

Parks & Recreation Board Meeting Minutes

The Parks and Recreation Board of the City of Mesa met in a regular session at the Parks and Recreation office at 201 N. Center Street, Building 2, Mesa, on May 12, 2010.

Members Present:

Connie Gullatt-Whiteman
Steve Ikeda
David Martinez
Matt Shaffer
Ron Wills
Marilyn Wilson

Staff Present:

Mary Berumen
Dawn Bies
J.D. Dockstader
Cynthia Garza
Beverly Godfrey
Marquisha Griffin

Marc Heirshberg
Mike Holste
Robert Howerton

Members Absent:

Milt Fort, unexcused
Don Goodrum, excused
Michelle Udall, unexcused
Mark Yarbrough, excused

The meeting was called to order at 3:38 p.m. by David Martinez, Chair.

Welcome and introductions

Mr. Martinez welcomed the Board members, staff and citizens present.

Approval of Minutes

Mr. Martinez asked if there was a motion for approval of the minutes from the March 10, 2010 Parks Board meeting. Ron Wills made a motion, Connie Gullatt-Whiteman seconded, and it was unanimously carried to approve the minutes.

Discuss and take action on designation of Basin 420, 8th Street and Harris

Marc Heirshberg gave the Board background information about Basin 420. The parcel is designated as a basin allowing for drop in recreation and on leash dog use, and has been maintained by the City since 1985. Three sides of the basin are made up of retaining walls; the fourth is a steep slope. The City fenced in the sides of the basin to protect pedestrians and later installed a double equipment gate in the northeast corner of the parcel to prohibit unauthorized vehicular use. Approximately five years ago a pedestrian gate appeared enabling the basin to be completely fenced in. This was not a city issued gate. At that time citizens began using the basin as an off-leash dog area.

In February 2010 complaints were received from people both in favor of the parcel being used as an off-leash dog area and opposed to off-leash dog use. Shortly thereafter the gates disappeared from the park.

Staff hosted a public meeting on April 6, 2010 with 95 people in attendance, including Parks Board members. Comments received at the meeting, as well as by phone and email, were submitted and mapped by staff and included in the report to the Board. There were 76 people in favor on the parcel remaining an off-leash dog area and 31 opposed; the majority of those opposed live in the immediate area by the basin.

Mr. Heirshberg told the Board the model that is being followed nationally and in other valley communities for dog parks show that dog parks are a regional amenity and belong on larger parcels of land, not in neighborhood parks or parcels within neighborhoods.

Staff and Council are aware that there is a shortage of off-leash dog parks in the community and that it is inconvenient for citizens to go out to Quail Run to use the dog park facility; however, staff believes Basin 420 is not the correct location for an off-leash dog park and are focusing on regional areas for dog parks.

Staff had been working on securing funding which included a grant from the Arizona Sports and Tourism Authority (AZSTA) for another project in the amount of \$100K; however, the project was dropped. Staff has asked the AZSTA for permission to reallocate those dollars for another project, which would allow the City to look into creating an off-leash dog area.

On Council's upcoming meeting agenda there is a resolution supporting a grant request to the Ak-Chin Indian tribe for \$300K for the construction of four dog parks at Skyline, Riverview, Countryside and Red Mountain Parks. This would cover every quadrant of the city and focus on a regional draw for these amenities. The first target area would be Countryside Park, which would address the immediate neighborhood near Basin 420.

Staff's recommendation is that this area remain a standard basin for drop in use and on-leash dog activity and allow staff to continue to focus on securing funding and working with community partners to install dog parks on a regional scale.

Public Comments

The following comments were from residents who attended the Parks Board meeting:

- Debra Pennington – Used to live in neighborhood near Basin 420; has been going to this park for many years. They love their animals and being out in the community with their pets. She has been attacked and assaulted by a community member while at the park. She feels everyone needs to work to keep the peace and need to all get along.
- Faith Snitzer – Was disappointed with the recommendation from staff, felt users of basin have been described unfairly in the comments that were submitted to city staff, made to feel like criminals, trespassers and unwelcome at the park. She described herself and other dog owners as neighbors, taxpayers, dog trainers and rescuers, people who want a place to come with their dogs and visit.
- Jo Gardner – Lives a block from basin. Feels that this issue has been blown out of proportion and that some of the comments have been exaggerated. Park users are not asking for amenities, asking for off-leash signs to be removed, gates to be returned, and basin returned to off-leash use. Why is the parking an issue for park users but not when there is a church function and cars are parked all over the street? She has never seen the dog waste in the basin as bad as described, volunteers help to keep the basin clean. Supporters have been accused of bringing riff raff into the neighborhood, of bringing drugs into the neighborhood, been assaulted/threatened, have been watched through binoculars, and made to feel like substandard people. As stated previously, not asking for formal dog park with amenities, only for the freedom to have their dogs off-leash.
- Lori Smith – Representing people who live near the basin. The past five years prove that a dog park is not a good idea; it has become a dog park for people who think that the laws are for everyone else but them. Leash laws and parking laws have been broken. If the people who are using the park have no regard for these laws then why would they care about her rights and the rights of those living near this basin. She suggested we

