

**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 October 8, 2008.

Members Present:

Brian Etheridge
Russ Gillard
Don Goodrum
Connie Gullatt-Whiteman
Tim Gump
Steve Ikeda
Michelle Udall
Marilyn Wilson
Mark Yarbrough

Staff Present:

Darla Armfield	Mike Holste
Nicole Behrman	Bob Huhn
Dawn Bies	Cindy Hunt
Sue Deck	Stephanie Kraus
J.D. Dockstader	Aimee Manis
Rhett Evans	Andrea Moore
Mark Foote	Kelly Rafferty
Mark Grant	Rochelle Rotert

Members Absent:

Frank Alger, unexcused
David Martinez, excused

The meeting was called to order at 3:31 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 September 10, 2008 Parks Board meeting. Russ Gillard made a motion, Mark Yarbrough seconded, and it was unanimously carried to approve the minutes as written.

Public Comments

Ms. Gullatt-Whiteman invited citizens to come forth with their comments. Two citizens voiced their opinions in opposition to the sale of the Redberry/82nd Street parcel, asking the Board to preserve the site for Mesa's future growth; one citizen did not wish to speak, but was also against the sale of this parcel. Another citizen raised concerns on behalf of residents in a neighborhood near Countryside Park and its future as a dog park. The resident stated that this area serves a large population and children in the area have limited places for indoor summer recreation as this was originally designed to include a youth recreation center and a library. There were also concerns over impacted property values, increased traffic and the monitoring of animal clean up. Two citizens representing the West Mesa Alliance spoke to the Board to ask them to bring the discussion back to the community regarding the sale of the vacant parcel on Beverly Street. It was pointed out that west Mesa has very little open space available and this parcel is one of the last opportunities to enhance the neighborhood by developing it into usable space.

Mark Yarbrough asked the citizens present if they knew of any problems because of the Redberry property not being developed. The response was that there were no issues with crime because there is nothing there to vandalize, due to the fact that it is virgin desert land.

Presentation of Mesa HoHoKam donations to making Waves and Urban Fishing Program

Ms. Gullatt-Whiteman introduced Bud Page, a representative from the Mesa HoHoKam organization. Mr. Page explained that the HoHoKam Foundation supports youth sports activities

by providing funds to various youth groups that benefit individuals and group functions. He recently presented the Foundation for Mesa Parks & Recreation with a \$3,000 check for youth softball field lighting, and today was presenting a check from the Mesa HoHoKams to the Making Waves program in the amount of \$5,000. Mr. Page presented a second check to J.D. Dockstader in the amount of \$3,000 to support the community's Urban Fishing Program.

Rhett Evans thanked Mr. Page for the donations and asked Darla Armfield to explain how children in our community benefit from these donations. She said 1,000 scholarships were given out this summer that paid for swim lessons and also provided opportunities to participate in fitness activities.

Mr. Evans added that the two urban lakes at Riverview and Red Mountain were recently stocked with fish, which would not have been possible without the urban fishing program. The City's commitment to retain the program is \$11,000, and every dollar donated helps sustain it.

Master Plan Update: Discuss and take action on the future of Beverly Park and Redberry & 82nd Street parcels

Andrea Moore gave the Board a recap of the issues regarding the two parcels at Beverly and Redberry Streets. During the past year, the Parks and Facilities Subcommittee and the regular Parks Board reviewed the status of each park and each of the undeveloped parkland parcels. These two parcels, in particular, came forth as needing additional discussion. Ms. Moore reviewed the pros, cons and alternatives of selling both parcels, as originally outlined in detail during the September 10 Parks Board meeting. She stated that the Board requested that staff notify neighbors and representatives from neighborhood organizations in the areas of each parcel, asking for community involvement in today's discussion by inviting them to the meeting. Letters were sent to 57 addresses in the area inviting them to the meeting. Ms. Moore also invited staff from Community Revitalization, Parks Maintenance, the Police Department, and representatives from the West Mesa Community Development Group and the Mesa Grande Community Association to be available to answer questions that the Board may ask in order to help them make better informed decisions regarding the two parcels.

Ms. Moore then took questions regarding the 2.86-acre Beverly Street parcel, located near Alma School Road and Main Street. She pointed out that this parcel has generated a lot of complaints from immediate neighbors in the area with dust control and noise problems, vandalism, trash, graffiti, and trespassing. She further stated that the site would need to be developed within the next couple of years to retain its Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) funding that was used for acquisition.

Michelle Udall asked if there were any pocket parcels available in the west Mesa area in lieu of the Beverly parcel. Ms. Moore said there are vacant parcels in the area, but the market has not been examined and this parcel would have to be sold first.

