CITY OF ALEXANDRIA, VIRGINIA

Park and Recreation Commission
Regular Meeting

Thursday, February 18, 2010, 7:30 p.m.
Charles Houston Recreation Center
901 Wythe Street, Alexandria VA

SUMMARY MINUTES

RPCA Staff: James Spengler, Director, Roger Blakeley, Jack Browand, Ron Kagawa, Mary Stephenson, Robin DeShields. Absent: Roger Blakeley, Alisa Carrel.
Guest: Nathan Macek-Chair, Waterfront Committee.

I. Welcome: The Chair opened the meeting at 7:30 p.m. and welcomed staff.

II. Presentation on Duron Paint Building Site -4109 Mt. Vernon Avenue- Judy Guse-Noritake, Chairperson. The Chair gave the presentation.

- The presentation was also given to the Arlandria Action Advisory Group on 2/17/10; public response was characterized as largely enthusiastic.
- Background: In 2007, the City bought 4 parcels located at 4109-4125 Mt. Vernon Avenue, adjacent to Four Mile Run Park for use as open space. Three of the four buildings were torn down; the Duron paint building was left standing. Estimated costs to install HVAC and bring the bldg. up to standard was $¼ million dollars. The cost to demolish the building was estimated at $80K. Due to costs/budget, the City decided to leave the building up while considering options for demolition or re-use. A group of architects from Alexandria and Arlington proposed to develop some conceptual ideas for the building’s re-use on a pro-bono basis, with the goal of being able to use the building for community purposes as a simple, multipurpose facility. Because the biggest cost to renovate was to re-do the HVAC system they proposed instead to use the building as a seasonal building without heat or AC.
- The proposed site design will open the building up on the west side with a large barn-door opening. The mural will be relocated to interior of building and the restrooms will be reconfigured & renovated to with ADA standards. Daylight harvesting (non-electrical) will be accomplished by installing light tubes and skylights. Community uses of the building could include cultural events, environmental education, small performances, summer youth camps, farmers and holiday markets, and other community uses. The proposal shows possible phasing of the building along with the series of 3 “outdoor rooms” on the adjacent sites to the north where buildings were torn down.
- Funding- some services will be provided pro-bono; some funds will come from the Open Space Fund to help underwrite what can’t be done with in-kind funds, along with some community sweat equity.
- Mr. Spengler thanked the Chair of the P&RC who has been instrumental in getting this project moving forward. Two years ago, General Services did a study on the Duron building and their analysis was that it would be less expensive to tear the building down than to rehabilitate it. The Chair worked with a small group of architects, “Architects Anonymous”, who looked at the site pro-bono to suggest uses and design concepts that would benefit the community with a minimal monetary investment. The City Manager, after seeing their presentation, agreed to consider their proposal for re-purposing the building instead of tearing it down, with the understanding that the Arlandria community needs to be in support of the project, and that there be volunteer and in-kind services for accomplishing the project and the on-going operations of the building and adjoining sites.
Next Steps:
- Public Hearing on proposed SUP Application, March 18, 2010.
- Submit SUP Application in March 23 for the June Planning Commission and City Council public hearings.
- Community meetings and involvement - March-May.
- Begin construction by the end of summer or fall.
- The park planning process for all four parcels will also be initiated with any plan to come back to the P&RC for review and comment.

Business Items:
- Introduction of New Commissioner: The Chair introduced new Commissioner Mr. Jeffrey Murphy who was appointed to the P&RC at the 2/16/10 City Council meeting.
- Minutes of January 21, 2010 - this item was deferred to the next regular meeting, 3/18/10 due to the recent major snowstorm, the City was closed for 10 days.

III. DIVISION UPDATES:
Note: To view a full copy of Staff Reports, please go to www.alexandriava.gov/Recreation/Commission & Committees.

