

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 200 S. Center Street, Building 1, Mesa, on March 13, 2008.

Members Present:

Frank Alger
Russ Gillard
Don Goodrum
Connie Gullatt-Whiteman
David Martinez
Michelle Udall
Marilyn Wilson

Staff Present:

Larry Alexander	John Goodie
Dawn Bies	Mike Holste
Jerry Bradney	Andrea Moore
Sue Deck	Kym Otterstedt
J.D. Dockstader	Kelly Rafferty
Rhett Evans	Rochelle Rotert
Dale Furnas	Sherry Woodley

Members Absent:

Dina Lopez, excused
Brian Etheridge, excused
Walter "Bud" Page, Jr., excused

The meeting was called to order at 12:02 p.m. by Connie Gullatt-Whiteman, Chair.

Approval of Minutes

Ms. Gullatt-Whiteman asked if there was a motion for approval of the minutes from the February 14, 2008 meeting. Frank Alger made a motion, Russ Gillard seconded, and it was unanimously carried to approve the minutes as written.

Public Comments

None.

Hear update on parks and basin maintenance

Rhett Evans introduced Larry Alexander and Jerry Bradney, Parks Maintenance Supervisors for the Parks, Recreation and Commercial Facilities (PRCF) Department. He told the Board that the goal of the parks maintenance staff is to keep the parks and basins clean, safe, and inviting for the citizens of Mesa; however, in recent weeks citizen complaints regarding weeds in City parks have increased. He told the Board that Mesa has 56 parks and 135 retention basins, totaling almost 1,400 developed acres to be maintained. Some of the maintenance issues include:

- Budget restraints in the past few years have reduced the regular turf maintenance routines (fertilizing, watering, tree trimming)
- Some former turf areas have turned to bare ground, allowing weed seeds to take hold
- Higher than normal rainfall this winter season (double that of Jan/Feb 2007) has resulted in increased weeds

Mr. Evans told the Board the two options available to staff to resolve the weed problem were to spray chemicals to kill the weeds or increase the mowing schedules. Typically during the winter months, PRCF does not budget for mowing due to a lack of growth; however, after investigating cost options, spending unbudgeted money at \$22,000 per mow made more sense than spending \$320,000 to spray the weeds, which would not remove them completely. Mr. Evans said that maintenance staff will combat the weed situation in the next two to three weeks and,

once temperatures reach the 90's, weeds will die and Bermuda grass growth will choke out the remaining weeds.

Mr. Evans welcomed the Board's suggestions for combating the weed situation.

Hear information on Park Ranger program

Sherry Woodley gave the Board some background information about the Ranger program. She said that the program started in 1987 to provide citizens with a safe environment in the parks; only five west side parks were being patrolled at program inception. In 1992, the Parks security program was absorbed into the Ranger program and eventually 52 parks were patrolled Citywide. As budget deficits over the years slowly reduced the number of park rangers, it has left the City with only four full-time employees; currently there are three rangers, with one vacancy. Currently, the parks are patrolled at random, from 4:00 p.m. to midnight, Sunday through Friday, and noon to midnight on Saturday.

Ms. Woodley explained that in 1993, City Council granted the Rangers the authority to issue citations to resolve parks violations, and today they are respected by Mesa Police and effectively interact with them when necessary to address serious issues in the parks. She also stated that the most important function of the Rangers is their interaction with the public; citizens feel a sense of safety by their presence, and they serve as the face of PRCF to thousands of park users each month. Ms. Woodley introduced John Goodie and asked him to speak to the Board about his 10-year experience as a Park Ranger.

Mr. Goodie told the Board that he and the other Park Rangers are passionate about their jobs and their goal is to keep the parks safe. He gave the Board a brief overview of his job duties and said that his work shift can include:

- Checking for graffiti
- Assuring safe operation of playground equipment
- Checking sand for glass and other harmful debris
- Finding lost children
- Monitoring ramada reservations
- Checking and locking restrooms
- Assuring lights have been turned on at ball fields
- Educating citizens of park rules and regulations
- Assisting police with traffic control as needed
- Combating negative activity in the parks in lieu of police
- Radioing police when arrests are imminent
- General presence in the parks that increases good public relations for PRCF

Ms. Gullatt-Whiteman asked who the staff contact person is when there are requests for Ranger ride-alongs. Mr. Goodie replied that an interested citizen would contact Ms. Woodley.

Hear and discuss the subcommittee updates

Ms. Gullatt-Whiteman asked for subcommittee updates. Don Goodrum, Chair of the Programs Subcommittee, informed the Board that staff had provided the subcommittee members with rankings of the various programs measured by means of customer and financial driven criteria. Mr. Goodrum thanked staff for their extensive and thorough analysis to achieve these rankings. He said that once the members receive some budget figures and funding requirements, they would be able to make educated and informed decisions regarding which programs are most important, most used and most vital to the City.

