

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

**February 13<sup>th</sup>, 2024, Athletics and Activities Center**

**Board members in attendance:** Jeff Donaldson, Terry Maybin, Bob Smith, Corum Smith, Katie Breckheimer, Doug Moon, Mary Davis, Stephanie Cantwell, Ralph King, Phillip Ellis, Tricia King, and Milton Butterworth

**Staff in attendance:** Bruce Gilliam, Jason Kilgore, Cory Blackwell, and Brooklyn Bishop

**Public in Attendance:** Gayle Merrell and Lynn Gilpin

**1. Call to Order:** 12:02

**2. Approval of Minutes:** January 2024

Jeff asked for a motion to approve the January minutes as written. Corum motioned to approve, Bob seconded, and there was a unanimous approval from the board.

**3. Public Input**

**a. Gayle Merrell – East Flat Rock Park**

Gayle was the former owner of the recent land acquisition purchased by the county at East Flat Rock Park. She presented the board with a plan of how she would like this land to be utilized. Gayle suggested that the new land be used to build soccer fields and presented how she thinks this could be a possibility. She provided the board with extensive information on how she believes this could be completed along with history of the land itself. Stephanie suggested that this information might be best presented in written form that could be sent to the board.

The board was grateful for the information Gayle prepared and presented. After discussing the presented material, the board concluded that this area would not be best utilized by installing soccer fields and feels the walking trail and disc golf course is the best option. Adding soccer fields would require extensive work and change of the layout of the natural landscape of the land. This area would not be able to

accommodate enough fields for what the county needs. The board agreed installing a walking path and disc golf course would encourage positive use to the park and would be a quick installation process.

**b. Lynn Gilpin – Tennis Association**

Lynn is the president of the Community Tennis Association in Henderson County, a nonprofit, volunteer base organization supporting programs that grow the game of tennis for people of all ages. Lynn would like to thank the board for their support in the programs that the CTA has been running through the county parks. She has been a resident of Henderson County for 30 years and raised her children locally. She wanted to second Mrs. Merrell's comments and highlight how she also had to seek recreation soccer in Asheville for her kids and respects her passion on this issue. Lynn was a founding member and former principal of Veritas and was an educator for 40 years. Once she retired, she was able to become involved with the CTA. The CTA is involved in several youth and adult tennis programs throughout the county with Parks and Recreation, Henderson County Schools, other organizations, and their own programs. Lynn currently works at Hillandale Elementary School as a tutor and has seen how bare the East Flat Rock area is compared to the rest of the county.

The CTA is responsible for donating \$5500 in tennis scholarships to each Henderson County high school and \$1000 to Polk County schools. They raise most of their funding at their annual Apple Tennis Tournament, where they raise around \$10,000 to put back into local tennis programs. The sport of tennis is growing, and Henderson County does not have the courts to accommodate. There are 8 courts in Jackson Park, and we will not be able to use the lower 4 this spring due to renovations. These courts must be shared between all CTA programs, East Henderson High School, and Hendersonville High School, the 5-time state champions. These schools have been traveling to Brevard to practice due to the lack of space. Mills River has courts, but they cannot be reserved which can't work for their programs.

There is land behind Hillandale Elementary School that Lynn, Bruce, and others went to look at. Hillandale has very little for the students to do. This is a very low-income school with 70% of its students being below the poverty level. The CTA has contacted National, Southern and State CTA and they are willing to help fund and build courts. Land would need to be identified and she has spoken with the County Commissioners about this possibility. She is working on assistance to find the land and writing grants for this project. The CTA groups would be willing to bring in specialist to help build these courts as well. There is a great need for more amenities in the east side of town.

#### **4. New Business**

##### **a. Vote on Updated By-Laws – Brooklyn and Bruce**

Brooklyn provided a copy of the updated by-laws draft for the board to review and vote on. Phillip asked how special meetings would be called and Bruce stated that any special meetings would be sent in an email or called for those who need it. Jeff asked for a motion to approve. Terry motioned to approve, Bob seconded and there was a unanimous approval from the board.

##### **b. JP Tennis Court Update - Bruce**

This spring will be crowded on our Jackson Park courts with the CTA, East High, and Hendersonville High sharing. The lower 4 courts will be shut down on March 1<sup>st</sup> to be redone and will hopefully be completed by June. The lower courts have major cracks and have become a safety hazard. Tricia asked when this will be completed, and Bruce stated we are hoping for the end of May, but rain could push this date back into June. Doug asked if we were taking the courts down to the subsurface and Bruce confirmed. Corum stated that we should consider a tennis complex given the need in the county.

