

## **Henderson County Parks & Recreation Advisory Board Meeting**

Tuesday, February 9th, 12pm, Athletic and Activity Center – Virtual Meeting on Zoom

**In attendance:** Terry Maybin, Robert Smith, David Hill, Jeff Donaldson, Milton Butterworth, Scott Rhodes, Philip Ellis, Tricia King, and Katie Breckheimer.

**Staff in attendance:** Carleen Dixon, Casey Conner, and Autumn Radcliff.

**Speakers in attendance:** None

**A. Call to Order:** 12:02pm

**B. Welcome New Member – Commissioner David Hill**

**C. Approval of Minutes:** With Katie Breckheimer's corrections to November's minutes, a motion to approve made by Robert Smith, seconded by Philip Ellis, unanimously approved.

**D. Consent Agenda:** None

**E. Public Input:**

**F. New Business:**

### **1. Position Openings**

Carleen noted that the Admin Assistant 1 position was recently vacated and that they were currently hiring for this position as well as the 3 different auxiliary Parks positions. These include weekends only, Parks PT Monday through Friday, and Seasonal Parks 40 hours a week. We made changes in part time job descriptions to help in recruiting new hires for the busy tournament season that is approaching. Multiple job opportunities available for ages 17 and up.

### **2. Tournament/Event Requests 2021**

Carleen shared that Henderson County Parks and Recreation continues to receive tournament and event requests weekly, with nine straight months booked from the third weekend in March through the second weekend in November. At least four new tournament directors will be renting from us in 2021, this will bring a more diverse group of people to the area.

### **3. Requests from BOC in Budget Workshop**

**a. Etowah Trail** – Commissioner McCall requested funding for the Etowah Trail, Commissioners voted to fund the repairs to the Etowah Trail in the current budget cycle, FY21. These repairs will include a new underlayment

and make the trail 8 feet wide for the entire length of the park. Some trees will need to be removed but Carleen noted that staff are working with other departments and the Etowah Lions Club to determine the best course of action.

Katie suggests the possibility of getting asphalt placed near the field lights so the lights could be more easily replaced. Carleen states that she loves this idea but unfortunately the trucks used to change field lights would exceed the weight limitations of the trail.

Milton states the use of hexagonal mats that have been used to distribute the weight of utility trucks while working on light poles might help get the lights repaired. Katie states that she contacted Duke Energy to inquire about a donation and she was told a subcontractor was used to install the poles along the Oklawaha Greenway.

Philip asked for more information on the potential options the staff was presented with regarding the trees around the Etowah Trail. Carleen stated that one example was rerouting the trail through the complex to avoid the trees. However, options may be limited because of the high-water table, as well as the use of this area during tournaments. Philip suggests looking at the cost of stormwater improvements, such as different, more water-loving vegetation planted in the wet spots of the park. Carleen states the BOC mentioned their intention of replanting trees as well as water-loving plants. Tricia agreed with the benefits of water-loving plants to help mitigate drainage problems. Carleen noted that she will reach out to Philip and Tricia for suggestions on this when the time arrives.

**b. Jackson Park Trail Fix and Soccer Fix** - Commissioner Edney mentioned the Jackson Park Trail flooding issues during the budget workshop as well as the problems with the Jackson Park soccer field. At the next BOC meeting, Marcus Jones will present possible fixes for the Oklawaha Greenway. Carleen mentioned her work with Philip brainstorming possible ways to get a grant for the area.

Currently there is no movement to report on the soccer fields; Carleen continues to explore potential options and communicate with other organizations with flooding issues to determine if there are any good options that might work for us. She noted that while most fields are flooding once or twice a year with a few inches while we are flooding many times a year and often by 5-6 feet!

#### 4. **VFW**

The BOC has expressed interest in purchasing the VFW for a number of reasons: the struggle with COVID, opportunities for historic preservation including a museum as well as possible use of the upstairs facility as a multi-use space. The purchase has not been finalized but Carleen wanted to inform the board of the possibility.

Philip stated that the VFW intersection is one end of the urban corridor of Henderson County and that he would urge officials to take into consideration the needs of pedestrian mobility in that area. Tricia stated her agreement. Katie states that as they consider the cost to purchase the facility, the Commissioners should direct those funds toward parks and recreation needs such as soccer fields and greenways. Bob and Tricia agreed.

David states that the VFW asked the commissioners if they would be interested in purchasing the facility and renovating it to move the VA out of the health department and into this building. It would also be used as a multi-purpose building for organizations to meet. The initial cost would be about \$900,000, with the total project estimate coming to \$4 million. There is limited parking availability. At the last BOC meeting they voted to rescind their noninterest in the Edwards Park and the board is still in negotiations with the VFW as well as communications with the city.

Philip inquired about the historical significance of the VFW building. David stated the main reason being veterans and the use of the building for the VFW, as well as older architecture.

## **G. Unfinished Business:**

### **1. Trails Update - Autumn**

Moving forward but slow going. The Mud Creek Feasibility study has been finalized and basically complete. This was requested by the previous BOC.

