

**Parks and Recreation Commission Special Meeting
Thursday, November 6, 2014
Board of Supervisors' Chambers
400 County Center, Redwood City**

MINUTES

Chair Merrilees called the special meeting to order at 4:00 p.m.

Commissioners Present: Cooney, Enriquez (Vice Chair), Merrilees (Chair), Okelo, Pincus, Ruehl (Youth Commissioner) (arrived at 4:06 p.m.)

Staff: Finley, Arechiga, Bennett, Castillo, Herzberg, Lombardi, Schoof

Oral Communications

There was none.

Consideration of Minutes

Commission Action: M/S Cooney/Enriquez to approve the minutes of the regular meeting of October 2, 2014 as presented.

Motion carried 5-0 with Youth Commissioner Ruehl not yet in attendance.

Workshop on Budget FY2015-17 Priority Setting

Director Finley provided a status report on the priorities identified in the Parks Five-Year Strategic Plan and what had been accomplished to date. She said the Department was seeking input from staff, the public, and the Commission to help identify needs in the development of program and project priorities toward making recommendations to the Board of Supervisors for FY2015-17 budget priorities. She noted that specifically the Commission was being asked to identify areas they would like to see the Department focus on in the next two years along with those programs or focuses that had been initiated and should continue.

Responding to a question from Commissioner Enriquez, Director Finley said environmental literacy programs happen in a number of ways with many of the Friends' groups and other partners providing those programs. She said Ranger Wright was hired as a term employee to jumpstart the department's interpretive program.

Responding to a question from Commissioner Okelo, Director Finley said the four goal areas came from the Strategic Plan and were critical to setting priorities. She described the workshop as a sensing session of the public and Commission to identify what the Department was doing that should continue, what the Department should do more of, what was most important moving into the next two budget years, and other general recommendations.

Commissioner Cooney expressed support for more community engagement noting that engaging the community and community partners early on in projects such as trail development would bring support as people would have a sense of ownership.

Public Comment: Ms. Julia Bott, Parks and Recreation Foundation, said as a County Parks' partner, the Foundation wanted to fund projects based on the Department's direction and needs. She said operating funds for the Foundation were identified as a need during the 2013 joint County Environmental Quality Commission and Parks and Recreation Commission meeting. She said there would be a process to apply for Measure A funds for the future two-year budget and requested endorsement for the Foundation to apply for those funds.

Ms. Faye Brophy, ETRAC, said any trail project that was paved in essence banned equestrian use. She asked that Parks look at providing more support for trails for the local equestrian community, which she described as a valuable resource and unique to the broader region.

Chair Merrilees closed the public comment period.

Commission Comment: Commissioner Okelo said he agreed with Commissioner Cooney that community engagement was important. He noted as an example the mini-parks subcommittee which has Commission and unincorporated local advisory group representation that were meeting to develop policy. He noted the importance of ways to solicit broad input from people in the County to increase communication among community users, partners, Department staff and the Commission. He said marketing was a necessary component of community engagement. He said recent projects and events have enhanced the parks system's image in the community and said that was something to build on to increased engagement. He said the Department should work more closely with the Parks and Recreation Foundation noting that group's network resources. He said for the District he represents he would like to see the residents make more use of the parks. He said it might be that people weren't aware of the parks system, or it might be a matter of economics or transportation. As an example he said for school trips, there might be a lack of funding for buses to take children out to the parks systems. He said he would like measurements of how many county residents currently use the parks systems and a measurement in future years to determine the efficacy of community engagement and marketing efforts. .

Commissioner Enriquez said he wanted staff to focus on the environmental literacy programs particularly for seniors and peoples with disabilities to enable those groups to be more involved in the parks and projects. He suggested ADA improvements would be one way of doing this. Director Finley confirmed with Commissioner Enriquez that he wanted staff to reach out and engage seniors and persons with disabilities to make sure parks facilities supported their use. She said it would be important for the Department to do a transition plan to survey all parks systems facilities' compliance with current ADA standards and include a schedule of budgeted improvements.