Steve Ikeda asked if the CDBG funds had to go towards the purchase of another park or if it could go towards the maintenance of an existing park. Ms. Moore replied that if the parcel was sold the funds would go back to CDBG. The City would have the opportunity to request the reallocation of the funds for acquisition of another parcel, but the funding cannot be used for maintenance.

Brian Etheridge expressed concern about increased incidences of crime if the Beverly parcel were turned into a park. It could be a more comfortable location for crime with benches, restrooms, etc., and he did not think it was wise to develop this parcel.

Marilyn Wilson asked Ms. Moore what circumstances have changed since the parcel was purchased in 2002. Ms. Moore said that identifying funding for development and maintenance has become increasingly difficult since 2002 and most of the Park Ranger staff has been depleted that would have assisted police in monitoring the area. Ms. Wilson then asked Ms. Moore to explain why there have been time restrictions placed on this parcel to develop it. Ms. Moore said that there is no written definitive period of time, but at some point if there is no progress towards park development within the next two to three years, the City will either have to repay the funds or sell the parcel to be able to repay the funds, returning the money to the CDBG program with the Federal Housing and Urban Development Department.

Mr. Evans encouraged Board members to openly ask questions of the representatives from the Police Department, Neighborhood Services and Mesa Grande if they were seeking more clarification.

Ms. Gullatt-Whiteman asked Crime Prevention Officer Patty Gallagher to share her concerns regarding the Beverly parcel. The officer stated that the long, deep parcel would need to provide patrol officers with a clear line of sight and ample lighting and the park would need to be closed at night. A participative neighborhood would be needed with an organized community watch program in place. The officer added that if it was turned into a positive use park, there would likely be less crime. Mr. Gillard asked what kinds of crimes are currently reported in the area. The officer replied that it is mostly trespassing, transients, and drug use.

Ms. Gullatt-Whiteman asked the representative from Mesa Grande if the neighbors in the immediate area were willing to participate in patrolling the park area. The representative said that she could organize the neighborhood to have them attend a forum to explore the idea of turning the vacant land into a park and taking a certain amount of responsibility for their neighborhood park.

Mr. Etheridge asked if a Neighborhood Watch is already established in the immediate area of the parcel because he thought the crime issue was the Board's biggest concern. Ms. Gallagher replied that there is an organized Watch group to the north of the parcel, but the group may not be active. Mr. Etheridge said that if this park were to remain in the Master Plan, a Neighborhood Watch program would have to be in place demonstrating that there is a definite commitment to keeping the park crime free. Also, private sector sponsors would need to come forth to contribute to the creation and upkeep of the park. He further added that if a Neighborhood Watch program and sponsors fail to exist, then the property should be sold. Tim Gump asked the Mesa Grande representative how long a time frame would be needed in order to put this action plan together. The representative said that it would take no longer than one year, but to please remember that no one has approached the neighbors about the parcel conversion to a park since January of this year.

After hearing further comments from citizens, the Neighborhood Services representatives and the Mesa Grande group, Ms. Udall asked that the sale of the Beverly parcel be tabled until an evening neighborhood meeting is organized and the Board members can hear directly from the neighbors themselves and measure their level of commitment. Ms. Gullatt-Whiteman agreed and asked that staff arrange a meeting in January or February, meanwhile giving the Mesa Grande group time to notify neighbors and get an action plan started as discussed. She said this issue should be re-examined by the Board for further review after the neighborhood meeting.

Don Goodrum stated that since the 2002 land purchase, the City's budgetary priorities have changed considerably requiring re-evaluation of this parcel in today's environment. He added that the Board should not take a long time to decide what to do with this parcel, and if the

support of the neighbors is not there, the Board should agree to sell it. Mr. Goodrum then made a motion to defer a decision in order to seek community input and readdress the future of the Beverly parcel at a later Board meeting. Ms. Wilson seconded the motion. However, Ms. Udall and Mr. Etheridge asked that the motion include a specific time period for the community to come together with an action plan to support the park. After further discussion, Ms. Gullatt-Whiteman asked Mr. Goodrum to restate his motion that was left on the floor. Mr. Goodrum restated the motion to defer a recommendation on the Beverly parcel at this time in order to receive community input within the next six months allowing the Board to see what kind of commitment the neighborhood is willing to provide and for the Board to make a decision after all the input has been presented. Ms. Wilson seconded the restated motion and it was unanimously approved.

Ms. Gullatt-Whiteman asked staff to keep the Beverly parcel on all future agendas so that the Board could receive monthly updates on its progress.

