

**Department of Recreation, Parks and Cultural Activities
City of Alexandria, Virginia
Park and Recreation Commission
Regular Meeting
Thursday, February 19, 2009
7:30 P.M.
Lee Center
1106 Jefferson Street**

Commissioners

Henry Brooks (Acting Chair)
Richard Brune
Matthew Coda
William Cromley
David Dexter
Ripley Forbes
Robert Moir
Marshanika Rich

Commissioners – Excused Absences

Judy Guse-Noritake, Chair
Kaj Vetter

Staff

Kirk Kincannon (RPCA)
William Chesley (RPCA)
Ron Kagawa (RPCA)
Mary Stephenson (RPCA)
Jack Browand (RPCA)

AGENDA

- I. Welcome**
- II. Approval of Summary Minutes From the January 15, 2009 Meeting**
- III. Charles Houston Recreation Center Update**
- IV. Budget Update**
- V. Director’s Report**
- VI. Reports From Commissioners**
- VI. Adjournment**

I. WELCOME

- Meeting called to order by Chair at 7:30pm

II. APPROVAL OF SUMMARY MINUTES FROM JANUARY 15, 2008 MEETING

Follow-up Action: Draft minutes to be sent to all Commissioners for informal review.

- Consideration postponed to next meeting to provide members additional time to review the minutes.
- After some discussion among Commission members, the Chair proposed that RPCA staff begin sending the final draft of meeting minutes to all members for informal review rather than the current practice of sending them only to the Chair for informal review and comment before the draft is finalized and distributed to all Members for consideration and approval at the next Commission meeting.

Action – Motion Passed: Commissioners approved by unanimous voice vote a motion proposed by Mr. Forbes and seconded by Mr. Dexter that draft minutes be forwarded to all Commission members after RPCA has received them, rather than only to the Chair.

- Commissioners agreed they should e-mail any comments or suggested changes re: the draft minutes with all draft recipients via “reply all”.

III. CHARLES HOUSTON REC CENTER UPDATE – Mr. Chesley

Follow-up Action: Commission’s March 19 meeting to be held at Houston Center.

Follow-up Action: State of the City address and Center dedication ceremony to be Web-cast live from the Rec Center on City web site.

- Chair noted all Commissioners had received invitations from the Mayor to attend the dedication the following Saturday.
- Highlights of Mr. Chesley’s update:
 - Mayor to present a brief State of the City at 8:30 a.m., prior to dedication ceremony.
 - Staff tours of the Center to follow the formal ceremony.
 - New 34,000-square-foot Center now includes several multipurpose rooms transformable for variety of programs.
 - Computer lab has been added.
 - Center’s core programs from pre-renovation will resume.
 - City Civic Associations have provided, and will continue to provide inputs regarding services and activities most needed by the community.
 - Many additional programs, reflecting community input, are planned.
 - Pre-school programs to be offered.
 - New Center now includes child-friendly spaces adjoining the outdoor playground.
 - Boxing to be offered again.
 - Day-time Senior programs to be offered by Office on Aging in multi-purpose spaces.
 - New Center director - Sheila Whiting – was chosen by RPCA after a wide national search. Ms. Whiting, the internal candidate, was by far the most qualified candidate.
- **Discussion:**
 - Mr. Brooks and several other Commissioners plan to attend.
 - Commissioners who had already seen the new Center were very enthusiastic about both the Center’s variety of activities and its design.

IV. BUDGET UPDATE – Mr. Kincannon

- **Full list of RPCA’s proposed cuts has been posted to City Web site.**
- **RPCA approach to budget cuts** – No cuts to youth and family recreation services until all possible cuts are taken from other activities.