Commissioner Pincus said one question regarding environmental literacy was the target audience. He said currently in education there was a massive change in how early reading skills were being taught to children as young as three years. He suggested developing age appropriate programs. He said many seniors he knows were not visiting parks and that information about activities in the parks was not being broadly disseminated. He suggested some broader communication beyond newsletters to 4,000 people.

Commissioner Cooney suggested that County Parks reach out to other park and recreation commissions in the County and include them in community engagement and marketing. He talked about buses that Samtrans provides for special needs groups and thought that was an area and resource to be explored.

Commissioner Okelo said regarding stewardship and developing relationships with other entities that he particularly liked the idea of reaching out across the County. He suggested that the Commission host a meeting and invite all the other parks and recreation commissioners in the County to share challenges and discuss opportunities for collaboration. He said regarding stewardship that public safety was part of the Parks Strategic Plan but he thought health and well-being should be included. Director Finley said that staff had started building those relationships with the Health Department.

Commissioner Enriquez said he wasn't sure if it would fit under fiscal management or community engagement but he would like to see events for all diverse groups to enjoy such as a concert in the parks. He said people wanted to have their voices heard and suggested parks needed to host festivals on a larger scale. He suggested scheduling a date.

Commissioner Pincus said a lot of their conversation centered on getting people into the parks. He asked what it would take to remove the entry fee as he felt that kept people out of the parks. He asked if a study had been done of the fiscal impact of eliminating the park entry fee. Director Finley said staff could look at the entry fee revenue for those parks that the entry fee is charged. She said additionally that management analysts in the County Manager's Office as part of developing performance measures were looking at parks' fees, and a report of fee recommendations was expected in January. She said the Department has also contracted with a business consultant to look at parks' concessions, fees and leases to develop a model for sustainability.

Youth Commissioner Ruehl said community engagement was a fantastic priority. He said one of the reasons he was on the Commission was to engage different sections of the community. He said specifically within the stewardship category he liked the items for resource management to include habitat restoration and fire fuel reduction, and water conservation and green energy in parks. He said water conservation and fuel reduction were critical in view of the California drought. He said green energy and habitat restoration were good workable environmental goals in general.

Chair Merrilees said he supported volunteer program expansion as that would serve community engagement as well. He said regarding revenue enhancement and a sustainable funding plan that the wedding business was growing on the coastside. He suggested there was revenue potential to use park space for weddings. He said regarding goals that the word environmental should be added in front of stewardship as the County parks system was the end result of a lot of environmental organizations work. He said he would like the word environmental in the goals and mission. He said regarding community engagement and marketing that the Commissioners could do more in the area of public relations by going to other groups and telling them what County Parks was doing. He supported solar panels being installed wherever possible and environmentally sound ways to handle storm water and runoff. He said related to Fiscal Management that it was important to plan for leaner fiscal years by balancing environmentally sound facilities improvements and equipment with low maintenance requirements. He said park trails and facilities were there to get people out to walk and recreate and agreed with Commissioner Okelo that health should be a focus. He said the Department does environmental stewardship very well and keeps people happy.

Commissioner Okelo said he liked the idea about reviewing entry fees. He suggested incorporating an element of marketing to look at when parks are most often used. He said perhaps people who were born in January would not have to pay to come into the parks in January. He said if they came in their birthday month and enjoyed it they could generate more interest.

Director Finley asked if the Commission had any caution or advice moving forward. Chair Merrilees said to keep in mind low maintenance equipment and facilities. Director Finley said other park systems do a life cycle analysis before purchasing anything.

Commissioner Okelo asked about updating the Parks Strategic Plan and tying health to it. Discussion ensued about the process and there was consensus to have an item on the December agenda.

Commission Action: M/S Okelo/Enriquez to have an agenda item on the December 4 meeting to consider a recommendation to amend the Parks Strategic Plan to include a health element.

Motion carried 6-0.

Commissioner Okelo asked if there was a written agreement with the Parks and Recreation Foundation. Director Finley said it had expired and she and Executive Director Bott were discussing formalizing the relationship with an MOU.

