has not yet been agreed upon.

M. Eisenhower West - Judy Coleman

Vice Chair Coleman reported that the next meeting of the Eisenhower West Steering Committee is scheduled for April 29, 2014 at the Cameron Station Clubhouse.

ADDITIONAL TOPICS:

Chair Noritake reported that the School Board had found funding for lights at T. C. Williams tennis courts and they are expected to be installed by spring 2015.

Chair Noritake invited recommendations for people who might be interested in replacing her as the Commission representative for Park Planning District 1, an area extending from the river to the railroad tracks that includes part of the Eisenhower Valley. She said it is important to remember that Commissioners are responsible for keeping both the broad interests of the City in mind as well as those of their own immediate community.

VI. Public Comments

Speaker: Jerry King, Vice Chair of Bicycle and Pedestrian Advisory Committee (BPAC).

King thanked the Commission for supporting BPAC's work and Chair Noritake for her support of the City's cyclist community throughout her 22 years on the Commission, including support for the creation of the Commission's bicycle subcommittee that had eventually developed into independent BPAC. Chair Noritake said trails are part of the City's park system and should be considered as such during Commission considerations. She said it is important to add more off-road bike lanes and sharrows as the bike plan is updated. King reported that Hillary Poole of T&ES would discuss the City's Complete Streets Program at BPAC's April 21, 2014 meeting.

Chair Noritake recommended the Commission hold one of its periodic retreats in the fall to discuss priority issues and concerns, including those related to budget cuts facing RPCA. She said it is important to remember the Commission's responsibility is to advise Council directly and work in partnership with RPCA to achieve their goals.

Chair Noritake said she submitted her resignation to Council that day, effective that evening.

VII. Adjournment:

The meeting was adjourned at 8:09 p.m. Director Spengler invited people to a City reception following the meeting held to honor and celebrate the Chair's 22 years of service on the Commission.