start enforcing the leash laws, which would bring in a substantial amount of revenue to pay for a new dog park. Homeowners in Chandler near Shawnee Dog Park have been facing similar issues and city officials there have stated that a dog park should not have been built so close to a residential area. Dog owners talk about community but exclude other users by putting up a gate to turn the area into a dog park for their dogs, they don't obey the leash laws, and show a blatant disrespect for the law. There is a noticeable difference between now and when the park was being used as a dog park.

- Theresa Jepsen – Supports a dog park in this side of Mesa, thanked staff members for allowing both sides to be heard. She now better understands residents concerns who live near the park. Very glad staff is considering building a dog park on that side of town, and thinks some residents would be happy to contribute to getting it funded.
- Steve Snitzer – Gathered over 300 signatures in support of this facility which raised awareness for the need for off-leash facilities in Mesa. Request off-leash usage temporarily in Basin 420 until an off-leash facility can be established. He understands this would create a minor short term inconvenience for the adjacent neighbors but suggested setting up some working parameters and working together as neighbors to minimize the impact on the neighborhood. Basin entrance could be moved or second dogs only entrance added; basin will revert to park when new facility is completed.
- Bill Close – Lives across canal from basin. He is happy the city is looking at other places for a dog park, agrees there is a need for off-leash dog parks in the city but does not feel this is the right area for it. Has seen illegal parking and people using ramp for the canal to drive out of the area where they are not supposed to be park; they are the ones who ruin it for everyone. He visits the park with nephew but lately there has been a lot more feces in the park. Off-leash dog usage has brought more people to the area, sometimes ones that misuse the laws. He is grateful the city is looking into building a dog park but opposes it at this basin.
- Ron Taylor – Lives next to the park. He loves dogs but is opposed to off-leash use in this basin. Feels it is a matter of appropriate land use. An off-leash dog park in this area is woefully inappropriate; in addition design standards for an off-leash dog park would require the city to spend a lot of money bringing it up to standard. He agrees with staff that this is a regional issue and feels that if this basin is designated as an off-leash issue it will cause parking issues and additional noise and doesn't think it is a good idea.
- Linda Laukaitis - She thinks it was interesting that the Board sided with the minority and not the majority. Many of the things said at the meeting were not true, particularly issues of safety, parking, inaccessibility of the park and other issues. Have any of the people who recommended this not be made an off-leash park ever go to this park either before or after this became an issue? She has never seen any more than 4 or 5 cars at any given time, parked legally – not blocking driveways, etc. Since the signs went up designating this as on-leash only, she has not seen anyone use the park. What concerns her is the support of the Board for individual who make comments about the type of people this will bring into the neighborhood. She thinks it is very unfair and not a sense of good community, when 71% of the people in the area have less rights then 31% of the people who live immediately next to that area.

Mr. Martinez then opened this agenda item up for discussion by the Board. Mr. Wills asked if Basin 420 would be designated as a park or a dog park, and wanted to know what additional costs would be incurred.

Mr. Heirshberg said the size of the property doesn't allow the basin to fit within the designation of a park, as established in the Master Plan. Basins are primarily for water retention. Dogs are allowed on-leash in all basins. He added that the Director can designate off-leash areas within the guidelines of the Master Plan and with a recommendation from the Parks Advisory Board and the support of the Council's Neighborhood and Community Services Committee. Additional

costs would include fencing, double gating, water, doggie pots, and trash cans. Maintenance costs would be for increased trash pickup.

Mr. Shaffer asked about safety issues. He has noticed drainage holes on the property and posts with concrete sticking up. Mr. Heirshberg said that these were the same concerns staff faces with playgrounds and these are things that need to be taken care of with backfills by the maintenance crews and added that it is another reason that basins are primarily for drop in use only and not scheduled by the City.

Mr. Wills asked if higher fencing would be added if it was designated as an off-leash area. Mr. Heirshberg said it would have to be brought up to NRPA standards and city code if it was designated as an off-leash area.

Mr. Martinez asked if a variance would be required because it was not consistent with the Master Plan. Mr. Heirshberg answered that a code ordinance would be required and will be addressed after citizen feedback is received from the Leashed Dogs in Parks issue.

