

City of Alexandria, Virginia
PARK AND RECREATION COMMISSION

Public Hearing and Regular Meeting
Thursday, September 17, 2015, 7:00 p.m.
Mount Vernon Recreation Center
2701 Commonwealth Avenue

Summary Minutes

Members Present: Jennifer Atkins, Chair, Judith Coleman, Vice Chair, Gina Baum, Stephen Beggs, Rich Brune, Secretary, Ripley Forbes.

Members Absent: William Cromley, Brian McPherson, Catherine Poulin.

RPCA Staff Present: James Spengler, Director; Dinesh Tiwari, Deputy Director, Park Operations; William Chesley, Deputy Director, Recreation Services; Jack Browand, Division Chief, Public Information, Special Events, Waterfront Operations; Margaret Orlando, Division Chief, Recreation Services; Ron Kagawa, Division Chief, Park Planning, Design+Capital Projects; Laura Durham, Open Space Coordinator, Bethany Znidarsic, Landscape Architect/Park Planner, Kelly Gilfillen, Marketing Manager; Robin DeShields, Executive Assistant, Iris Portny, Assisting Recording Secretary.

Other City Staff: Jeffrey Farner, Deputy Director, Planning and Zoning.

Guests: Cathleen Curtin, Cyndi Flores, David Fromm, Jeanne Gardner, Christine Garner, Caroline Griglione (AAA), Melany Hansen, Marilyn Howe, Marguerite Lang, Barbara Lynch, Bruno Mahlmoun, Teresa Miller, Dan and Karen Sehnal, Bill Rivers (AAA), Maryann Walker.

I. Call to Order: by Jennifer Atkins, Chair. Atkins called the meeting to order at 7:10 p.m. She noted the absence of a quorum and reported that Vice Chair Coleman had been delayed in traffic. When Coleman arrived at 7:10 p.m. a quorum was then present.

II. Public Hearing: Proposal to De-designate Three Unfenced Dog Exercise Areas.

Chair Atkins reviewed what had prompted the Park and Recreation Commission (P&RC) to develop its proposal for the City to de-designate three unfenced dog exercise areas - those at the southeast corner of Braddock Road/Commonwealth Avenue (Braddock/Commonwealth), at Fort Williams Parkway/Dearborn Road (Fort Williams Parkway/Dearborn), and at Timberbranch Parkway/ParkwayTerrace (Timberbranch/Parkway Terrace).

A Commission-generated proposal - Atkins said Commissioners, not City staff, developed the proposal after hearing resident concerns that were presented as either comments to individual Commissioners, or as public comments during the City's public hearings that were held as part of the RPCA's ongoing park planning process. The P&RC created ***a Dog Park Subcommittee***, to identify issues needing to be addressed that relate to either specific unfenced off-leash dog exercise areas, or to the Dog Park Master Plan (DPMP). Commissioners Coleman, Forbes and Brune serve on the subcommittee. Some criteria used to identify unfenced dog exercise areas for potential de-designation

were lack of use and potential safety concerns raised either by park users or related to the exercise area being located on a busy street.

Atkins said public comments submitted by email will be included in the hearing's public record.

Public Comments

1. Cathleen Curtin, 501 Princess Street

Curtin, a dog owner and president of "foundersdogpark.com", a non-profit (501c3) organization of dog owners who use the off-leash unfenced dog exercise area in Founders Park, said they organized about five years ago to deal with complaints about the unfenced dog exercise area. She said foundersdogpark.com conducted a small survey covering dog parks throughout the City when the organization was established, and it showed that most dog owners prefer using the unfenced dog parks because dogs are better socialized/trained, and the grounds are better kept. They found that in seven fenced dog parks, that they sometimes become dirt pits, are not well maintained, and dogs there are not well monitored by owners. She said she supports keeping the three designated unfenced dog exercise areas as is, and urged the City to conduct a more systematic outreach in the neighborhoods near the Timberbranch/Parkway Terrace and Fort Williams Parkway/Dearborn dog areas to determine the actual usage.

2. Christine Garner, 25 W. Glendale Avenue

Garner, a dog owner who lives next to the Braddock/Commonwealth dog exercise area and regularly uses it, said she had gathered about 100 neighbors who signed her petition asking for the dog exercise area to stay as is. She said about 90 percent of the petitions signers oppose fencing this exercise area, in part because they fear it would generate more users and traffic. She said that unfenced dog exercise areas tend to be better for older dogs than fenced areas where the dogs may be less supervised.

3. David Fromm, 2307 E. Randolph Avenue

Fromm said he does not currently own a dog. He does not want this proposal to be used as an excuse to close unfenced dog exercise areas in the City. He said some dogs do not handle fenced-in dog areas well, and recommended that plantings be used as an alternative to fencing.