##### **c. Ecusta Trail Update – Autumn**

Construction is in progress. Marcus Jones met with all property owners who were worried about the tree removal along the trail. He assured them this would not be all the trees but only the ones that impact

safety. There is a lawsuit in progress with the Federal Government that many have signed up for to check if all property owners have been compensated. The RTAC meets tomorrow at 10am and Marcus will give a construction update. Everything is on schedule, and they still hope to be completed with the first 6 miles by the end of the year. The DOT has cleared to go ahead with the scoping process for the design of the next section. A trail partners program has been started by the county which hosted a meeting in the fall and hopes to host another coming up. This is open to everyone but mostly aimed towards businesses and homeowners along the trail to help partner with them to help accommodate the trail.

Jeff asked if there will be funding available for future maintenance on the trail and mentioned the Swamp Rabbit has started to overgrow. Autumn stated there will be an MOU in place with all jurisdictions and they are working to make estimates of what maintenance will cost. They will also rely on funds set aside and donated to assist maintenance. Tricia mentioned the clearing that happened in front of the synagogue and how some residents were surprised at the amount cleared in that area. Autumn said that was a lesson learned situation as there was not much done to reach out to property owners in the areas to inform them of the property lines, but the area was surveyed and staked. Katie mentioned the Friends group has a great newsletter to keep people informed about the trail. Autumn stated the contractors have had good feedback while on the trail with people inquiring about the project.

**d. Youth Sports Update – Bruce**

Our youth soccer program this season will have 61 teams with over 700 kids registered. We will be using the Jackson Park fields for games on Saturday and will host the sprouts program at Hendersonville High School. Our coaches meeting will be next week, and we will allow them to choose what night to practice. Tuesday and Friday nights we will have the school fields to practice on, but we are unsure if every team can practice then so we will also use other fields at our parks. ABYSA has been using some of these fields as well and Bruce is working with them

to develop a schedule to share these fields. Since our registration numbers have gone up, we will switch to 7v7 so every child can play for half a game. Bruce appreciates Gayle's research and information about East Flat Rock Park, but he doesn't believe the area would accommodate the space we need.

All our youth sports are growing, including basketball which had over 800 registrants. We have had to hire additional staff for basketball, 20 referees for soccer and more needed, and will need to hire a minimum of 4 supervisors to cover the high schools for youth practice. This season's schedule will be a lot to manage since we need to rest the Jackson Park fields during the week. We also have Mountain Community, Immaculata, and a homeschool who play games at Jackson Park, but we are unsure where to place them. Jeff asked if we are communicating this to the commissioners and Bruce confirmed that he relays this information to them and his bosses to let them know this is much more growth than we planned for which turns into more money going out. Bruce believes it is worthwhile to keep the program growing and Milton agreed and stated this is a great problem to have and a testament to the hard work put in.

Terry asked if the commissioners were aware of Gayle's presentation and what our next steps would be since we have already given the letter regarding the walking trail and disc golf course to them. Bruce confirmed the commissioners have voted to put \$40k to the walking trail and disc golf course. Tricia stated she did a study last year on the land to set out 3 fields and said it was far too tight and didn't allow for proper drainage. She feels the plan we have now would be best to fit the natural layout of the land without removal of the current landscape. Gayle contacted Bruce and Jason after she sold the land to have them remove the shrubs that were growing into fences and powerlines. Bruce listened to her ideas and the board discussed the options for the land. Milton mentioned how the board agreed this land was not big enough for the complex we need. Gayle reached back out to Bruce later about her ideas again and informed her to speak with the county managers.

The land was then voted on for approval of the walking trail and disc golf course. Bruce has already proposed in next year's budget to redo the basketball court at East Flat Rock Park. Phillip mentioned that Chris Todd is working hard in the background to complete a large soccer complex so building smaller fields at the same time is not the best move. Stephanie mentioned she wants the land to be used. Tricia mentioned families with young children are having a hard time in the area since there are not spaces to recreate. Tricia spoke with Lynn before she left today and Lynn wanted the board to know that the CTA would not be where it is today with the help of Bruce and the support of Parks and Recreation.

Ralph asked if we could ask the community what they would like to have. Terry mentioned we did a survey online in 2019 and there wasn't much participation. Ralph thinks we should split up a survey by each community. He believes that we should make soccer a priority over trails to focus on the younger generations in the county. Bruce reiterated Phillip's statements that the county is actively looking for the property for the soccer complex to make this happen. Jason said logistically, the land doesn't work to add fields and would be a major cost. We want to add usage to the park and passive recreation is the best way to get use to the park quickly and for low cost with an amenity that would be frequently used. We want to update and care for East Flat Rock, but soccer fields are not the best option. Terry mentioned if that land had been an option for a soccer complex, we would have used it. Milton thinks the board would like regular updates on the complex like we receive for the Ecusta Trail so we are in the loop and able to relay accurate information to the community. Doug mentioned that since we have received a significant amount for this project, we want to make sure we tread lightly so this isn't taken away. Katie also would like to ask commissioners for regular updates. Autumn mentioned it could be possible, but we may not get much information since real estate processes need to be kept private.