A. Recreation Programs and Services Update - William Chesley
- See Staff Report: Follow-up Discussion on Update-Early Morning Fitness Program Registration at Charles Houston: Mr. Chesley reported that the program has been in place since last summer and is designed to be full cost recovery (10% is being recovered currently). City Council approved $26,000 for the program. The Program is not taking off in the community as well as expected. Staff is working to improve its marketing and outreach efforts. The program will be re-evaluated in June and a decision made whether to continue it. The City of Alexandria offers a Wellness Program for its employees, currently there are more City employees than paying patrons. The overall monthly participation rate varies - cost is $3.00 per visit.

- The Chair reminded staff of the Charles Houston Room and Gymnasium Naming/Dedication Ceremony: February 27, 2010 from 3-4 p.m. at Charles Houston. This will be a major community event. She encouraged P&RC members to attend.

- Out of School Time Program: Mr. Spengler will give a presentation at the next City Council/School Board sub-committee meeting on 2/22/10. There is a difference in enrollment vs. average daily attendance. Enrollment is down but the average daily attendance is better. When parents pay a fee for children to participate in programs, attendance is usually better. The meeting is at 5:00 p.m. at the School Admin. building-2000 N. Beauregard St. Meetings are held monthly.

- See Staff Report. Mr. Blakeley was absent. The Director will provide further information under (Item V). The P&RC requested that a summary report if possible be provided in the future.

C. Office on the Arts Update – report by Alisa Carrel
- See Staff Report. Staff reviewed the report; there were no questions or comments.
IV. Park Planning Updates:

A. Update on Playgrounds Report - Ron Kagawa
   - See Staff Report. Mr. Forbes asked which playgrounds had passed their Consumer Product Safety Commission (CPSC) standards- he wanted to know if the ones in need of the most repair have safety issues-this may help Council in making a decision. Mr. Kagawa- a number of playgrounds in the City currently have old equipment, staff is reviewing these and making recommendations for repair/replacement. Mr. Spengler- approximately 10-12 playgrounds out of 40 are in need of repair. Current funding is allocated to do about three per year. **Action Item:** RPCA staff will pull together the playground inventory list again and send this out to the P&RC. The list has three categories of the status of playgrounds.

B. Witter Fields Update - Ron Kagawa
   - See Staff Report. The project is on schedule and construction will begin in the summer with completion anticipated by the end of 2011.

C. Freedmen’s Cemetery Update - Mary Stephenson
   - See Staff Report & Drawings - Mary Stephenson provided an update of the Freedmen’s Cemetery project including drawings of the site. The site is near Washington and Columbus Streets. The Official Name of the Cemetery- will be the “Contrabands and Freedmen’s Memorial Cemetery”, also known as “Freedmen’s Cemetery”. The site will include interpretative elements explaining the wording “Contraband”. Mary- In 1864-it is believed that very few “Contraband”are laid to rest there. A lot of progress has been made since the 2/3/10 Steering Committee Meeting. Grave markers will be installed for all known graves, as well as fencing and a “name wall”; the wall will incorporate benches for seating. The site will also include a remnant of the old office building stairs. The stairs can not be removed or it may disturb the graves. A sign will be posted describing the stairs as part of the former site. Mary-Neighbors expressed concerned about noise due to the removal of the office building. VDOT planted some vegetation to help calm noise, and some additional trees will be planted. In most areas trees can not be planted because this might disturb the graves. There will be a sound wall 25 ft. tall along the Beltway side of the site.
   - The group discussed concerns about handling potential graffiti on the name-wall and benches. Mary said the design is not a flat surface but textured to discourage graffiti, but will also allow graffiti to be removed.
   - On-street parking will be available; there is no parking planned at the site.
   - The Chair asked Bob Moir to serve as the new liaison for the group, since Kaj Vetter has resigned.