The county used STBG money to complete a feasibility study for extending the Oklawaha Greenway both North and South. Equinox provided cost estimates and suggestions on how to extend the North section. Marcus Jones is working on a more extensive plan.

Katie asked for clarification on the north extension; Autumn states that the feasibility study looked at extending the trail from Berkeley Park to Westfeldt as the Northern section. The two feasibility studies looked at where trails could possibly go, with considerations such as flooding issues.

The Ecusta Rail Trail is moving forward. Blue Ridge Southern sent a letter to government agencies in January to outline their intent to file for an exemption of abandonment for the 19.1 miles. Conserving Carolina has completed all negotiations and now we are waiting for DOT to move forward with the process. Mid-February is the expected start time and it could take 30-90 days to go through the service transportation board process. Rail abandonment and rail banking. STBG money is available for the first three phases. The funding for preliminary engineering will be available October 2021, and the construction funding will become available in October 2022. The County plans to apply for the remaining phases in the next round of SDBG.

Katie mentioned that Watco released more land than predicted and that it will start at the entrance of the city near the Fresh Market. She mentions the future plans involving the traffic circle and incorporation of a trailhead.

Autumn states that section of the rail was not initially included, and the STBG funding does not currently cover that section so additional funds will be needed.

Philip asked how far the Ecusta Trail comes into town. Autumn stated the rail is from Milepost 0.7 to Milepost 19.8.

Jeff asked for the timeline of when the Ecusta will be available for use by the public.

Autumn stated that in theory it is a 4-6-year project. This will depend on any issues that arise during the engineering process, including the extensiveness of repairs that are needed.

## **H. Staff Updates:**

### **1. Recreation Update – Casey**

The staff just finished the 17<sup>th</sup> edition of the activity bags. 100 bags were given out last week and there were about 30 people on the waitlist. 100 bags seems to be a good number. Pickleball play has been busy the past few weeks. Limited activities are going on in the building: dance classes, exercise classes, and karate. Basketball Shootarounds in the afternoons have been popular, especially with the high school kids. Pickleball and Basketball are free. We are halfway through youth basketball clinics; these were all full and everyone remained healthy on our side. Soccer clinics will start in the Spring, sign-ups are expected to fill up fast. The Daddy Daughter Dance only had 40 sign-ups, so refunds will be given, and the activity kits will still go out to those that signed up.

Katie asked if there is a mandatory mask policy for those in the gym. Casey replied masks are required and a screening is administered including a temperature check and questions.

## **2. Parks Update – Carleen (for Jason)**

The chain link fence separating the upper parking lot from the park has been taken down at East Flat Rock Park and replaced with a split rail fence.

Overgrown bushes have been removed and they are seeding/planting the area below it.

A bridge in Jackson Park near the soccer field area has been removed and rebuilt by Parks staff, they have one more left to replace.

Staff have been cleaning and reorganizing the Jackson Park Maintenance Shop to get ready for the upcoming season.

The dugouts at Jackson Park are being rebuilt as well, replacing wood and roof materials. They have also been completing field prep as well as removing the silt and mud off the greenway. They are also completing downed tree removal.

Our mowing contractor has decided not to continue so we will have a new mowing contractor in March. An RFP has been posted.

## **3. Admin Update – Carleen**

Henderson County Youth Baseball is finalizing their spring schedule, they have expanded their age groups for some older kids wanting to play. They have elected a new president, Jason Tweed, and they are open to utilizing other fields.

The HC Youth Softball group has struggled with numbers for a season, but they have reached out to Fletcher to possibly partner with them.

A group of interested individuals in Etowah are interested in creating a Friends of Etowah Park group and are looking at establishing a 501(c)3. There are all a part of multiple HOAs that are near Etowah Park that are interested. So far there is no hard interest in Friends of Parks & Rec overall, but anyone interested should contact Carleen.

The AAC downstairs classrooms has been committed to the vaccine call center, we are not sure how long that space will be needed.

## **4. Member Comments:**

Katie Breckheimer brought up the subcommittee that met but did not get to speak to commissioners during the budget process and wanted information on steps moving forward.

Carleen stated that David Hill will serve as a liaison to the board and will be able to communicate recreation needs to the BOC now.

David agreed and stated he is available to listen and talk and help in any way he can.

Milton mentioned that the subcommittee wanted to inform the commissioners and they identified multiple routes to do so. He expresses how the group wants to be effective and helpful to the BOC.

Carleen clarified the goal of the subcommittee, to bring the impact of tournaments on the parks to the BOC's attention. The parks hosted 278 teams in 2019 and hosted 570 teams in 2020, and this number is only expected to grow in 2021. The board wanted to inform the BOC of not only the tournaments success but the impacts on the parks, staffing, other parks activities, and resources.

Milton added that the subcommittee wanted to report the return on investment in parks and recreation from these tournaments.

Katie mentioned that the November minutes reflected the rise in tournaments, noting the community benefits but also the impact on staff and facilities and emphasizes the need for balance.

**Motions:**

1. With Katie Breckheimer's corrections to Octobers minutes, A motion to approve made by Robert Smith, seconded by Philip Ellis, unanimously approved.

**I. Call to Adjourn: 1:22pm**