

Henderson County Parks & Recreation Advisory Board Meeting

November 14th, 2023, Athletics and Activities Center

Board members in attendance: Terry Maybin, Corum Smith, Robert Smith, Katie Breckheimer, Doug Moon, Mary Davis, Scott Rhodes, Stephanie Cantwell, Ralph King, Milton Butterworth, Phillip Ellis,

Staff in attendance: Bruce Gilliam, Jason Kilgore, Bridgette Thompson, Jason Powell, Autumn Radcliff, Chris Todd, and Brooklyn Bishop

Public in Attendance: Eric Clonch, Cathy Ford, Kevin Burk, Betsy Gerwig, and Rachel Gardner

1. Call to Order: 12:10

2. Approval of Minutes: September 2023

Terry asked for a motion to approve the September minutes as written. Bob motioned to approve, Phillip seconded, and there was a unanimous approval from the board.

3. Public Input

a. Eric Clonch -ABYSA Presentation

Eric a member of the Board of Directors for ABYSA and has been a past member of the Board of Directors for Henderson County Soccer Association. He would like to recognize Phillip, Stephanie, and Bruce for the subcommittee that was formed to discuss soccer challenges in Henderson County and to take these issues to the County Commissioners meeting. ABYSA came in during 2014 around the time when the AAC facility was purchased. ABYSA offers recreational and competitive soccer programming and has taken the step to handle the academy, intermediate, and classic programs along with summer camps at the AAC and in Asheville. During the pandemic in 2020, soccer programming was cancelled, and during the fall ABYSA introduced recreation soccer programming in Buncombe County. HCPRD did not offer soccer in the spring of 2021 either, which allowed ABYSA to have the opportunity to offer soccer in Henderson County. The current

numbers for kids registered are as follows; 573 with a Hendersonville address, 474 with a Fletcher address (needs to be narrowed down to determine the county), 178 from Mills River, 46 from Flat Rock, 36 from Horse Shoe, 26 from East Flat Rock, 20 from Etowah, 17 from Zirconia, 12 from Saluda (possibly Polk or Henderson county), 5 from Laurel Park, 3 from Dana, 2 from Edneyville, and 2 from Gerton. Bruce has addressed that the Jackson Park fields are in rough shape, and the Town of Mills River has the same issue with their own fields. Eric has come today to encourage the board to advocate for increased field space for soccer programming in this county sooner rather than later.

Phillip asked for the bottom-line number for the kids registered with ABYSA and HFC for the fall season. Eric informed the board this was a massive number but that it also included summer camp registration and there could be some kids included in the count for Henderson County that are from outside counties. Phillip asked Bruce for the same information based on HCPRD programs. Bruce responded that we are expecting around 50 teams this spring and we had 48 teams this past season. HCPRD basketball numbers are exceeding 750 registrants and soccer is continuing to increase as well. In fall of 2022, there were 480 including sprouts soccer registered, and this fall season we had 600 registrants for soccer. Bruce addressed that we have had to add fields in the green space at Jackson Park which has cut down on sideline space. We have struggled to get referees since the parents are so close to the games and often argue with the referees.

The biggest challenge we will face this spring is the state of the Jackson Park fields. Jason spoke on how when you have to use the space so often, it takes away the opportunity to rotate fields. Maintenance tries to resod the area, but due to no rain and the heat, the grass has not been able to repair. This spring we will have to change some playing locations to give the field a break and hopefully with some rain we can have growth in some dirt patches. Games will still be held in Jackson Park. Phillip brought up how this has been a new issue in the last 5 years due to dry conditions and asked Jason if there were other areas in

Jackson Park that could be used for fields. Jason has looked but they would not be a good fit for soccer without doing a good deal of top dressing to the area. Bruce mentioned that we allow ABYSA to use our AAC turf field for their programs, but we may have to use the field some just to accommodate the size of our own program this spring season.

Katie mentioned that Jason has been a great authority with this turf and grass situation, and we are grateful to have him working with us. Katie also spoke about how Bruce had mentioned to her about the parent issues on the sidelines and she is wondering if there is a code of conduct for behavior for spectators. Jason Powell has done a great job of keeping contact with coaches and parents, and parents are required to sign a parent manual at registration to acknowledge behavioral standards. The board all agreed that there is not much that can be done with this issue besides reprimanding them at the games.

Stephanie asked what progress has been made towards getting a soccer complex. Chris Todd stated that finding land that is both affordable and buildable for this type of project is challenging in the county. The common cost for land has been six figure numbers. The board is working diligently with the county managers office with different groups and relators but have had no success yet. The board has set funds aside for this project, but the goal is to not spend too much on land so there will be enough funding for the rest of the project. Eric mentioned that the Town of Mills River just purchased 70 acres of land and this space would accommodate the project well. However, this land is owned by Mills River and Eric attended a council meeting where they discussed possible uses for the land, and it seems that soccer is not a priority for that community. Eric has suggested that he thinks the best route to take might be looking into getting 25 acres from Mills River for this project.