Ralph said anything there will please him, but he wants to help the at-risk kids in the East Flat Rock area. That is a very poor area of the county so any activity will be helpful for the community. Stephanie mentioned how different the schools are in the area due to the poverty level. Milton wants to pay respect to Gayle and the work she put into the ideas she brought to us and the initiative to come and speak at this meeting. Bruce appreciates her passion and care for the area. Cory mentioned she probably doesn't know the positive impact that a disc golf could have on the park. Phillip asked if we program on the East Flat Rock soccer field. Bruce stated we will use it for some practices, and we also have other people who often rent the field for use.

## **5. UNFINISHED BUSINESS**

### **a. Bell Park Trail Update – Jason**

This is a new park that is on the left after the Green River Bridge. Conserving Carolina purchased this property and donated it to the county. They have just built a boardwalk and will be meeting with the contractor this week about starting the trail. Milton said this looks great and Cory mentioned there is a waterfall in the area. They are building the parking area and Jason's crew is building a kiosk and installing benches. Phillip asked when this will be opening, and Jason stated there is no date yet, but the money is allocated. The boardwalk area will be opening soon, but the trail has not been built yet.

### **b. Dana Park Grant from State Update – Jason**

A pre-bid meeting was just held for the renovations and the bid openings will be in two weeks. This will be a complete interior renovation and will be closed for around a month and a half. We will be able to renovate the kitchen, ceiling, restrooms, and flooring.

### **c. Etowah PARTF Update – Jason**

Jason has received 90% of the quotes back for playground and exercise equipment, basketball courts, and pickleball courts. He is still waiting on

a few such as concrete work but groundbreaking will begin soon. Terry asked how much funding was received for this and Jason stated we got \$580k for these updates.

**d. Swim Meeting Sub Committee – Katie Breckheimer**

Katie mentioned in the 2019 Needs Assessment, a pool was in the top results. They have met once and will meet again tomorrow. We have 2 pools in the county that are very dated. Patton Pool is only open 3 months a year and was opened in 1978. They have been looking at pools in surrounding areas for examples. Katie understands the barriers for a project like this and will address these struggles. The committee has been looking into historical aspects and discovered the New Zealand swim team stayed in Hendersonville in 1995 to use Patton Pool during the Atlanta Olympics. Katie will share the minutes with the board and share at each meeting. Autumn mentioned the Lila Patterson Center also has a pool. Mary mentioned the city will be putting funding into Patton Pool but will not be able to make major updates. They discovered only 2 of the county schools have swim teams. Tricia asked if the TC Robertson pool is public or private and Mary stated it was built as a replacement by Buncombe County. Tricia stated when she thought about a large complex, she had a pool in mind as well. Mary would love to see a rec complex, and pool built in the future. Milton asked if the pool is involved in the updates coming to the YMCA and Mary stated they are considering a pool. Doug asked if the city is still looking into a splash pad and Mary thinks it will be going where the kiddy pool was. Katie stated they learned that Patton does not have the staff to accommodate their facility.

**6. STAFF UPDATES AND EVENTS**

Cory presented the completed the Jackson Park map to the board. Cory has been working with different biking groups in the county and they are on board to help restore the bike park. Bruce will be adding this to the capital requests. Phillip and Tricia mentioned how exciting this would be. Cory will be gearing this renovation toward strider bikes up to teens. Senior Games will begin soon,



and we are looking for sponsors. Lynn is hosting free senior programs 3 days a week currently. Upward Dental were the champions for our Winter Adult Basketball League. The Daddy Daughter/Family Dance was a huge success with all three sessions with full waitlist and Cory presented a video to the board. We had staff and volunteers working including East Henderson High School cheerleaders. Lindsay is hosting plenty of youth programs at the Edneyville Community Center, she just hosted a Dolly and Me Tea Party. Summer camp registration will open on March 1<sup>st</sup> along with Senior Games registration. We will start mobile vending back in our parks in March and are looking for new vendors. Bridgette has Movies in the Park planned for this summer and will be hosting the Easter Egg Hunt on March 23<sup>rd</sup> in Jackson Park. Cory will be hosting even more hikes this year and has been receiving more participation. Bruce would like to thank maintenance and our staff for all they do.

## **7. MEMBER COMMENTS**

Corum asked with how we select which projects to start first. Bruce stated this is a difficult question. Often, we receive funding or other starts to a project that seem to spark a start.

## **8. ADJOURN: 1:50**

Next Meeting: March 12<sup>th</sup>, 2024 – AAC Classroom