4. Maryann Walker, 206 S. Pitt Street

Walker, a dog owner, said she uses the dog exercise area next to Ford's Landing, supports off-leash dog parks in general, and wants to make sure the Ford's Landing unfenced dog exercise area is kept as is. She said the only safety problems she has experienced in Ford's Landing Park are created by bicyclists who ignore posted signage advising them to dismount.

5. Cyndi Flores, 3 Groves Avenue

Flores, a dog owner who uses the Timberbranch/Parkway Terrace dog exercise area, said she supports unfenced dog parks because fenced dog parks tend to be more chaotic, with more poorly trained dogs. She said unfenced exercise areas are also good for to train dogs, especially for higher end uses such as therapy dogs.

6. Marguerite Lang, 14 W. Rosemont Avenue

Lang, a dog owner, said the Braddock/Commonwealth dog exercise area should not be de-designated. She said this park is adequate and safe for older and less active dogs and most owners of more active dogs tend not to use this park. Lang said as a taxpayer she doesn't want to lose the benefit of having this dog exercise area.

7. Melany Hansen, 610 S. Washington Street

Hansen, a dog owner and new resident, said she uses the Windmill Hill Park and Monroe dog parks and notices that dog owners are more attentive to their dogs at an unfenced dog exercise area. She said it would make it easier for users of a dog exercise area to respond to any safety concerns raised if they can communicate with each other directly as the Founder Park Dog Park users do.

8. Bruno Mahlmoun, 501 Princess Street

Mahlmoun, a dog owner who uses the Founders Park and Windmill Hill Park dog exercise areas, said it is important to preserve open spaces where possible, and to mitigate any safety issues without fences where possible. He noted that founderdogpark.com had raised \$35,000 to install trees and benches at the City's dog exercise area to help alleviate park users' concerns. He said if safety-related incidents occur at a dog exercise area, City Council should have metrics to reference when deciding how to respond.

Public comments submitted by email:

Note: The following residents submitted comments on the proposal by email. Their unabridged comments are included as an appendix at the end of the meeting minutes: Susie Acheson, Ali Ahmad-President, Wakefield -Tarleton Civic Association, Daniel Gustav Anderson, Margaret M. Ballard, Barbara P. Beach, CaddingtonII (Tweet), Cathleen Curtin-FoundersDogPark.com, Yvonne Callahan, Ruben ("Bill") Duran, Kirk S. Fedder, Christine Garner, Carrie Keene, Tricia Levy and Robert Ritsch, Melissa McMahan, John Merten, Heather Fox, Mary Hobbie, Linda Holland, Amy Slack, Michael Rose, Timothy Sullivan.

Commissioners' Responses to Public Comments:

- Atkins said the unfenced dog exercise area in Mount Jefferson Park will be kept unfenced, and the exercise area's current drainage problems will be fixed and some plantings may be added. She said natural barriers at this location effectively discourage dogs from running into nearby streets.
- Atkins said the P&RC has no plans at this time to propose de-designating other unfenced dog areas beyond the three proposed. She said the Commission is concerned about unfenced dog exercise areas on a relatively busy street without separation barriers, such as the Braddock/Commonwealth one. She said the Dog Park Sub-committee's goal is to proactively identify potential safety risks for dogs, pedestrians, bicyclists and other users rather than waiting for an incident to happen.
- In response to suggestions that the P&RC increase its outreach to neighbors when a dog exercise area is being considered for de-designation, Atkins said the effectiveness of the public outreach was shown by the many residents who emailed comments and attended that evening's meeting. She said the Braddock/Commonwealth area is clearly "well-used and well loved" but few comments were received regarding Fort Williams Parkway/Dearborn and Timberbranch/Parkway Terrace.
- Atkins said the P&RC wants to continue to hear from neighbors and users of dog exercise areas about whether an exercise area's apparent safety risks are actual problems.
- Coleman said the Sub-committee had worked hard to word the Commission's announcement for the public hearing in a way that made it clear the focus of the de-designation proposal was limited to the three unfenced dog areas mentioned. She regretted that some people were nonetheless worried that broader actions were being planned. She said it's time to revisit the DPMP because the City has changed a lot since the DPMP was approved.
- Coleman said that resident inputs help the P&RC consider what types of changes are needed for these exercise areas, the P&RC is not an administrative agency that regularly gathers information so it relies on outreach. She emphasized the City is and will remain dog-friendly.
- Forbes said he had raised the initial safety concerns about the Braddock/Commonwealth dog

exercise area. He said designation of a site as a dog exercise area should not depend upon whether most dogs using it appear well-behaved, because others dogs may not be.