Chris mentioned that at this point we will have to give up something to find the land possible. This project has been a daily discussion. Milton mentioned that it is more difficult for local governments to work together than it may seem and asked if there is any path forward with

Mills River and if soccer has even come up with their town council as a possibility. Chris said they have spoke with the other municipalities including Mills River. They are in the process of doing a PARTF Grant for this land and when they performed a public input survey, soccer ranked #9. Chris has spoke with them about this, but it is not a priority for their citizens. Mary asked if there has been input from those who might be selling in the future. Chris stated they have approached landowners for land that is both actively on and off the market both directly and indirectly. Some owners have gone into the process, but it has not been smart financial options. Chris asked that if you hear of any land opportunities to let him know.

Katie asked if we had thought about capping the number of teams or players for our soccer programs. Chris stated that our goal is to never cap a program but rather to make it work with the resources available. Stephanie mentioned that she left North Carolina originally because there was no programming for kids and now that she has returned there are options which is so important for her family. The main goal is for kids to be able to play but it is becoming a challenge.

b. Kathy and Kevin – Birding

Kathy and Kevin own Carolina Nature Tours who do primarily bird watching and botany day trips around the area. Kevin has been involved in bird and nature travel for 20 years and formally worked for a larger company in Texas where he led tours all around the world. Henderson County is a great place for nature travel and Kevin has been bringing people from all over the world to do birding during peak migration times. Kevin has personally seen 260 species of bird in this county, and this is the best area in Western NC for birding. Nature fragmentation has the biggest effect on bird populations. The groups that he is bringing for these trips are generally wealthy and like to spend money locally with small businesses. Jackson Park is the best place to go birding in the state during the fall, and even the next 3 states. They host an event in October every year in Jackson Park which has attracted 110 people at

once in the past. In September – October, Kevin would estimate there are 25 to 50 people using Jackson Park for birding a day.

The baseball fields in the back of the park have contributed for one species to leave the park and additions can cause species to leave. Kevin is here to advocate for nature travel in our parks and to make their presence known to the board. Phillip asked if using the grass area at the entrance of the park by 4th Ave would affect birding. Kevin stated that unless trees were removed, no habitats would be affected. Katie mentioned that she invited Kevin and Kathy to this meeting to discuss the signage for the parks and to highlight the importance of signage for birding. Kathy added that signage would be a great addition especially for the visitors who come to the park who are not familiar with the area. Kathy also mentioned that making the paved trail wheelchair accessible would also be a great improvement. Katie wanted to mention the key point of this discussion is how important Jackson Park is to birding.

4. New Business

a. Grant Update Jackson Park – Betsy

Edneyville – They received 3 qualifying bids for contractors and Baker Grading and Landscaping had the lowest bid. Hopefully, the Board of Commissioners will approve them for the project tomorrow. They were able to get additional funding from the landowner participating with the project, so the project is fully covered with the possibility of having extra to do additional work that was not planned. A preconstruction meeting will be held prior to construction. The construction schedule will be posted at the park for the public. The path to the low slope will be closed temporarily. The lower area will be closed until the work is completed and vegetation is able to regrow. The contractor will compact the path at the top of the bank when this is completed.

Doug asked where the construction will be exactly in Edneyville. Betsy stated that it will be the entire length of the park, the Pressley project which adds about 400 ft and connects to a previously restored section, and additional land owned by the Pressley's on the other side will be

restored as well. The stream bed will stay the same on other properties, just the park side will be impacted. Doug also asked if the walking path will be restored as well, and Betsy confirmed that it is not part of the project. This will be a discussion when the project is done. Milton asked if part of the project was to hinder further erosion on the walking path and Betsy confirmed this is correct.

Jackson Park – The RFQ for the engineering firm to do the engineering and feasibility study were posted Nov. 6th and close Friday at 3pm. Betsy will have the proposals at her office if you would like to review them. She must submit by next Wednesday for them to be on the agenda for the December 6th Commissioners meeting so the company can begin Jan. 1st. They will have a year to complete the project. Once the firm is selected, they will work with them to get updates. It has been hard to notice if the debris removal process was helpful since there has been minimal rain. Betsy is working with HCPRD to get funding to continue routine debris removal to maintain what was achieved. Betsy has spoken with other organizations, and they have noticed that regular clean-ups have made tremendous improvements in the flow of the streams throughout the year. The state budget provided \$20 million for the next two years for the STRAP program so they will apply again. They are looking at Mud Creek for the next section to clean-up.