Ms. Gullatt-Whiteman asked what this will mean for other neighborhoods who decide they want their basin designated differently, will this start a firestorm for the entire city if this is put into place. Mr. Heirshberg said that potential is always there and staff would bring them up as received before the Board for consideration and recommendation. He added that established Master Plan and NRPA standards show that dog parks need more space than this parcel provides, in addition to fencing, double gating, and separate areas for timid dogs and large dogs. He added that staff is trying to come up with funding to install fencing at Countryside Park in order to establish an off-leash dog area for citizens to take their dogs.

Ms. Wilson added that while dogs are just as important to people as kids she agrees that the recommendation of the staff is appropriate and she would favor the recommendation to leave this basin designated as a basin which allows on-leash dog use. Ms. Wilson made a motion to approve staff's recommendation of leaving Basin 4210 designated as a basin with on-leash dog use permitted.

Before voting on the motion, the Board had more questions.

Mr. Ikeda added that while the basin looks to be a nice place for a dog park, due to the size of the basin, it doesn't fit the plan for a park designation and that he supports staff's recommendation.

Mr. Martinez asked how quickly funding could be obtained for an off-leash dog park. Mr. Heirshberg said that staff would be required to obtain three bids and hold a public meeting in the area where the dog park would be established. He said staff had discussed the issue with Councilmember Finter, who understands staff's recommendation and supports staff trying to secure additional funding for another site. He added that staff is working with the AZSTA to get funds reallocated and hoped to get a decision from them by late June.

Mr. Martinez thanked the residents for their comments and called for a motion to take action on this item. Ms. Wilson's motion was on the table. Mr. Wills seconded the motion and the motion was unanimously approved.

Discuss and take action to change Basin 601 to Marlborough Mesa Park

Mr. Heirshberg told the Board that the Marlborough Mesa neighborhood had requested that Basin 601 be renamed Marlborough Mesa Park. This location should have been re-designated

as a park through the Master Plan process. The park has playground equipment and a ramada with routine maintenance completed regularly. The cost for maintenance annually is estimated at \$6,000, which would be absorbed in the parks maintenance budget. Staff recommends granting the request to rename Basin 601 Marlborough Mesa Park.

Mr. Martinez read a public comment from a citizen present who asked to have their comments read to the Board. Comments included:

- Where is the \$6,000 cost going to?
 - Mr. Heirshberg replied that it was costs for increased mowing and trash pickup. He said maintenance staff and supervisors would continue to evaluate although he did not foresee that there would be increased trash at the park due to a name change.
- It is not necessary to increase mowing or garbage pick-up as we have been using this as a “park” since 1998.
 - Mr. Heirshberg replied that the same process as trash pickup would be utilized.
- Lighting is non-existent now although light poles are there. Darkness encourages crime! Why not use CFL’s to reduce cost?
 - Mr. Heirshberg asked Mike Holste to address the issue of lighting. Mr. Holste said he would check with the maintenance staff and send the information to the citizen.

Ms. Gullatt-Whiteman asked what the reason was behind the request for a name change. Mr. Heirshberg said this neighborhood has always been very active in the community and is used as a model of community representation and involvement. He said staff was approached at a neighborhood meeting and directed the citizen to submit a request to staff for a name change.

Mr. Holste added having the playground equipment, rather than just open space, reclassifies the basin as a park.

Mr. Martinez said staff’s recommendation was to change the name of the basin to Marlborough Mesa Park. He asked for a motion to approve staff’s recommendation. Mr. Wills made a motion, Ms. Gullatt-Whiteman seconded and the motion was unanimously approved.

Mr. Heirshberg told the Board that he would present this request to the Neighborhood and Community Services Council Subcommittee at their June meeting. He said upon the Subcommittee’s approval, staff would work on updating signage and would follow up on the lighting issue.

Hear update on leashed dogs in parks

Mr. Heirshberg gave the Board an update on the public education campaign regarding dogs in parks. He said the rule change and designation regarding allowing on-leash dogs in all city parks, except for in ramadas, playground areas, on sports fields, and in sports parks had been completed. He told the Board that a web page that had been designed to receive citizen input. He told the Board a formal recommendation would be brought before the Board in January after public feedback had been compiled.

Ms. Wilson asked about the area in Red Mountain to establish a dog park. He replied that there was a large area of open space in Red Mountain that could be developed for this purpose. He added that the Park Rangers would have post cards to hand out in parks to receive citizen feedback.

