

Parks & Recreation Board Meeting Minutes

The Parks and Recreation Board of the City of Mesa met in a special meeting at the Parks and Recreation office at 100 N. Center Street, Mesa on August 17, 2006.

Members Present:

Reggie Dye
Russ Gillard
Connie Gullatt-Whiteman
Jeff Kirk
Dina Lopez
David Martinez
Bernadine Mooney
Walter "Bud" Page, Jr.
Marilyn Wilson

Staff Present:

Darla Armfield
Mike Holste
Cindy Hunt
Mary Lindemuth
Kym Otterstedt
Terri Palmberg
Patricia Sorensen
Sherry Woodley
Bob White

Members Absent:

LeRoy Brady, excused
Don Goodrum, excused

The meeting was called to order at 12:03 p.m. by Bud Page, Chair.

Introductions and Chair's Comments

Bud Page introduced new Parks Board member Reggie Dye. Mr. Dye stated that he has lived eight years in Mesa and received his MBA at Arizona State University. Owner of a small business in Tempe, he has two children. The family loves Mesa, has put down roots here and Mr. Dye is looking forward to the chance to contribute to the City as a Board member.

Acting Community Services Director Patricia Sorensen introduced herself.

Bud Page announced that the Arizona Parks and Recreation Association (APRA) plans to award Russ Gillard its Volunteer of the Year award at the upcoming APRA conference. All Board members were encouraged to register for the conference, if they have not done so already. Board Day has some interesting sessions specifically designed to appeal to members of boards.

Mr. Page was pleased to report that the HoHoKams have decided to donate \$5,000 to the Making Waves program. A presentation of the check is planned for a future meeting.

Public Comments

No public comments.

Approval of Minutes

Mr. Russ Gillard moved to accept the minutes from the meeting of May 25, 2006. Ms. Marilyn Wilson seconded the motion. The motion was carried unanimously.

Pioneer Park Locomotive

Assistant Parks and Recreation Director Terri Palmberg sketched the background and history of the locomotive. Donated originally by Southern Pacific Railroad and due to an effort on behalf of the community, the train has been located in Pioneer Park since 1958. In 1992 the Parks and Recreation Board recommended that the City of Mesa partner with the Railroad Museum to relocate the deteriorating train to Chandler. City Council chose not to follow the recommendation and the locomotive remained in its current location.

Ms. Palmberg noted that over the years the locomotive has been vandalized. The gauges and mechanisms no longer remain. Currently it is fenced and must be viewed through wrought iron railings. Within the past six months, a California group approached and stated a wish to buy the locomotive. The Arizona Railroad Museum of Chandler also came forward again stating its desire to relocate the train to Chandler.

An issue to be considered is the asbestos used in the construction of the locomotive. The City of Mesa Environmental Services conducted an inspection and reported that relocation is safe as long as the asbestos is contained. The cost to provide full asbestos abatement is prohibitive, upwards of, according to the most recent estimate, \$80,000-\$100,000. Due process must also be considered for items of value, per City of Mesa Purchasing rules.

Staff explored the feasibility of selling the locomotive. Bids were placed online and also mailed to contacts who had expressed interest in the past. Upon learning of the bid process, the community came forward to demonstrate interest in maintaining the locomotive in Mesa. Subsequently the bid was pulled.

The Historic Preservation Office has expressed interest in working with local groups to develop a plan to keep the locomotive in Mesa.

Ms. Palmberg listed alternatives. The Board could recommend reinstating the request for bid process. This could result in sale of the locomotive if bids are received. The Board could also recommend donating the locomotive to the Arizona Railway Museum. If the goal is to ensure that the train remains in Pioneer Park, the continuing deterioration must be addressed, as well as the need for timely asbestos abatement.

David Martinez inquired as to why the bid process was initiated. Ms. Palmberg related that over the years there have been continual requests for relocation. Concern exists over the condition as the locomotive is rusting and the costs of restoration as well as asbestos abatement continue to rise. Contracted experts continually apply a slurry to cover the asbestos, as it becomes exposed. If the goal is to restore the train to operation, the asbestos must be contained. Also, the wrought iron fence is inappropriate to the park setting. It was placed around the locomotive to prevent graffiti and for reasons of liability. By newer playground safety standards, the locomotive is unsafe and can not be accessible to the public unless supervision is provided.

Mr. Martinez asked if the fence truly solved the liability issues. Ms. Palmberg replied that the potential for liability is ever present. Bob White stated that the City wants what is best for the engine. It is a museum piece and no longer appropriate for a park. It must be preserved.