**Next Steps:**
   - 3/11/10-an informational meeting, an Open House, for design will be held and then the design will go before the Planning Commission and City Council for final approval.
   - **Mary Stephenson’s departure**- Mr. Spengler announced that Mrs. Stephenson will be leaving to relocate overseas with her husband, effective March 12, 2010. Mary has been an important talent in the RPCA organization and was instrumental in getting the Athletic Field Study completed. The Chair said we are losing a very talented person. The group wished Mary well.
V. Director’s Report – James Spengler

A. Patrick Henry School/Recreation Center

- See Staff Report: Mr. Spengler provided an update on the project and a lengthy discussion ensued with the P&RC members.
- The Alexandria School system is moving forward with their CIP for a new K-8 facility identified as, school site #1.
- It will be placed on the existing Patrick Henry field location; both campuses will be operational for a period of time. A meeting of staff was held with the schools, G.S., OMB and RPCA to discuss challenges. Staff will work together as a joint project team.
- The concern is that in the school planning process, recreational uses will become secondary to schools. The biggest problem is the schools are unsure of how they will manage increasing enrollment.
- RPCA – can we operate the old and new Recreation Centers concurrently?
- General Services estimates that the existing Recreation Center is structurally sound and has a useful life of 20-30 more years and could serve as a stand alone Center if needed.
- Interest continues in building a West End Recreation Center, this will be looked at when Landmark Mall is redeveloped. Patrick Henry could serve as the West End Center for the next several years.
- In looking at the school CIP vs. the City CIP for recreation, the opportunity for additional recreation facilities, over the next ten years lies in working with the school as they build new school sites.
- Given the City’s current budget situation, one of the policy issues is whether the City can afford the School/Recreation Center concept, which is not currently funded. The Operating Budget is moving in one direction, the CIP another. The majority of funds is on the school side and will be there for some time. As school enrollment increases it will have a direct correlation on Recreation Services.
- Ripley Forbes- asked if there is an opportunity to engage the schools and/or to intervene in the CIP. Mr. Spengler responded that 8 different public meetings are planned between now and May when the budget is adopted. Bob Moir- said he feels it is an unconscionable for the schools to build schools without field space.
- The P&RC needs to be involved as the project moves forward to provide advice to RPCA and City Council. The goal is to find ways where the schools, RPCA, P&RC and Planning can work together collaboratively on solutions.
- **This item was selected as one of the top issues for discussion at the upcoming Park and Recreation Retreat March 6 and will continue to be on the regular agenda for discussion.**

B. Retreat – March 6, 2010

- The Director outlined the plan for the upcoming Retreat to be held 3/6/10 from 8:00 a.m. to 12:00 noon, location-TBD. The top three priorities selected by Commissioners for discussion at the retreat are:
  - 1. Planning for joint school/recreation expansion.
  - 3. Layout out the top priorities for the next one or two years.
- Dave Dexter will be the Facilitator for the retreat.
- The retreat will include a discussion on the role of Commissioners, including legislative requirements and governance procedures.
- The Master Plan for parks will focus on use of the parks. The City may be losing some fields and open space, due to renovation of school sites (P.H., J.H.) this will impact use of Recreation Centers and services. The goal will be to figure out what land is in our inventory and how to preserve it in a useful fashion.
• **Snow Storm Update- See Staff Report (Item # III-B)**
  The Director gave an update on the recent snow storm/blizzard in the absence of Mr. Blakeley. The City Manager issued an emergency declaration and City went into emergency management mode. The normal organizational structure during this mode changes. All resources and new operational units now fall under the command of the City’s Emergency Operations Center (EOC). The City Manager is the Incident Commander in charge of the event, not individual departments. All calls go through the EOC. The EOC operated 24-7, until the event was over; many staff worked in shifts (6:00 a.m. to 6:00 p.m. & 6:00 p.m. to 6:00 a.m.) over the last week. Software tracked the number hrs. Worked-FEMA will reimbursement the City. An estimated $8 mil. was spent to date; none was budgeted for. RPCA was responsible for: Mass Care and debris removal- Charles Houston and William Ramsey Rec. Centers were opened as warming centers. Charles Houston was later used as a shelter. An estimated 12 persons used the Centers; this helped ensure people who experienced power outages had some place to go and did not freeze. All Park Maintenance Operations- which are normally handled by RPCA, fell under the command of the EOC. During, non-emergency situations T&ES does schools and sidewalks. Priorities were determined by the EOC: priorities were to clear streets first for emergency vehicles; clearing bus stops and fire hydrants. The parks and marina were not a top priority. The schools were the third priority–this upset some people. Several off-site locations were used to dump the snow, no parks were used because it would damage the turf. In case the P&RC/staff receives calls or questions, they should let people know that the City was under the authority of the EOC, City Manager, during the recent snow storm, not RPCA.