- Forbes said the P&RC initiated its review because the DPMP was approved in 2002 and the Braddock/Commonwealth exercise area was designated 30 years ago, well before the Braddock Metro station and the increased traffic it generates.
- Forbes said other communities' best practices for dog exercise areas generally require smaller dog exercise areas to be fenced, especially when located at a place or intersection where an accident risk is foreseeable, e.g. Braddock/Commonwealth. He noted Denver's best practices require unfenced off-leash dog parks to be 200 feet from a road.
- Forbes said he would like to see Hooff's Run developed into a significant dog park.
- Brune said additional details about specific complaints received during the past five years regarding dog exercise area safety issues would be useful.
- Brune agreed with Forbes that the Braddock/Commonwealth site is a potentially dangerous location for an unfenced dog exercise area.
- Beggs said locating a dog exercise area at the intersection of two busy streets (e.g., Braddock/Commonwealth) is "not the best idea". He likes the suggestion of adding plantings and other barriers to unfenced dog areas.
- Atkins agreed with Forbes that the P&RC should be proactive in looking at places where potential safety problems exist, even with few or no reported incidents, or conflicting opinions.
- Atkins said the City's Office of Animal Control considers Braddock/Commonwealth to be a high risk area for having a dog-related accident.

Commission recommendation to Council

Action: Baum moved, and Brune seconded, that the P&RC recommend to City Council that (1) the unfenced dog exercise areas at Timberbranch/Parkway Terrace and Fort Williams Parkway/Dearborn be de-designated now, with the understanding that staff should consider more suitable locations for off-leash dog exercise areas within these parks when they are reviewed during the City's natural area park planning process; and (2) that planning for the Braddock/Commonwealth dog exercise area should be considered later as part of the pocket park planning process. Coleman and Beggs opposed solely on the limited ground that the de-designations of Fort Williams Parkway and Timber Branch Parkway could wait to be addressed in a future planning process. They agreed with the proposal regarding the Braddock/Commonwealth area. The motion passed 4-2.

III. Presentation: Oakville Triangle/Route 1 Corridor Vision Plan - Jeffrey Farner, Deputy Director, Planning and Zoning.

Note: Corridor Vision Plan and Design Guidelines are posted at:

http://alexandriava.gov/uploadedFiles/planning/info/Oakville_Triangle/OakvilleDesignGuidelines09232015LoRes.pdf

Farner reviewed the Oakville Triangle/Route 1 Corridor Vision Plan. He said the final recommendations will be submitted to the Planning Commission and City Council in October 2015. He noted this area is adjacent to Mount Jefferson Park and a Mount Jefferson Park update will be presented to the P&RC at a future meeting.

Highlights of the plan's open space elements include:

- Parcel on Bellefonte Avenue adjacent to Route 1 to be used as open space.
- 25-foot wide Route 1 sidewalks and undergrounding of utilities.
- Ground level, roof top and public access easement open spaces.

- Possible higher and lower paths in Mount Jefferson Park.
- Swann Street probably to be closed to cars on weekends.
- Including building scale transitions and open space in the area near Mount Jefferson Park.
- Ruby Tucker Park to expand by about one-third by adding the existing Lynhaven Drive right-of-way. Staff will recommend the City be responsible for maintaining the added-on space, and that Preston Condominium Association continue to maintain the existing Ruby Tucker Park area.
- Privately owned parks next to Mount Jefferson Park to be made accessible via public access easements.

Items still to be determined include:

- Whether and how to make roof-top open space open to the public.
- Developing options for creating interim open spaces that can be actively used by the public during construction period as elements of the plan are phased in.

Next steps:

- Oakville Triangle/Route 1 Advisory Group to prepare letters submitting its recommendations and endorsement of the plan to the Planning Commission and City Council.
- December 1 Planning Commission public hearing for proposed Mount Jefferson Park redesign. December consideration by Planning Commission and City Council of Development Special Use Permit (DSUP) for rezoning that permits plan's office building and two residential buildings.

Commission comments:

- ***Park phasing*** - In response to Atkins 's question, Farner said the developer has agreed to include Mount Jefferson Park from Raymond Street to Route 1 in Phase 1 of the redevelopment and design, and that development will be entirely funded by the developer.
- ***Building heights*** - In response to Atkins' question about increasing building heights, Farner said the plan currently shows the property at Fannon Street and Route 1 as a 55-foot height, but in recent months multiple property owners asked the Advisory Group to support higher building heights to make the redevelopment more economically viable. He said the proposals for increased heights include 45 feet next to Mount Jefferson Park, and either 65 or 85 feet further away from the park. Farner said the Advisory Group could not agree on the proposed height increases and decided instead to recommend principles that the Planning Commission and City Council should consider when considering these height requests. He said the Advisory Group wants to avoid uniform building heights along Route 1.
- ***Roof-top open space*** - Farner said that for roof top open space to meet DSUP requirements, it must meet the DSUP's dimensional requirements and be usable for programming.