- **Overview**
 - RPCA is one of the three larger departments to be hit by major cuts; TES and DHS being the others.
 - Maintaining core recreational services on the proposed FY2010 budget, a 15 per cent cut, \$2.8 million below the FY2009 budget of slightly over \$20 million, will be a major challenge.
 - These RPCA budget cuts would return RPCA to its budget level of 3-4 years earlier, though with salaries are now higher additional service cuts will be needed to match this earlier funding level.
 - Programs and services in every part of RPCA to be affected.
 - Staff cuts -- 10-15 RPCA full-time positions likely to be eliminated, including some in Division Chief in Park Planning, several in Recreation Services and Park Operations and Field Maintenance; at least 10 seasonal positions to be cut.
 - New cost recovery options for adult programs being identified.
 - Most e-mails received thus far about proposed fees have been positive.
 - The importance of City activities being self-supporting was emphasized,
 - Marina's being largely self-supporting already was noted.
 - Maintaining recreational services through increased City – private collaboration -- RPCA is actively considering and seeking ideas for ways to maintain existing City recreational services by collaborating with providers like YMCA, Boys and Girls Clubs and other organizations, using shared programs and shared resources.
 - Director has already met with some YMCA program staff and a Board member to discuss possible options for collaboration.
- Negative impact on City's healthy lifestyle and anti-obesity programs for youth and families was highlighted as a particular RPCA concern.
- RPCA to cut tree and park maintenance budgets before programs affecting families and youth.
- **CIP** – “Dramatic cuts” to capital improvements previously approved and planned for FY2010 and FY2011 are likely.
 - \$5-6 million a year had been the average budget (including renovations of athletic fields, tennis courts, Charles Houston Rec Center, etc.).
- **Tree maintenance** – Possibility of collaborating with residents to cut costs.
 - Mr. Brooks noted that since the Urban Forestry Plan calls for City to plant more trees, this would be appropriate for City-resident collaboration.
 - Consideration being given on how the City can split costs of tree planting in neighborhoods, especially on private property; perhaps people could plant trees on people's property that residents have bought and would be responsible for maintaining.
- **Senior activities**
 - City has for many years subsidized senior activities 100 per cent.

- Potential for recouping program costs is now being discussed (e.g., for tai chi, self-directed art and senior programs at local recreation centers).
 - City Council has received many e-mails on the issue, with most supporting some sort of charge for senior programs.
 - A sliding fee scale, with scholarship assistance available for eligible residents, is being considered.
 - Issue will need to be addressed by City Council.
- **Potential Impact of Federal Stimulus Package on RPCA budget cuts**
 - City government has been organized and early in identifying several hundred million dollars of eligible projects - including capital projects – that meet Stimulus Package funding guidelines.
 - Projects were discussed at the previous City Council meeting.
 - All identified projects submitted will be ready to proceed in no more than two years, many more quickly.
 - City recommendations for projects have been submitted to Sen. Webb’s and Rep. Moran’s offices.
 - RPCA hopes Stimulus funding might prevent some planned cuts to operational services by funding some of RPCA’s budgeted capital costs – freeing up some capital funds to be shifted to offset shortfalls in the operational activities.
 - Example: Windmill Hill Park’s engineering design is done, but funds are needed to replace the concrete and steel. Hope is that funds would be available through the Water Resource Development Act and Corps of Engineers.
 - Example: RPCA has received the final report from a study commissioned to review the need for a sea wall to improve Alexandria’s flood mitigation efforts and evaluate the urgency of proceeding with related actions.
 - **Waterfront Study – Commission to receive regular updates.**
 - The Chair, is the Commission’s representative on the Waterfront Committee, requested that the Park and Recreation Commission receive regular updates on the Waterfront Study, noting that currently only the Waterfront Committee was being briefed.
 - Director agreed, noting that the original scope for work on the Waterfront Committee study includes providing updates to the Commission.

V. DIRECTOR’S REPORT – Mr. Kincannon

Hand-out: February 16, 2009 letter from Council Member Krupicka and Vice Mayor Pepper to the Mayor, City Manager, City Council, RPCA Director and other City officials re: Cameron Station retailers.

Hand-out: February 16, 2009 letter from Council Member Krupicka to the Mayor, City Manager, and City Council Members re: Alexandria’s Large Parks.

Follow-up: Four Mile Run project to be discussed in greater detail at March Commission meeting.

- **Four Mile Run Restoration Project Draft Design Guidelines - Mary Stephenson (RPCA)**
 - Follow up to master plan approved by City Council and Arlington County Board two years earlier.
 - The recommended design guidelines developed by the Arlington and Alexandria Joint Task Force and Agency Coordinating Committee, working with consulting firm Rhodeside & Harwell, Inc., to be posted to the Northern Virginia Regional Commission's (NVRC) web site the next day – at [HTTP://WWW.NOVAREGION.ORG/index.asp?NID=214](http://www.novaregion.org/index.asp?NID=214).
 - **Public open house** - to be held in April to present the guidelines.

- **Four Mile Run pedestrian bridge - design competition – Ron Kagawa**
 - RPCA working with Virginia Tech's Architecture School in Old Town to develop a design competition for a 400-foot pedestrian bridge span to link Eads St. (Arlington) to Commonwealth Avenue (Alexandria).
 - Solicitation to go out in June/July 2009.
 - Virginia Tech campus in Alexandria has extensive experience with international design competitions.
 - RPCA anticipates significant interest from high level design firms.