• **600 N. Henry Street -Open Space Site** - The site was approved to contract for purchase and use as open space at the 2/16/10 City Council Meeting (Res. No. 2383), utilizing $2.4 mil. of available open space funds.

• A member of the P&RC inquired as to how the P&RC could be notified of upcoming City land purchases for open space in the future. Mr. Spengler – City Council discusses possible land purchases/negotiations during Executive Sessions. Information is confidential and not official until Council votes on approving it. The Sequence is as follows: Council authorizes negotiations with potential seller; it is then brought back to Council for discussion/decision to move forward or not. City staff prepares a docket item to vote on contract for purchase. Planning Commission makes the final decision according to Section 9.06 of the City Charter. A docket item will be done for the March Planning Commission docket. In the Braddock Metro Plan this site is specifically identified as the preferred location for community open space. Intent is to work with the US Post Office regarding potential acquisition of the adjacent site. This is the 12th parcel purchased with Open Space funds.

• **Action Items:** A weekly email blast will be sent on upcoming docket items to the P&RC. Mr. Spengler will speak with the City Attorney to see if there is a legal way to share land purchase information with the P&RC in advance.

• **The Field at Ben Brenman Park-COA Request** - The Director, shared a copy of a letter received from Mr. Gary Carr which was sent to the Mayor, Vice Mayor and Council Members and schools regarding the project. Mr. Carr feels that replacing the fields at Francis Hammond should be made the priority, not Ben Brenman. The Director RPCA sent a response to Mr. Carr, supporting staff’s recommendations and findings re: Ben Brenman. He will keep staff updated on any further information. There was an article in the Alexandria Gazette today regarding this.
VI. **Reports From Commissioners** (verbal updates):
   - **Ft. Ward Ad Hoc Advisory Comm.-Bob Moir, Ripley Forbes, Rich Brune-none.**
   - **Youth Policy Commission- Stephen Mercer- none.**
   - **Waterfront Committee- Henry Brooks - the last Waterfront meeting was postponed; the next meeting is this Tuesday.**
   - **Youth Sports Committee- Bob Moir- the meeting was cancelled last week.**
   - **4- Mile Run- Ripley Forbes- none.**
     - Chair –asked about the status of the Pedestrian Bridge Design Competition. Mr. Kagawa: 40 applications were received, of very high quality. A one-day event will be held at the Masonic Temple for the top 3 finalist. He will let the Commission know the date and time.
   - **Charles Houston Memorial Project-William Cromley**
     - 4 Artists chosen as semi-finalists.
   - **Freedmen’s Cemetery-Bob Moir**
     - See Update by Mary Stephenson previously given (Item IV-C).
   - **Beauregard Corridor Plan-Dave Dexter**
     - Holmes Run/Winkler Preserve –opportunity to for additional open space.
     - Chair - She looked at Congressman Moran’s web site. He has a statement on protecting Mark Winkler. David Dexter spoke at the meeting last night.
   - **Chair- Judy-Guse Noritake-** asked Mr. Coda if he has had any success in helping to recruit another student for the vacant position yet. Mr. Coda responded he has not had any luck with this yet.

VII. **List of Upcoming Public Meetings-was provided at the meeting.**

VIII. **Adjournment – 9:30 p.m.**