Dina Lopez commented that she visited the train in the morning, prior to the meeting. Maintenance staff happened to be present and allowed her to go inside. It is indeed rusted, home to cats and in poor condition. She has fond childhood memories of climbing on the train and wants to do what is best for the train.

Ron Peters, chair of the Preservation Committee of Mesa, submitted a comment card and addressed the Board. Mr. Peters stated that he supports the staff recommendation to continue the bid on hold thus allowing for exploration of alternatives. He is concerned over the loss to the city as the railroad was integral to the development and history of Mesa. Rail service into the city stopped as recently as 1970. He would like an opportunity for the Committee to examine the possibility of restoration. Grant restoration money is available and can be obtained. It is possible that Pioneer Park is not the best location for train. He plans to partner with the Mesa Historical Museum. Mr. Peters requested a six month period to develop a proposal and report back to the Board.

Marilyn Wilson asked whether his goal would be to restore the locomotive and place it behind the fence as currently exists or have it available for climbing. Mr. Peters returned that different options will be considered but that he personally hates it fenced. The issue will be addressed in the proposal.

Russell Lassuy, a deputy of the Arizona Railway Museum, submitted a comment card and addressed the Board. He stated that he had pleaded before the Board for relocation of the train to the Arizona Railway Museum in 1992. Then mayor Willie Wong wanted to do the right thing for Mesa and so decided to keep the train in Mesa. Today, there is no money to improve either the park setting or the train. The Arizona Railway Museum has raised \$20,000 for the relocation. Mr. Lassuy showed pictures of the new Arizona Railway Museum setting in Tumbleweed Park allocated by the City of Chandler. He asked that the Board do the right thing for train. The Arizona Railway Museum still wants the locomotive.

David Martinez inquired whether Mr. Lassuy had the best interests of the train or his organization at heart. Mr. Lassuy replied that if the Arizona Railway Museum had to shame Mesa into doing the right thing, then so be it. He does not want to see the train cut into pieces.

Russ Gillard asked what was involved in relocation. Mr. Lassuy replied that relocation is a very expensive and complicated proposition. Originally the train was brought in on rails, which have since been removed. Consider the weight and size of the locomotive. A pole truck must be brought in, power lines must be avoided. Damage to the park and turf must be avoided. If damaged, repair must be made. It is tough to raise funds for such an undertaking.

David Martinez asked if \$20,000 is enough for relocation. Mr. Lassuy stated that it is. Mr. Martinez asked if sufficient funding is available for restoration. Mr. Lassuy replied that there is sufficient money available as the Arizona Railway Museum relies on volunteers for labor.

Bud Page then read a letter dated August 5, 2006 from Kenneth Kahan, Vice President of Operations of Carrizo Gorge Railway, Inc., El Cajon, California, into the record. The letter expressed disappointment that the bidding process was suspended. Funds have

been committed for the purchase, removal and rebuild of the locomotive. The company is hopeful that the City of Mesa will reconsider and allow the bid process to go forward.

Marilyn Wilson commented that she, too, visited the train and had fond memories of her children playing on it. She recommends the Board take action but with a time frame for decision.

David Martinez moved to accept the staff recommendation to further study the alternatives within a six month time frame, revisit and take action at the February 8, 2007 Board meeting. Connie Gullatt-Whiteman seconded the motion. Bud Page suggested that two Board members serve as representatives to the study team. Jeff Kirk and Reggie Dye volunteered to serve. Mr. Russell Lassuy stated that the Arizona Railway Museum would like to remain in the loop.

The motion passed unanimously.

Special Event Handling

Staff members Assistant Director Mike Holste and Recreation Supervisor Cindy Hunt addressed the Board to summarize the history of special events in the City of Mesa and the current issues. In recent years the Parks and Recreation Division has been responsible for the production of nine City-sponsored events and four supported events annually. In the fall of 2005, all special events were put on hold by the City Council, pending the outcome of the May 2006 property tax election. The January 2006 Martin Luther King Jr. event was the last City sponsored event held. The tax initiative did fail, resulting in the elimination of all support and production of special events.

The 2006 Cinco de Mayo one-day event was handled solely by a private organization. Novoa Marketing Solutions reserved Pioneer Park for a fee of \$13,500 and Sister Cities provided beverage sales. Entrevision partnered as well. By all accounts, the event was successful and smoothly run. The public was satisfied and the park undamaged by the event. The Sertoma Club ran the 2006 Fourth of July event at Mesa Community College. It, too, proved successful. In July 2006, letters were sent to past partners and stakeholders informing them of the current situation and outlining the process of permit application and facility rental should they elect to put on an event.