Mr. Gillard, Chair of the Parks and Facilities Subcommittee, gave the Board a summary of their subcommittee's accomplishments to date. Mr. Gillard stated that the members ranked the City's parks and facilities by using a grading scale to evaluate infrastructure. With the exception of professional baseball fields, the subcommittee has assigned grades to pools, gyms and recreation facilities, sports fields and facilities, parks, basins, golf course, and the cemetery. Mr. Gillard pointed out that the subcommittee decided not to grade undeveloped parcels, only to evaluate the development potential of each parcel. He commented that staff is extremely knowledgeable and did an outstanding job in giving their presentations to the Subcommittee; he also thanked the subcommittee members for their dedication to the process. Mr. Gillard said they were ready to meet with the Programs Subcommittee to begin to mesh their gathered information. He added that Dave Dunne would more than likely give a presentation regarding Hohokam Park in April.

Provide direction on next steps for revising PRCF strategic plan

Mr. Evans said that looking at the department's \$19 million budget, staff and the Board need to figure out how to balance the budget and define PRCF's priorities in a revision to the Master Plan to be presented to City Council. Mr. Evans asked Ms. Moore to speak to the Board.

Ms. Moore said that the task of staff and the Parks Board is to amend the Master Plan by making recommendations at a regular Board meeting and getting public input to review the amended Master Plan recommendations. By June, staff hopes to submit the Parks Board update of the Parks Master Plan to Council.

Ms. Moore reviewed with the Board the questions that need to be answered when considering the philosophy of what the City parks and recreation system would look like in the next five, ten, and 15-plus years. Should Mesa:

- Offer more programs and fewer parks? (Reinstate programs that were once cut; provide the right kind of programs for the community; offer these programs in the right locations.)
- Offer more parks and fewer programs? (Construct more parks, recreation centers, pools, etc., in the right locations for the community.)
- Strive to keep a balance between programs and facilities and remain status quo? (Continue to modify existing programs; no new construction, but rehabilitate existing facilities.)

Ms. Gullatt-Whiteman asked Board members to consult their schedules so that they could come up with a date and time to meet again as a combined/joint subcommittee to discuss the strategic plan. After a lengthy discussion the next meeting was scheduled for March 27, 2008, before the next regularly scheduled Board meeting in April, in order to educate each subcommittee on the other subcommittee's findings and rationale behind the gradings/rankings. Ms. Gullatt-Whiteman also stated that a general philosophy needs to be determined at the March joint Subcommittee meeting that will establish guidelines and general direction the Board will take regarding the 2025 Master Plan for Parks and Recreation.

Mr. Evans said that before the March 27th meeting, a packet of maps/service circles extracted from the City's 2025 Master Plan will be sent to each Board member that shows existing and future parks and facilities.

Chair Comments

Ms. Gullatt-Whiteman announced that Brian Etheridge, the Board's newest member replacing Reggie Dye, is currently out of the country, but will be attending the April regular Board meeting.

She said that the Mayor's office has yet to fill Jeff Kirk's vacated position; however, they are in the process of filling that vacancy.

Director's Comments

Mr. Evans said that Fit City continues to be a successful, well-attended event each month. On March 8th, a boot camp event was held at Jefferson Recreation Center to accommodate infants, children, and adults. He noted that Fit City's April 19th Hohokam Stadium 5K walk and the "running of the bases" event has been rescheduled due to several other community events centering around fitness held the same day; April's event will now be held the following Saturday, April 26th.

Mr. Evans told the Board that Spring Training has also been very successful, with five of the seven games sold out to date. Chicago Cubs games will continue throughout the month, with the last game scheduled for Thursday, March 27th.

He noted that each Board member should have received an updated Events Calendar via email, and welcomed and encouraged everyone to attend any scheduled events.

Reports on meetings and/or events attended by Board Members

Frank Alger said that he recently attended the Downtown Mesa Association meeting for the first time and said they are planning to shut down Macdonald Street to hold a rodeo and other venues on April 12th, calling it Western Days; they are also holding another Friday Night Out and Saturday Cruise on Main Street, March 14-15. Mr. Alger also attended the Mesa Veteran's Day Parade Association meeting.

Mr. Gillard reported that the Foundation for Mesa Parks & Recreation met on February 20th to take action on the proposal for using Countryside Park as a dog park; he said that the Foundation overwhelmingly supported the proposal, thereby not losing the proposed dog park donation money. Mr. Gillard said that the Foundation would be holding a fundraiser in the stadium parking lot at the same time as the April 26th Fit City event at Hohokam Stadium. He said that the fundraiser, Man's Best Friend Car Show, has free admission, but will be accepting donations and collecting money from concessions, which will go towards the dog park at Countryside.

Mr. Gillard also commented that the Foundation is actively seeking members and asked that Board members consider a seat on the Foundation, acting as the Parks Board liaison, when Mr. Gillard is no longer a Board member.

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

The meeting was adjourned at 1:29 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

J. Rhett Evans
Parks, Recreation and Commercial Facilities Department Director