Ms. Gullatt-Whiteman asked Ms. Moore to continue with the discussion regarding the possible sale of the 10-acre Redberry parcel, located near Thomas and Hawes Roads. After reviewing with the Board the pros, cons and alternatives to the sale of this parcel, Ms. Moore said that notification of this meeting was sent to residents in the immediate vicinity of the parcel and to area neighborhood organizations. As a result of those notices and a recent news article, six phone calls were received in favor of retaining the parcel for future park growth and one suggested selling the parcel. Ms. Moore pointed out that several people from the Redberry area were present at the meeting and opened the discussion to the Board.

Mr. Yarbrough said that he was comfortable holding onto this parcel due to the zero crime rate and usable area it provides the residents in its current natural state. Mr. Goodrum agreed that it is a pristine area and nothing would be gained by selling it.

Mr. Etheridge disagreed by saying that there are plenty of recreational opportunities surrounding this property and if there was no intended use for it in the future, it did not seem wise to hold the land that would merely lock up capital assets.

Several residents from the Redberry area spoke to the Board in favor of retaining this land, requesting that it be left as open space to take advantage of the natural desert and wildlife. It was also pointed out that private recreational opportunities were only available to the Las Sendas and Red Mountain residents through their HOAs. The residents in the immediate area of the Redberry parcel did not have any planned recreation.

Ms. Udall made a motion to retain the Redberry & 82nd Street parcel with the possibility of future development on that parcel; Mr. Yarbrough seconded the motion. Seven members were in favor of retaining the parcel, two members opposed.

Discuss and take action on the development of dog park at Countryside Park.

Mr. Dockstader started the discussion, telling the Board that the parcel at Countryside Park has been brought before the Board in the past, most recently to approve the demolition of two structures on that parcel. He explained that these two structures were once used as office space and storage but were no longer utilized. It was also brought to the Board's attention that the Foundation for Mesa Parks and Recreation was seeking a location for an off-leash dog park. Staff began to explore the possibility of converting a portion of Countryside Park into a dog park and is now asking the Board to approve the conversion. Mr. Dockstader said that the Foundation acquired a sponsor, "Bark Avenue Pet Resort", to commit \$100,000 towards the development and installation of this park; however, the newly designed park is estimated to cost

\$200,000, and the Foundation is actively holding fundraisers for the additional \$100,000 needed. Mr. Gillard added that the Bark Avenue donation may be rescinded if progress is not made soon to firm up the location.

Mr. Evans stated that the 2025 Master Plan had originally proposed a recreation center and branch-style library on the property. To date, funds have not been available for this development to occur; the City does not have funds for the dog park, either, but through sponsors such as Bark Avenue, a dog park has been made possible.

Mr. Evans noted that if funds were to become available in the future, the west side of the development is still earmarked for a youth center. He said that it would be difficult for the City not to accept a \$100,000 donation for building a dog park with the City's inability to fund any type of development at this time.

Mr. Gillard informed the Board that having the support of the Foundation meant at least five acres would have to be dedicated towards the dog park. Ms. Moore said that some of the acreage would be lost if a recreation center were to be built.

Discussion and deliberation continued regarding the use of Countryside Park as a dog park, but no decision could be reached. Mr. Gillard concluded that the Board should hear comments from the group of individuals who are interested in building the dog park in order to make a more fully informed decision. He made a motion to table the discussion and action to be taken until more information was available for consideration by the Board; Mr. Etheridge seconded the motion. It was unanimously carried.

Recap of summer aquatics/recreation programs

Darla Armfield, Aquatics Supervisor, and members of her staff, and Cindy Hunt, Supervisor of Adaptive and After School Programs, gave presentations to the Board, reviewing the highlights of this past summer's safe and affordable aquatics and recreation programs that the City offered to children and adults.

Mr. Gillard commented that the City of Mesa's aquatics program was the best in the state.

Update on aquatics capital projects

No update was presented due to Board members taking additional time to discuss previous agenda items.

Discuss fees and charges and assign subcommittee

Ms. Gullatt-Whiteman asked Mr. Ikeda, Mr. Gump and Ms. Udall if they would consider volunteering on the Fees & Charges Subcommittee by attending three meetings during the next two months. Each Board member agreed to serve on the subcommittee and Sue Deck told them that she would contact them regarding the time and location of the first meeting.

Director's Comments

Due to time constraints, Mr. Evans mentioned that the calendar of events would be emailed to Board members.

Reports on meetings and/or events attended by Board Members

Due to time constraints, no reports were given by the Board.

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

The meeting was adjourned at 5:30 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

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