Director Finley said that Community Programs Specialist Schoof was working on a community engagement plan and they would bring that to the Commission in either December or February. She said regarding environmental stewardship and natural

resource management that Natural Resource Manager Arechiga had prepared a draft natural resource plan and that could come to the Commission in December.

Commissioner Okelo asked about an annual report made by the County Health System and if County Parks participated in that study. Director Finley said one of the Shared Vision 2025 performance measures for Healthy Community was the 7th grade fitness test. She said she thought the countywide percentage of 7th graders meeting the standards of that fitness test was 35%. She said it was important to Parks in identifying ways to help children become healthier. Youth Commissioner Ruehl said a county based organization working on improving children's health in the county had made a presentation to the Youth Commission and stated that two out of three 7th graders were unable to pass the fitness test. He said his committee with the Youth Commission was investigating ways to advocate getting youth into the parks and doing outdoor activities. He said they were considering a website or doing competitions.

Commissioner Pincus asked if County Parks had any specific problems related to sea level rise. Director Finley said that was an issue at Coyote Point Recreation Area. She said Phase 2 of the Promenade project had been engineered to allow for sea level rise. She said another example was a project the Department was helping with at Surfer's Beach to repair the coastal trail there where erosion from waves has changed the access. She said Senior Parks Planner Herzberg was representing the department on a County climate change committee.

Director Finley asked what the Commissioners thought was really exciting about the County parks system.

Commissioner Okelo said he loves the trails and particularly likes the trails in Wunderlich Parks. He said he enjoys the task of getting his friends and families to take advantage of the resources offered by the parks system.

Youth Commissioner Ruehl said the Department's tagline captures what he feels: Wild places and friendly spaces. He said there were so many fantastic outdoor areas and so many beautiful natural spaces that it was marvelous there was a parks department to preserve and treasure those places.

Commissioner Enriquez said he would like to see a Day in the Park event that would bring diverse communities together as a family and enjoy the beauty and open space of the parks.

Chair Merrilees said he loves the trails noting he walks the Coastal Trail nearly every day. He noted that maintenance of the trails was critical to that enjoyment. He noted how different this area was from southern California in that the hills and mountains were not covered with houses and condominiums but kept natural which he said made this area a magic place to live.

Commissioner Pincus said for him it was the trees and the views offered when walking in the parks. He said it was just a good place to go and breathe in deeply.

Commissioner Cooney said quoting from one of the late Bing Crosby's songs that our parks were a little bit of heaven that fell from the sky one day and nestled in San Mateo. He thanked the Department for taking care of the parks.

A summary of the goals and priorities identified through the Commission's discussion follows.

Community Engagement

example: mini-parks subcommittee

- Marketing component – include more public relations efforts
- Opportunity to work with the Foundation
- Track visitor demographics.
- Reach out to other Park and Recreation Commissions within the County
 - Host countywide meeting of parks and recreation commissions
- Volunteer opportunity expansion

Environmental Literacy

- Increase program(s) opportunities for:
 - seniors – transportation for example
 - access for persons with disabilities/special needs
- Target specific age groups
 - Appropriate communication and materials for age groups

Stewardship

- Engage with Health Department and expand partnership
- Habitat restoration
- Fuel reduction and fire risk reduction
- Water conservation
- Stronger emphasis that parks stewardship is environmental – in general add environmental
- Keep/help people get healthy
 - two-thirds of 7th graders in county do not pass physical fitness exam

Fiscal Management

- Festival or concert – engage all communities to come together to enjoy the parks
- Consider eliminating parking fee
 - current review of park fees underway
 - market free park use – example by birthday month
- Weddings or other special events
- Keep environmental stewardship in mind with facility improvements, equipment purchases, and other tasks

- Best environmentally sustainable products, equipment facilities balanced with low maintenance needs to lessen impact in leaner fiscal times

(Recap) Commission Action: M/S Okelo/Enriquez to consider on December 4 agenda a recommendation to the Board of Supervisors to amend the Parks Five-Year Strategic Plan to add health component.

Motion carried 6-0.

Future Parks and Recreation Commission Agenda Item

- Community Engagement Plan
- Natural Resource Management Plan

Adjournment

The meeting adjourned at 5:25 p.m.