The issue has now arisen: how to handle multiple requests by vendors/organizations for the same event? Three alternatives have been proposed:

- Random Lottery
- Non-Profit Organizations First Right of Refusal with option of fee waiver
- Offer the Option of Holding Two Events at Different Locations

M.J. Whalen of Sister Cities, a non-profit humanitarian and cultural organization, submitted a comment card and addressed the Board. Sister Cities is opposed to the lottery option. The Cinco de Mayo festival was started by Sister Cities prior to its being run by the City of Mesa. They would like the opportunity to have the event returned to them so that they may expand the cultural aspects and return the festival to its roots. As a privately run event Sister Cities believes that Cinco de Mayo has been dumbed down. In addition, the beverage concession is a big fundraiser for the organization. Sister Cities would partner with Entrevision and Hispanic Chamber of Commerce. Finally, Mr. Whalen stated that Sister Cities does not want to pay a rental fee for their own festival.

Rafael Novoa, a private promoter from Novoa Marketing Solutions, submitted a comment card and addressed the Board. Mr. Novoa informed the Board that he worked five years with Sister Cities. When the City of Mesa lost the ability to run events, he helped to obtain sponsorships for the Cinco de Mayo festival from Fry's and Fry's Marketplace. Had not Fry's stepped up to the plate, there would have been no festival. Due to revenue loss, the festival has been trimmed from two days to one. It costs between \$150,000 to \$160,000 to run the event. In the past, the City of Mesa contributed \$50,000 to the cost. It no longer does. Mr. Novoa state that his company paid for a \$4 million dollar insurance policy, street barricades, security, etc. Most non-profits do not have the funding to pay the costs of large scale events. What he says he'll deliver, he does! And, Fry's will continue to sponsor.

David Martinez asked Mr. Novoa his opinion of the proposed bid/lottery process. Mr. Novoa agreed with Mr. Whalen. It is not a good idea and will not work.

Dina Lopez asked whether he had approached any non-profits for last year's event. Mr. Novoa replied that he had not received a list of them. He did use 501 3Cs for donations toward the clean up costs. In future he would like to expand the event to a two day festival. The event has remained free to the public due to Fry's tripling the funding.

Connie Gullatt-Whiteman remarked that Cinco de Mayo is an important event, but we need to keep in mind that it is only one of many events that will be affected by the decision we will be making.

David Martinez asked if the recommendations listed in the Board report came from staff only. All staff present replied that they are alternatives only. Trisha Sorensen stated that City Council wanted a recommendation by August 28. The alternatives were brainstormed.

Dina Lopez asked about using proposals and the bid process. Ms. Sorensen stated that evaluating various proposals requires staff and staff time. At present there are no staff budgeted to do this task.

Bob White asked whether the organizations can work together. Mr. Whalen replied that Sister Cities is currently suing Novoa Marketing for breach of contract for liquor revenue shortfall. They believe that they were shorted money in the settling of the beverage concession.

Russ Gillard inquired whether other organizations had plans to step up for other events, Sertoma for the Turkey Trot, for example. Cindy Hunt replied that rumblings have been heard to that effect but that there is nothing definite so far.

David Martinez mentioned the Fourth of July event. Cindy Hunt confirmed that is was held offsite at a non-City property, Mesa Community College.

Bud Page asked what credentials were required to compete. Ms. Hunt said that an application of requirements did exist and that a check for facility rental was also required.

Marilyn Wilson stated that the global issue of the precedent set as well as judgment was involved. The City of Mesa clearly wishes to keep everyone happy. Why did the City

take over the Cinco de Mayo event from Sister Cities? She wants the non-profits to benefit Mesa. Dollars spent at events go back to the community so she would rather not charge event fees.

Dina Lopez indicated that she helped found and expand Cinco de Mayo 23 years ago with a staff committee as the Sister Cities basically hosted a dinner event. The non-profit role was to provide manpower. As the event grew, staff began looking for sponsorships. It is hard for non-profits to provide the amounts of money needed to run large events. She also stated that she was not comfortable with decision-making process as the timeline seemed short and the available information insufficient.

Reggie Dye asked if the goal was to provide the best, safest event for the public. Is this the driving factor? David Martinez noted that if there is no money for evaluation, how can a decision be made?

Trisha Sorensen stated that she could recommend that the Council allow money for staff to do this.

David Martinez said that with a lottery system there is no control. Who makes the decision and what is best for Mesa?

