

Orange County
**** VIRTUAL MEETING****
Parks and Recreation Council

April 7, 2021

Members present: John Greeson, Cecily Kritzy, Mikki Fleming, Xiong Zhao, Gina Reyman, Tim Tippin, Andrew Landstrom
Chapel Hill Parks and Greenway Commission liaison: Alice Armstrong

Absent: Haywood Rhodes, Bob Smith

Staff: Dave Stancil, Marabeth Carr, Chris Hirni, Beth Young

Vice-Chair John Greeson called meeting to order and turned it over to Dave Stancil due to technical difficulties with the GotoMeeting link. Stancil stated that the March meeting notes will be ready for the May meeting.

Report of the Chair – Stancil noted that he had learned that the BOCC will need to formally move Bob Smith from At-Large position to Little River Township position as previously proposed. This would be done with the new appointment recommendation of Christopher Colvin. There are no new applications for the vacancies. No applicants from Cedar Grove Township exist, Stancil noted that the PRC may be able to recommend another applicant for that position, an action that the BOCC has taken themselves in the past. Stancil added that he had sent emails to the two applicants who had older applications, to see if they were still interested, as directed by the Council in March. Gina Reyman made a motion to appoint Greg Hughes to the At Large position. Andrew Landstrom seconded. Motion passed. Stancil noted that he was unable to find the replies to the interest email that was sent, but would send the Council an email with this information once he found it. Mr. Hughes may be one of those who were inquired about.

New Business – Blackwood Farm Park Update: Marabeth Carr, DEAPR's Landscape Architect and project manager reported that the project will be going out for bid in the next week or so. Hopefully the bid will go to the BOCC in June with construction to begin in July. The site plan was reviewed with PRC, noting that it had been seen before during last winter and was largely the same. Reyman asked about a current trail being rerouted due to construction and Carr responded that it will be reconfigured. Tim Tippin asked about the disc golf course. Carr stated that is not in this contract and designer and civil engineer on the project have not done a disc golf course. Stancil added that this part of the project would be pursued under a separate arrangement. Xilong Zhao asked about parking capacity for visitors. Carr went over the parking areas and overflow parking areas which can accommodate several hundred cars. Stancil noted that for large events park and ride options will be used. Zhao also asked about the planting plans. Carr stated there is a required landscape plan with native plants included.

Old Business: Mountains to Sea Trail (MST) Update – Chris Hirni, DEAPR's Natural Resource Manager reported on the updates to the trail. Currently the State and staff are working to make the Occoneechee Mountain State Natural Area connection to Seven

Mile Creek (county owned). The State property office worked with the Eno River Association to purchase another section of property just west of Occoneechee Mountain, getting the trail closer to Dimmock's Mill Road. The DEAPR office is working with Eno River Association on a couple of additional promising possible connections that may occur in the next one to two years. The county received guaranteed grant funding from the State Land and Water Trust Fund for an acquisition that will expand the Seven Mile Creek Natural Area significantly. The county also received guaranteed grant funding through the same agency for a conservation easement directly adjacent to Seven Mile Creek Natural Area on the Moorefields property. This is a conservation easement and hopefully also allow for a trail easement. Alice Armstrong asked if the MST will go to Chapel Hill? Stancil replied that it will not, that the MST route runs from Saxapahaw in southern Alamance County to Hillsborough and thence to Durham through Eno River State Park. However, there is another idea out there for a multimodal trail that may connect Chapel Hill, Carrboro and Hillsborough - but that is not part of the MST.

In the Cane Creek Reservoir area Hirni reported that Christina Duprez, owner of the former Inn at Bingham School, donated a trail easement that will connect the future parking area and the trailhead on NC 54 to the intersection at Mebane Oaks Road. Additionally, an easement amendment has been recorded with a separate landowner further north who wishes to donate a trail easement to the county. Several landowners in the Cane Creek Reservoir area have easements that were drafted in the late-1990's to early-2000's. Those easements do not have specific language that allows or does not allow a trail, so the issue may arise again in the future. The Friends of MST and OWASA staff are working with County staff on a potential trail segment. Staff is reviewing the memorandum of approval and conditions with OWASA from 2018. Reyman asked if the State helped with the purchase of easements or if the county did it all. Stancil stated it is a mix with the state having funded over 50% so far. Tippin asked about the blue shaded areas on the map. Stancil reported these are OWASA owned lands. Tippin asked if Stancil is still hearing of opposition from landowners to the MST in that area. Stancil stated he has not in the last couple of years. He highlighted some changes to the Caterpillar Creek arm of the lake that had been a concern and a new alternate route. This alternate route will hopefully resolve the issue for residents in that area.

Report of the Director: Stancil noted that he and Chair Haywood Rhodes will appear before the BOCC at their April 22nd meeting, where they will review the annual report and work plan.

Stancil suggested that the May PRC meeting will likely include some local folks that are interested in more pickleball courts in the county. Stancil is meeting with two groups next week about their interest. He stated the County does not have a lot of resources for new courts and the budget is already being trimmed. There is approved funding to resurface the tennis courts at Fairview – which currently has a taped pickleball court on it as a pilot project. The County is not in a position to build any new courts in the next

five years based on the Capital Investment Plan. Efland Cheeks and Cedar Grove basketball courts also have approved funding for resurfacing.

Stancil noted that based on projected budget issues the Parks division will be operating at about 60% of our normal staff for seasonal help. As such the County may be looking at a lessened level of maintenance at parks beginning in June or July. Plans are to close Blackwood Farm Park during construction, and this will save three seasonal positions, but it will still be a stretch to maintain all parks. Staff will continue to evaluate the implications of the reduction – this could mean some maintenance is only done two times a week versus three times, or ball fields at some parks are mowed once a week instead of three times per week.

Summer Camp is going to be allowed to move ahead on a very limited basis, with about 22% of normal capacity. A camp lottery is going on now. Virtual camps and other programming (limited numbers) will continue.

Finally, Stancil noted that it is possible that live (in person) meetings will resume in September. Reyman asked who is making the final decision about whether advisory boards can be in person? Stancil replied the BOCC.

Council and Committee Reports:

The Intergovernmental Parks Work Group will meet April 14th with the focus of the meeting being how the town and county departments have functioned during the pandemic. Cecily Kritz is the Council's representative on that group.

Zhao asked about community volunteers helping with park maintenance. Stancil said there are some ideas out there but nothing has been flushed out. The Department of Social Services has a list of unemployed people looking for employment - they may possibly be available and would be paid by the state. Staff is also looking to formalize a Park Steward program, and inviting volunteers to that.

Reyman asked that Stancil stress to the BOCC that parks are needed now more than ever. Stancil said we have seen record numbers at our parks during the pandemic and that the County Manager and several commissioners are aware of that.

Friends of Parks & Recreation – Reyman noted that she will continue to work to convene group. Tippin asked to be included in that group.

Alice Armstrong reported on the interest of the Town Commission to connect Chapel Hill, Carrboro, Hillsborough and Durham. Chapel Hill will extend their greenway out close to the Millhouse Road Park site and it will be up to the county to connect. Armstrong also shared concerns that have been expressed over the Greene Tract being developed and preserving green space. Stancil said conversations on the Greene Tract will continue over the next year or so according to a recent inter-local agreement.

The next meeting will be held virtually on May 5. Meeting was adjourned at 8 pm.