- RPCA's free snack and lunch program has benefited significantly from state and federal programs since 2004 – funds that have not been impacted by current City and State budget cuts.

- Director called Commissioners' attention to the February 16, 2009 letters sent by Council Member Rob Krupicka to the Mayor, City Council, City Manager and other City officials re: Cameron Station retailers and large City parks.
 - Brenman Park neighborhood is interested in hosting some of the larger activities which have contributed to overuse of Fort Ward.
 - Cameron Station retailers letter
 - Reported on a community meeting with Vice Mayor Pepper, Councilman Krupicka and Cameron Station business community members discussing ideas for ways to enhance area retailers' visibility, especially to Ben Brenman Park users, including sports leagues.
 - The need to attract customers to the retailers is heightened by the economic downturn.
 - Future meetings will discuss how use Brenman Park as an economic engine for the area.
 - Alexandria's large parks letter
 - Highlighting the need for a Master Plan covering Oronoco Bay, Fort Ward, Chinguapin, and Ben Brenman.
 - Urged a plan be developed to use Brenman Park as an economic engine for the neighborhood, including relocating Fort Ward Jazz Festival to Brenman Park.

- **Fort Ward - Public Meetings**
 - First meeting was held the previous evening and attended by both members of the neighboring and wider City communities.

- Focus is to gather public inputs on RPCA's draft usage guidelines designed to address concerns re: over-use of Fort Ward park facilities, creating both nuisance problems for the immediate neighborhood, and costs consequences for RPCA. Largely uncontrolled use of park sites creates significant repair costs from wear and tear.
 - Office of Historic Alexandria briefed on the 35 acres of historical significance, presenting information re: African-American sites and recently discovered Native American sites in Fort Ward, and site's general cultural significance.
 - About 50 residents attended, with RPCA and other agencies' staff participating.
- Next meeting is March 4 at Lee Center.
- Third meeting, March 18 at T.C. Williams, to review data from earlier meetings.
- Fort Ward – athletic fields near St. Stephens
 - Director noted that a resident had complained that field lights were left on during the public meeting though no one was using the field.
 - RPCA investigated and determined the fields were, in fact, in use at the time.
- **Fort Ward athletic field lights**
 - A neighbor to the park has objected to the new Fort Ward lights.
 - Director has met with resident and explained that the recently upgraded athletic light system was the result of a year-long process of briefings and public comments and reflects the consensus of those public inputs.
 - To limit time when lights are in use, RPCA is further tweaking its computer system to fine-tune how long field lights are left on after use of the field for games ends, a safety practice that lets participants have lights on while returning to their cars.
 - Mr. Forbes noted his extreme concern about the possibility that soccer league supporters might need to revisit the athletic field issue after it had already been extensively discussed – and agreed upon - during a year of public outreach and hearings and those residents using the field had already expended large amounts of their time participating in that public hearing process.
 - Director noted City Council had approved the new lights after a year-long public process which enabled community concerns to be fully vented, but encouraged those using the field to e-mail the Department with their support for maintaining the field lights as is
 - Director advised that City Council approval would be needed for any reduction in Fort Ward Park hours.
 - Director encouraged those using the lighted field e-mail their support.
- **Fort Ward - Noise and alcohol restrictions to be imposed**
 - RPCA Director will need to approve an alcohol use permit in advance – and approvals will be rare.
 - Alcohol use by parties renting the Fort Ward park sites has created labor-intensive expensive maintenance requirements, such as clean up of broken glass and used cans.

- In response to neighborhood complaints, amplified sound will be restricted
- Security deposits will now be required from park site renters at Fort Ward. .

- **Freedom of Speech on private lands with public access easements.**
 - Director reported this issue has been raised re: public access portions of Potomac Yard's Land Bays G, I, and J.
 - At Planning Commission, issue was raised as to whether free speech requirements at events on this land should be equal to those for events held at Market Square.
 - RPCA may eventually become involved in the issue because it affects public open space and plaza space.
 - Issue expected to be raised at City Council meeting the following Saturday.
 - Planning Commission had approved a motion that free speech on private land used by the City for public events should be comparable to those rights afforded on publicly owned land.
 - Issue to be discussed at the following Saturday's Council meeting – can public rights to free speech be enforced on public access easements on private property that is used, for example,
 - Attorneys are reviewing the issue of public access and use easements on private property.

