

Henderson County Parks & Recreation Advisory Board Meeting

Tuesday July 13th, 2021 12pm, AAC

In attendance: Jeff Donaldson, Terry Maybin, Hunter Marks, Milton Butterworth, Katie Breckheimer, Corum Smith, Scott Rhodes, and Philip Ellis.

Staff in attendance: Carleen Dixon, Megan Bishop, Bruce Gilliam, and Zach High.

Speakers in attendance: None

1. Call to Order: 12:07

2. Approval of Minutes: A motion to approve the June 2021 minutes was made by Philip Ellis with the addition of his commentary regarding the Jackson Park Playground budget request, seconded by Terry Maybin, unanimously approved.

3. Public Input: None

4. New Business:

a. Discussion on Recreational Soccer League

Stacie Marlowe, the President of the Henderson County Soccer Association (HCSA), attended the meeting to present a partnership opportunity for Asheville Buncombe Youth Soccer Association (ABYSA) to take over our recreation soccer league programming.

The HCPRA Department conducted a survey sent to past Henderson County soccer league participants to determine if past participants had a preference on what organization ran the Recreational Soccer League in Henderson County. Carleen briefly discussed the results of this survey. The majority of respondents responded it does not matter what organization runs the league, however location was the most important factor considered when signing up. Carleen noted that we currently work with both HCSA and ABYSA. HCSA works as a partner supporting soccer in the county and ABYSA offers competitive level play in Henderson County and partner with us on the older age groups because we have less numbers to play against in HC so we play teams outside the county.

Philip asked about the current status of soccer leagues.

Carleen replied that HCPRD offers a recreational soccer league. This spring because of COVID, ABYSA offered a soccer league in Henderson County when restrictions were still in effect, and HCPRD started a league a month later once COVID restrictions were lifted. So, there were two leagues in the spring, which sparked this conversation.

i. Stacie Marlowe

HCSA is a soccer club affiliate with NCYSA that allows Henderson County Parks and Recreation program players to play other soccer clubs in the area. HCSA works with HCPRD to register players with the state. ABYSA reached out about providing a recreational soccer league in place of the program that HCPRD currently offers.

Jeff asked if there are try outs. Stacie replied there are not.

Terry asked about the cost difference. Stacie stated cost difference averages to about \$10 difference. Recreation play is \$95 per season including the jersey. ABYSA offers scholarships to kids who receive free or reduced lunch as well as kids who qualify for Medicaid. These kids pay \$22. There is also a sliding scale available for children who don't meet these requirements.

Stacie stated there are 116 Henderson County children currently registered with ABYSA for recreation play. HCPRD has not opened up registration for soccer yet.

Jeff discussed the branding issue regarding the Asheville-Buncombe name running programs for Henderson County.

Stacie stated they are looking at rebranding to something like WNC Soccer because they serve many municipalities, but that rebranding would not happen overnight.

Milton asked if this would mean the HCSA would go away. Stacie replied it would not and would continue to serve as an oversight and partnership facilitator.

Scott asked about the difference between ABYSA and HCSA.

Stacie stated that HCSA is a club organization and a nonprofit like ABYSA, but they do not have the depth of service to offer a league like ABYSA does. Stacie stated that field space development is a large priority.

Scott asked if ABYSA is a 501c3. Stacie stated they are.

Philip asked if ABYSA has the same relationship with Buncombe County and Asheville currently. Stacie replied they do.

Milton asked about the differences between HCPRD and ABYSA programs. ABYSA utilized a variety of fields in Henderson County and Buncombe County. Carleen stated HCPRD primarily utilizes Jackson Park used for games.

Terry asked why the Board of Commissioners would not be required to approve this change. Carleen stated they might want to be involved and that she will not be making the final call on this decision.

Hunter and Scott both clarified that if we did this, ABYSA would take control over the program and they would be utilizing the fields.

Carleen stated that while we would have a contract with ABYSA for field use, the department would still want to be involved at some level. It is our main priority to provide community recreational play to Henderson County. We would want someone to be on the ABYSA board to ensure these needs are being met, but at this time ABYSA does not allow liaisons on their board.

Milton emphasized the importance of making sports accessible to all, and how a cost increase would be moving in the wrong direction.

Scott asked if there is not a huge advantage to switching, would it be worth it to go forward despite the potential branding issues with the Asheville-Buncombe name.

Corum stated that every kid should be able to play that wants to.

Terry asked about the potential negatives to switching.

Carleen stated some potential issues would be accessibility regarding cost, transitioning for long term HCPRD families, lost revenue, tax dollars going to Asheville Buncombe instead of HCPRD, and the short timeline to get this done.

Bruce stated that we want kids who are cut from school teams to be able to play through the recreation department.

Corum asked if we would be losing control of the leagues if we entered this agreement. Philip replied yes. Corum then replied, then why are we discussing this? And asked what advantages the children would benefit from it.

Stacie stated that ABYSA has paid professional staff that solely coach soccer and has a larger program to train volunteers. Stacie stated that the partnership would take some of the burden off HCPRD to allow them to devote more resources to field preparation and development.

Carleen stated that the two do not coincide and field development is not up to the staff that run this league.

Scott stated that there could be another branding issue with this as well; Henderson County tax payers could disagree with developing fields for ABYSA use.

Milton emphasized the complications involved with attaching field development and the reallocation of resources to this conversation.

Philip asked if the contract is negotiable. Stacie replied that would need to go before the ABYSA board. The possibility of having a board liaison was mentioned but ABYSA does not currently have board liaisons.

Stacie stated if the 116 Henderson County currently registered with ABYSA stay registered with ABYSA for this season they will likely have to practice and play in Buncombe County. This number is likely high because people might think HCPRD will not offer a league this fall.

Several board members voiced concerns about how to move forward with these 116 kids that are already registered.

There was a discussion about letting ABYSA run the league just for the fall. However, it could be really confusing for parents to send them to ABYSA in the fall and then run the HCPRD program again in the spring.

Several board members agreed the timeline to make this decision is very short and do not want to recommend a major change with such little time to work through potential issues.

Jeff asked if it would be possible to table this discussion and delay the decision until the Spring 2022 season. Board members agreed to continue the conversation in the future.

Carleen stated that staff will work to find an immediate fix for the Fall 2021 soccer league and will update the board. She summarized that the board members can continue this conversation so there is more time to decide how to move forward and for now both organizations can operate a program. Kids who want to play ABYSA can and kids who want to play HCPRD can play there. This close to the season it would be confusing to direct parents to ABYSA if there is a chance that HCPRD would hold a Spring 2022 league. She will continue to talk with ABYSA and HCSA about the Spring 2022 season and hopes something can be worked out with refunds for kids that registered with ABYSA that want to play in the HCPRD league this fall.

Unfinished Business

1. Greenways Update – Carleen

Conserving Carolina is closing on the Ecusta trail land purchase soon. There is a tentative ribbon cutting planned to take place when this closes, more to come on this.

2. Etowah Trail Update - Carleen

The trail is completed and a ribbon cutting ceremony is tentatively set to be hosted on August 5th.

5. Staff Updates

1. Admin Update – Megan

2. Recreation Update - Bruce

3. Departmental Update – Carleen

The Fourth of July event went really well and it was compared to the Apple Festival regarding level of attendance.

Melanie Adams has joined the team as a Recreation Programmer.

6. Member Comments

Katie mentioned she spoke to John Mitchell about presenting the Needs Assessment to the County Commissioners. It is set to be presented to the Board of Commissioners on September 15th.

7. Call to Adjourn: 1:27