IV. Items for Information:

A. Public Comments (Non-agenda items).

David Fromm asked if there will be a trash can at the attractive new Stewart Avenue entrance into Mount Jefferson Park. Tiwari said there will be.

V. Items for Action:

A. Approval of Minutes: May 21, 2015, June 18, 2015, July 16, 2015.

- **Brune** moved and **Beggs** seconded that the May 21, 2015 minutes be approved. The motion was approved by voice vote with Baum abstaining due to absence.
- **Brune** moved and **Beggs** seconded that the June 18, 2015 minutes be approved. The motion was approved by voice vote with Baum abstaining due to absence.
- **Brune** moved and **Atkins** seconded that the July 16, 2015 minutes be approved. The motion was approved by voice vote with Coleman abstaining due to absence.

VI. **RPCA Staff Updates:**

A. **Director's Report:**

1. **FY17 CIP Update:** James Spengler, Director, RPCA. See Staff Report. Spengler reviewed the FY17 CIP Short Title Project List (FY17 to FY26), in total \$76 million is being requested over ten years.
 2. **Patrick Henry Project Update: See Attachments. Background:** On June, 18, 2015, the P&RC held a public hearing to receive input on the RPCA staff recommended, Neighborhood Recreation Center (NRC) programming model for the new Patrick Henry Recreation Center. On June, 23, 2015 City Council approved the NRC programming concept. The Alexandria City Council and Alexandria City School Board have recommended the formation of a new Patrick Henry School and Recreation Center Stakeholder Advisory Group to oversee the planning and design for the new recreation center. Letters to various groups requesting appointment of representatives will be mailed next week. The monthly City Council/School Board Sub-Committee Meetings will be used to provide regular project updates. Atkins said Brian McPherson (absent) will continue to serve as the P&RC representative on the Patrick Henry Board.
- B. **Division Updates:** To view full staff reports please go to <http://www.alexandriava.gov/uploadedFiles/recreation/info/PRCSEPTEMBER172015CO MBINEDREPORTSRevised2.pdf>
1. **Recreation Services:** William Chesley, Deputy Director, See Staff Report. Atkins thanked Chesley and staff for including data about summer camps, and Out of School Time Program (OSTP) participation in the report. She said that RPCA did well in this area. Chesley introduced long-time staff member Margaret Orlando, who was recently promoted to Division Chief.
 2. **Park Operations:** Dinesh Tiwari, Deputy Director - See Staff Report.
 3. **Public Information, Special Events, Waterfront Operations:** Jack Browand, Division Chief, See Staff Report.
 4. **Park Planning, Design + Capital Projects:** Ron Kagawa, Division Chief and staff - See Staff Reports.

VII. Commission Business and Reports from Commissioners by District (verbal updates):

A. Sub-Committees on Public/Private Partnerships and Open Space:

Durham said staff will provide an update to City Council on the Open Space Plan in January or February 2016.

B. Memorandum to City Council regarding NOVA Parks Proposal to Acquire

517 Prince Street: See Attachment Memorandum at:

<http://www.alexandriava.gov/uploadedFiles/recreation/info/PRCSEPTEMBER172015COMBINEDREPORTSRevised2.pdf>

In August, 2015, NOVA Parks submitted a proposal to acquire 517 Princess St., an 18th century historic property, contingent on the City renewing NOVA Parks' lease on the Cameron Run Regional Park property for an additional 30 year lease term. Coleman asked Director Spengler to keep the P&RC informed of further developments and if a public hearing is needed.

Action: Atkins requested the NOVA Park's item be added to the October agenda (non-public hearing) for discussion. Additional agenda items are: the proposed 50 meter pool at Chinquapin Center, and the Cameron Run Regional Park lease.

C. Civic Awards Update: Browand said the P&RC Civic Awards Sub-committee, Brune, Forbes, are working on updating nomination criteria. Atkins asked the Sub-Committee to provide an update at the October meeting.

VIII. Next Meeting: October 16, 2015, Charles Houston Community Center. Agenda items will include an update on the Neighborhood Parks Improvement Plan. The P&RC wants to hold its November meeting in the City's West End.

IX. Adjourned 9:23 p.m.

1/7/16

Attachments: Public Comments