- Bike path between west and south Glebe is expected to be open in the late spring/summer timeframe.

- **Charles Houston Recreation Center – Dedication the following Saturday.**
 - Results of the renovation are “absolutely incredible.”
 - Mayor Euille to present the 2009 State of the City address at 8:30 a.m. at the Center.
 - Commissioners encouraged to examine the finished Center.

Action: Youth Policy Commission - Commission designated Ripley Forbes to serve as the PRC member on the Youth Policy Commission.

VI. REPORTS FROM COMMISSIONERS

- **Mr. Brune**
 - Has been attending meetings related to Fort Ward, Potomac Yards, and Braddock Road, and West End development.
 - No actions to report with Pocket Parks.
 - Noted that the Braddock plan includes two potential parks.
- **Mr. Dexter**
 - Dora Kelley Nature Park clean-up March 28.
 - Invasive species removal project March 28.
- **Mr. Moir – Youth Sports Advisory Board (YSAB)**
 - Board meetings following up its January letters sent to Chair Noritake expressing its concern over potential impacts of RPCA budget cuts on the health of City youth – especially of any delay in the planned City athletic field upgrades.
 - The Board's letter had been forwarded by the Chair to City Council.

- Youth Sports Advisory Board has now discussed these concerns in person with Council Members Lovain and Krupicka and with City Council Candidate Kerry Donnelly.
- Board's four recommendations in the letter would have 'little to no impact on the City budget' - but have a major impact on City's ability to respond to City residents' – youth and adult – athletic needs.
- Issues highlighted included:
 - Board recommendation to move ahead with installing planned artificial turf on four fields (Potomac Yards, Little Simpson athletic fields, Roth-Witter, and Braddock Road), recognizing that federal and state funds are awaited for Roth-Witter and the developer's funds may be delayed for Simpson fields due to the economic downturn.
 - Board recommendation to make two existing athletic fields available for youth sports use (TC Williams and Bishop Ireton high schools).
 - TC Williams field access appears resolved since the January letter.
 - City is being urged to encourage Bishop Ireton to apply for an SUP for use of the fields Sunday afternoons.
- RPCA Director advised that RPCA has identified \$700,000 from FY2007 earmarks available for funding the artificial turf conversions.
 - Though actions on the Simpson Fields will depend upon the economy and the developer's ability to sell houses,
- Upcoming field disruption (March) at south end of the two existing fields -- Installation of a sanitary sewer line -- to support Fire Station 209 (now under construction) in March -- will impact the south end of the soccer field. Staff will review and coordinate on-site conditions.
 - Alexandria Youth Soccer and other users of the field have been notified.
 - Consideration is being given by RPCA re: how use of the fields might be modified to enable their continued use during this time.
- **Mr. Cromley**
 - Is the Park and Recreation Commission representative on Charles Houston Memorial Design Competition to develop public art to honor and memorialize the civil rights leader for whom the Rec Center was named.
 - Observed what a remarkable person Charles Houston was, a fact being brought to light once again by the Recreation Center's renovation and upcoming rededication.
 - Encouraged Commissioners to Google Charles Houston to learn more about his accomplishments.
- **Mr. Brooks**
 - Waterfront Committee - Emphasized importance of Commission receiving updates on actions related to City's moving ahead with development of its Waterfront Plan
 - Reported that RPCA staff Beth Carton and Ron Kagawa would be making a presentation at the upcoming Virginia Recreation & Park Society's Go Green Management Conference to be held in Fredericksburg.
- **Mr. Forbes**
 - Raised the issue of adequate court space being needed for the Alexandria Volleyball Club's Girls Volleyball League.

- Because of limited gym availability on City sites, the League had almost needed to cut two teams this year, an action avoided only by Episcopal High School's having made available its own courts for use by the teams.
- Mr. Chesley reported that the City is looking at ways to provide additional resources to support the program.
- Director reported that RPCA is looking at ways to respond to residents' interest in indoor soccer space for adult use on evenings and weekends.
- **Ms. Rich**
 - Is participating on the RPCA's Teen Advisory Board.
 - Alexandria Youth Council – Is helping them plan their February 27 talent show.
 - Mr. Chesley noted that her leadership skills on the Teen Advisory Board are much appreciated.
- **Mr. Coda**
 - Hoped no changes would be made to the Fort Ward athletic field lighting, since it is much needed by those teams using the fields.

VII. ADJOURNMENT - 8:45 p.m.