Milton was grateful this was brought to the board as it applies to the soccer discussion as well. He also asked what the project in Jackson Park is and Betsy informed the board it is an engineering and feasibility study. Since Jackson Park has two major streams on both sides, there are questions on what should be done regarding flooding and clean-up projects in relation to recreation. This would look at also creating more habitats for the species in the area and addressing how to live with beavers since they have continued to return. This study will break down where to start and what is a priority. Bruce stated that this also will help us address as we move to a soccer complex, what to use the land in Jackson Park for. Jason mentioned that we could alleviate the issues caused upstream and the work already done has helped drastically in

the flooding for the soccer fields. There are some issues caused from beavers that we are hoping to address soon, but the debris removal was a huge help.

b. Bell Park Trail

Construction is about to begin on this trail. An overlook will be built that goes around the trail. They are hoping to connect this trail to the Saluda Grade Trail. Milton mentioned that this area was steep and asked if there will be spots for mobility access. Bruce stated this will be a single-track hiking trail that is quite steep.

c. Dana Park Grant from State

Last week, \$120k was donated to Dana Park that will hopefully be used to upgrade the Dana Community Building. Chris stated we have not received this money yet, but it has been allocated in the state budget. This will be a great addition to an outdated facility. Doug asked if the property was deeded over to the county. Bruce stated that as far as he is aware it is still with the property owner.

d. JP Maintenance Shed Completion

The new shed has been completed. This was a much-needed project and the maintenance crew is currently working to get the building ready for use. Milton asked if the shed is in the same area as the old shed. Jason informed the board it is past the old shed, in the back parking lot with fields 8 & 9 in Jackson Park.

e. Signage for Parks

Cory has been working on signage for the Jackson Park trails. Bruce and Katie walked Jackson Park to discuss what was needed and to look at the current maps and signage. Austin at the Planning department has created a new sign for us, and Cory has been working on simpler signs for around the trails. Katie thanked Jason for fixing the kiosk by the Jackson Park house, but the map inside the kiosk is very dated and needs to be replaced. Mountain True is willing to put in the time but does not have the resources for quality signs. Katie mentioned that

there was an internal conversation about overall signage and how the best option might be to have all signage matching the upcoming Ecusta Trail. Things could shift in Jackson Park, so adding expensive signage right away may not be the best idea but rather temporary signage that could be replaced. Cory and Austin are working to get signage done soon.

Katie thought one reason signage was not done yet was because the funding did not get approval from the Commissioners this year and that there was a change issue as well. Bruce stated that there shouldn't be changes but when signage was submitted in the budget, it was for all parks and not just Jackson Park, which was not approved. Cory wants to add a QR code to the signs that will lead to our website to provide further information about the trails and other facilities we offer. Mary mentioned that the city might like the connecting greenway signs to match as well.

Katie brought up how the kiosk for the disc golf course also needs work. Cory has received a copy of the disc golf course and is in the process of getting that replaced and posted on our website. Katie said it is a testament to how important the signs are for the trails that the birding group has shown up today and she would like this to be in the budget conversation.

Bruce mentioned that Cory and Milton have discussed using Track Trails for our parks. Milton discussed that Track Trails was started by the Parkway Foundation as an interactive way to get families outside that connects different trails to others in the area. They can get customized brochures for their park. Carl Sandburg Home was the first in the County to add Track Trails, followed by Fletcher with the Bill Moore Park. Through the Healthy People, Healthy Carolinas Grant that Milton has managed, they implemented two more Track Trails in Mills River Park and Flat Rock Park. They have discussed that Jackson Park would be a great candidate but getting paths ADA compliant would be an important part of a project like this. Schools often go to parks during the school

year, and this would be a great outreach to encourage participation in the parks with kids and families.

Katie mentioned how kids coming in from the Greenway to the playground do not have a safe route. She thinks the best way to get them across the road, would be to add a path from the crosswalk at the house to above the tennis courts. This would require grading and there is an issue of spectator space for the tennis courts, but this would be a great option to look into. Stephanie stated that there is a great deal of kids that walk through the park without parental supervision so any added safety measures would be helpful.

5. UNFINISHED BUSINESS

a. Ecusta Trail Update – Ribbon Cutting Ceremony

The groundbreaking ceremony for the Ecusta Trail was held recently and was the biggest groundbreaking they have had. There was about 400 people in attendance. Chris thanked Bruce and Jason for all their help in preparation. There were 8 organizations present that were involved and will continue to be involved. The Emergency Management department and Rescue Squad helped provide the tent and assisted in set-up. The Veteran's Healing Farm were gracious to host the event and pushed back their own event to allow the groundbreaking to occur. You can visit the county communications website to see the video Mike Morgan created and the WLOS clip about the event.