Hear update from Foundation for Mesa Parks and Recreation on Triathlon plans

Mr. Martinez introduced Russ Gillard from the Foundation for Mesa Parks and Recreation. Mr. Gillard said the Foundation was working hard to raise funds to establish additional dog parks in Mesa. He was hopeful that grants received from the Indian communities would be run through the Foundation to assist in that effort. He mentioned that anyone can donate to the Foundation and can designate where they want the funds to be used.

Mr. Gillard told the Board the Foundation was holding a fundraiser, the Mesa Sprint Triathlon on April 9, 2011 at Kino Aquatic Complex. He said the triathlon would include an 800 meter swim, a 12-mile bike ride and a 5K run. He said advertising for this event would begin soon. He said the biggest expense encountered would be traffic control and said the Foundation is looking for sponsorships to help pay for this.

Ms. Wilson asked if there would be different age brackets for this event. Mr. Gillard confirmed this and added that the purpose of this event was to prevent youth obesity. He said funding received would go programs within Mesa Parks and Recreation. The website is www.mesaparksfoundation.org and donations can be made online.

Mr. Heirshberg thanked the Foundation for their fundraising efforts and added that \$16,000 had been raised in scholarships for summer recreation programs.

Director's Comments

Mr. Heirshberg gave the Board informational updates as follows:

- Spring Training 2010 – J.D. Dockstader told the Board that it was a successful spring training season even though there were less games (15 games), which included a rainout. He said a single game attendance record had been set. Mr. Heirshberg added that the Cubs led the league in single game attendance and were 2nd in the Cactus League with overall season attendance, attributed to the rainout. Mr. Dockstader said staff was in the process of finalizing the City's financial records from the season and would share that information with the Board at a later meeting.

Ms. Wilson asked about the status of the Cubs negotiations. Mr. Heirshberg replied that the City was continuing with negotiations. He said the Mayor was confident an agreement could be reached and may be willing to extend the Memorandum of Understanding. He said the Commissioner of Major League Baseball is behind the Cubs staying, not just in Arizona, but in Mesa, and would be willing to bring other teams to the table to figure out the right solution when negotiations reach that point.

- FlowRider – Mr. Heirshberg showed the Public Service Announcements (PSA) to the Board. He said the FlowRider opened for spring break with a tremendous response. He said staff is looking at doing some special incentives and/or promotions. He said the PSAs played regularly on Channel 11 and added that information was on the Parks and Recreation website also. He said that staff had been working with the schools to utilize their School Resource Officers (SROs) in the PSAs for the FlowRider. These PSAs play regularly at all Mesa Public Schools junior and senior high schools during school announcements.
- Budget reductions – Mr. Heirshberg said that PRCF Department is facing a \$760,000 deduction (5.5%) in General Fund dollars. He said there would not be any staff reductions due to these cuts. He said the cuts were identified through being more efficient and added that landscaping zones were restructured and rebid to consolidate our efforts and ensure the best use of equipment.

- Parks Board vacancies – Connie Gullatt-Whiteman will be leaving the Board at the end of her term in June; Frank Alger relocated to another valley community and had to resign from the Board.

Mr. Martinez presented plaques to Ms. Gullatt-Whiteman and Mr. Alger and thanked them for their service to Mesa. Mr. Heirshberg added that the Mayor's office had received names for new Board members but the appointments had not been made yet. He added staff's thanks to the departing Board members.

- Events:
 - Pool openings – Pools open on May 29, lessons start June 1.
 - Community Days of Play – hosted an event at Countryside Park with extremely low turnout. Thanks to Cindy Hunt and the recreation staff for putting those events together and bringing the community together through special events.

Reports on meetings and/or events attended by Board Members

Ms. Wilson attended the neighborhood meeting at Hawthorne Elementary, the Skyline Pool groundbreaking ceremony, and attended soccer games at Harmony and Red Mountain parks.

Mr. Ikeda attended the Skyline Pool groundbreaking ceremony, the recent Community Day of Play and the District 3 Pancake Breakfast.

Mr. Wills attended the community meeting at Hawthorne Elementary and uses Kino Pool regularly.

Mr. Shaffer attended the community meeting at Hawthorne Elementary and visited Basin 420 and a few other basins to check them out.

Ms. Gullatt-Whiteman visited Shepherders Park and various basins in her area.

Mr. Martinez visited city parks regularly and added that the parks are looking good even with the budget cuts. He also reported that he had attended 10K runs in Queen Creek and Las Sendas within the past couple of months.

Mr. Martinez asked if there were any other items for discussion; the Board had no additional comments. Ms. Gullatt-Whiteman made a motion to adjourn, Mr. Wills seconded, and it was unanimously carried to adjourn the meeting.

The meeting was adjourned at 4:57 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Marc Heirshberg, CPRP
PRCF Director