Terri Palmberg responded that calls are received every week regarding park use. Hundreds of non-profits request use of the facilities. Connie Gullatt-Whiteman commented that the City must understand that perception of the situation is very important. The City can be seen in either a good or bad light depending on how this decision is handled. No matter who puts on an event, since it is held in Mesa, people will attribute the success or failure of an event to some extent to the City. Trisha Sorensen responded that the City Manager will be told that more time is required to make a good decision.

Bud Page stated that with two representatives from the Board, a recommendation could be made by September. Terri Palmberg said that six to eight months is required to plan an event. Connie Gullatt-Whiteman made a motion to defer action until the issue has been more thoroughly studied by staff and Board representatives, by the next meeting on September 14, 2006. Marilyn Wilson seconded the motion.

David Martinez asked what exactly would be recommended? Dina Lopez and Bud Page both stated that a recommendation would be made for all events, not just Cinco de Mayo. Marilyn Wilson inquired would volunteer use of sports fields be affected? The Board must be consistent. Terri Palmberg said that staff would take that into consideration.

A vote was taken and passed unanimously to defer action until further study has been completed and to bring a recommendation to the next meeting. Dina Lopez and Russ Gillard volunteered to serve as the Board representatives to the study group. David Martinez commented that the group should keep event sizes in mind. It makes a difference as to when preference can be given.

Reports on Meetings

Russ Gillard read a statement from Robin White, President of the Foundation for Mesa Parks and Recreation announcing the generous donation of \$100,000 from Mr. Clay Coady, owner of Bark Avenue Pet Resort in Mesa, toward the establishment of a new municipal dog park to be located at 2100 W. 8th Street. The total estimated cost of the park is \$200,000. Plans are to raise the balance of the required funds privately. A draft handout announcing a park planning meeting for September 19, 2006 was distributed. Mr. Gillard commented that many had wanted a bark park on the west side for a long time and was pleased that funding has materialized.

Staff Updates

Mike Holste announced that summer programs successfully completed with participation numbers in the thousands. A fuller report will be made at the next meeting when more data is available.

Terri Palmberg reported on a recent monsoon storm that ruined 27 trees on the west side of town. Considerable cost and staff time were expended in the clean up. The signage at Riverview and Red Mountain Lakes now features Bass Pro Shops for their underwriting of the Urban Fishing Program.

Ms. Palmberg also updated the Board on the transition of the Autry Tennis Center to a privately managed facility. The Commercial Facilities Division will provide contract oversight. The contract with Tom Kenney and East Valley Tennis is close to being finalized. The recently published TimeOut brochure directs patrons to the new telephone number.

Ms. Palmberg was pleased to announce a donation of \$40,000 from NBC Universal, filmmakers of an action movie being filmed in northeast Mesa, for the inconvenience experienced by residents during the filming of a chase scene on the Red Mountain Freeway. The money will be used in partnership with Mesa Public Schools to develop a multipurpose sports field at Red Mountain High School and to add playground equipment to a retention basin. Project Evergreen is proceeding to work with sports groups to renovate and upgrade turf at Red Mountain High and Fremont Jr. High Schools as part of the partnership. Trisha Sorensen reported that she was pleased to say that an additional \$10,000 has been donated.

The Carson Pool project is on schedule and looks fabulous. Buy a Brick continues to generate money for the pool.

Bud Page stated that Kleinman Park Wheels Court had been heavily vandalized. Has the damage been repaired and is the park again open to bike riders? Ms. Palmberg responded that repairs have been made and is now open.

Connie Gullatt-Whiteman asked if problems with playground surfacing materials are still being experienced? Ms. Palmberg answered that problems still exist. City Engineering has been asked to evaluate. The manufacturer believes that dryness is a problem so staff installed sprinklers to water the wood chips.

Management Support Administrator Sherry Woodley announced that cash handling procedures have been tightened. Fall registration begins next week. Last year 50% of registration was handled online and staff is hopeful that this trend will continue. And,

finally, staff has been busy preparing for the APRA Conference to be held in Mesa at month's end. Ms. Woodley hoped to see everyone there.

Director's Report

Bob White announced that Terri Palmberg will be inducted into the ASU Hall of Fame for Public Programs. Six years ago she was honored as a "legend".

Trisha Sorensen thanked all for attending the special session. Russ Gillard commented on the prevalence of record theft and recommended shredding of Board rosters.

Russ Gillard motioned to adjourn the meeting. Connie Gullatt-Whiteman seconded the motion. The motion carried unanimously. The meeting adjourned at 1:42.

Respectfully submitted,

Bob White
Parks and Recreation Director