A detailed update was given to the RTAC last week. The Board of Transportation had to move their meeting up to tomorrow which will give the green light for the construction. They are expecting this to not be completed until the end of calendar year 2024. The engineering for the next section should hopefully be starting around the end of January and will be around an 18-month process. Chris stated that something unique is that the federal grants for the trail have helped to allow the trail to likely be completed fully in the next 3 to 5 years. There is a chance that Brevard and Henderson County could have one construction contract for the remainder of the trail. Phillip asked Autumn what the end point for the phases. Autumn stated the first phase ends at the

cross over of 64 in Horse Shoe near Battle Creek Rd. This project has 13 separate funding sources now with 8 different sets of rules to follow.

b. Tuxedo Park – Ribbon Cutting Sport Court Ceremony

We recently had a ribbon cutting at the sport court in Tuxedo. The court and park are getting a great deal of use. Bruce recognized the work Terry has done for the park and area.

c. Etowah – PARTF Grant

We are currently still gathering information and quotes for equipment. Progress is getting ready to begin but plans are still being finished.

d. East Flat Rock Park – Disc Golf and Walking Trail Update

We are getting quotes for the walking trail and disc golf course to take to the Commissioners in the next few meetings. Milton mentioned to some disc golf friends, and they have now visited the park and are very excited about the upcoming addition of the course. Phillip asked if there is a target date for this project. Jason stated we first need to acquire the funding to start the project. This will be an affordable project that will gather a great deal of use. If Jason had an estimate, he would hope for late spring, early summer for this to be done.

Ralph asked what the path will be made of, and Jason stated this will be a stone dust trail since it will work with the environment and allow for easy maintenance. Ralph also asked if the trail would impact the trees and Jason confirmed they will not be affected. This is currently slated for 84 inches which would be mostly ADA accessible. Ralph asked if the road behind the park would become an entrance and Jason stated that would only be for maintenance if needed but not for public use. This project will not add any additional parking. This was outside of our budget so any funding will have to come from the Commissioners. Ralph asked how many miles of walking trails we have in the county and Jason will compile a list to get that number.

e. Jackson Park Tennis Courts Update

The top courts have been resurfaced and look great. We have chosen a lighter green and grey color scheme that will help with the heat. Milton asked if this project was in the budget. Bruce confirmed this was budgeted along with the replacement of the lower courts. That will start around April and be completed around June since this will be a complete replacement including the fencing.

6. STAFF UPDATES AND EVENTS

Bruce showed the board a video Bridgette compiled for Treat Street. This event was a huge success with a great turnout. We had record numbers of participation from vendors this year. We were able to add another block to the event for contributors for trick-or-treating. This event would not have been the success it was without the help from contributors and other partner groups. The City of Hendersonville hosted the costume contest and assisted with the street closure. Biltmore Church provided two blocks of inflatables and activities for the fun zone. The Sheriff's Office and HPD worked together to provide coverage, along with the Henderson County Rescue Squad and Hendersonville Fire Department for medical stand-by. Ingles generously donated candy to the downtown merchants who all participated to provide trick-or-treating with the 55 contributors. HCPRD staff was great for helping put this event on and our maintenance department was a huge help in both the set-up and clean-up of the event.

We are so grateful for the growth of this event and the support it has received from the community. Phillip stated that the video did a great job of showing the scale of the crowd at this event and asked if this crowd was mostly Henderson County kids. We are unsure if the crowd is locals only, but it could be visitors given the crowd. Mary said her grandkids come to Treat Street from the other side of Asheville due to how popular the event is. The county managers office also did a great job with the candy drop from the courthouse.

All programs are continuing to grow. We have new senior programs offered and we are starting to plan for our youth summer camps. Jason Powell is preparing for our next soccer season to begin. Bruce is grateful for how hard

the HCPRD staff works especially with how busy we have been. The Commissioners have been very gracious in allowing us to complete so many projects.

We will not be meeting in December so the next meeting will be in January. Bruce has discussed with Chris and would like to propose to the board that we extend meetings to bimonthly rather than monthly in the future. Katie and Milton both agree this would be a good route to take even if we must extend meeting times when we do meet. Terry asked for a motion to move meetings to every other month on the second Tuesday. Bob motioned, Stephanie seconded, and the bylaws will be checked to fully approve.

7. MEMBER COMMENTS

Milton mentioned that today is the last day to complete the City of Hendersonville Comprehensive Plan survey. This survey is a great place to mention a soccer complex and they provide a link to a parks survey as well.

Kaite asked for approval to start a sub-committee to advocate for a swimming complex. Bruce has approved, Cory has joined the discussion, and Mary would like to join the committee. Phillip agreed that this would be a good idea and Brooklyn will check the bylaws to see if a vote is required to approve.

Terry was grateful to see such a full agenda and is grateful to hear all the input from outside groups to help identify what is important to the community.

8. ADJOURN: 1:50pm

Next Meeting: January 9th, 2024 – AAC Classroom