

Kern County Parks and Recreation Commission

Kern County Administrative Building
General Services
3rd Floor Multipurpose Room
1115 Truxtun Avenue
Bakersfield, CA 93301

Wednesday, January 25, 2017
6:30 P.M.

MINUTES

A meeting of the Kern County Parks and Recreation Commission was held on Wednesday, January 25, 2017. Chairman Faull presided.

Present: Bob Jamison, District I (Vice-Chairman); Mark Faull, District II (Chairman); Carl Park, District III; Gregory McGiffney, District IV; Manuel Barerra, District V.

Staff: Bret Haney, Division Chief, Kern County General Services Department; Suzanne Boyd, Kern County Parks and Recreation Division

Others: There were 11 other people present including a TV reporter.

NOTE: Fa, Ja, Pa, Mc and Ba are abbreviations for Commissioners Faull, Jamison, Faull, Park, McGiffney and Barerra. As an example, Fa-Ja denotes Commissioner Faull made a motion and Commissioner Jamison seconded the motion.

Meeting called to order at 6:34 p.m. Flag Salute: Chairman Faull

1. Approval of the Minutes of November 30, 2016

The minutes need a minor change on page 3, paragraph 8 should read "We have not had recreation programs since the 1970's..." rather than "... since 1970...".

The minutes also need clarification on the language on page 5, paragraphs 8 and 9. Suzanne will transcribe the area in question verbatim and e-mail to the Commissioners to better understand what was said. The new wording on this page will be postponed for approval from the Commission until next month's meeting on February 22, 2017.

Mc-Pa, all ayes. Minutes approval will be postponed until February.

2. Public Presentations

None

3. Correspondence

None

4. New Business

- a. Appoint new officers
 - Chair
 - Vice-Chair

It is the time of the year to appoint new officers. Commissioner Faull asked the Commissioners if they had any nominations for Chair.

Ja made a motion to nominate Mark Faull for Chair; Mc seconded the motion. All ayes, motion carried.

Commissioner Faull asked the Commissioners if they had any nominations for Vice-Chair.

Pa made a motion to nominate Greg McGiffney for Vice-Chair; Ba seconded the motion. All ayes, motion carried.

- b. The Commission acknowledged that Ed Waldheim received a Certificate of Recognition, for his many years of service and achievements for the Off-Highway Vehicle (OHV) community in Kern County, from the Board of Supervisors on December 13, 2016. A presentation was made to Ed at that meeting.

Bruce Miller, Friends of Jawbone and Friends of Temblors, spoke on Ed's behalf as he was unable to attend tonight's meeting. Ed Waldheim has been a champion for many years for responsible multiple use recreation. He has played an active role in many groups such as Friends of Jawbone, Friends of Temblor, Friends of El Mirage, and to a lesser extent Stewards of Sequoia, and Stewards of Sierra. He has been a trouper with endless energy. Bruce thanked the Commission for acknowledging his achievements. He also informed the Commission that Ed is listed in the American Motorcyclist Association Hall of Fame for his tireless advocacy.

Mr. Miller spoke a few minutes about volunteerism. When you get a very passionate dedicated volunteer and later they have to move on, for whatever reason, then it creates a big drop in the energy level of the group. It can be very difficult to replace that dedicated volunteer.

Commissioner Faull thanked Bruce for speaking about a few of Ed's many accomplishments. He agreed that it is difficult to replace passionate volunteers when life circumstances change for the volunteer.

Mr. Miller stated that on the other side of the coin, the Stewards of the Sequoia have grant money, tools, and volunteers available but they outpace the State or Federal agencies, as far as timing, to meet the guidelines and approval processes. Then the Stewards are left to wait before moving on to the next phase of a project, which can be frustrating.

5. Old Business

- a. Hart Park – Purpose, Scheduling and Number of Free Days. DISCUSSION, RECEIVE PUBLIC INPUT, MAKE RECOMMENDATION.

Bob Rutledge, audience member, requested that a special accommodation be granted for Isaiah Crompton, who every year takes 100+ kids to Hart Park for a free fishing day and lunch. He would like it if the adults who help to chaperone the kids can have the park fees waived on that day. The event usually takes place on one of the State free fishing days, either the first Saturday in July or the first Saturday in September. Bob believes it would be an extreme hardship for Isaiah if the adult chaperones had to pay a \$5 fee on that day. It would most likely mean that the event would have to be discontinued if they do have to pay the fee. He will check with Mr. Crompton to see if he has any flexibility on the day that he takes the children fishing.

Commissioner McGiffney said they will discuss it further when the Commission makes its recommendations for the free days at Hart Park.

Audience member, Glenn Gregory from the Southern Sierra Hiking Club stated that his club uses the hiking trails on the hills south of Hart Park for conditioning hikes approximately three times per week. Most of the members park by the Sheriff's shooting range parking lot. He asked if this area would be in the boundaries of the proposed fees for Hart Park? Many of their members are not aware of the fee proposal. He also asked about the other people who visit those hills, such as mountain bikers, runners, etc. He said the boundaries are not well defined. There is a large unpaved dirt area by the Sheriff's shooting range. Mr. Gregory would like to see the shooting range area excluded from the fee boundary area of the park.

Division Chief, Bret Haney stated that signage will be put up to let people know where they can park.

Audience member, Kathleen Chambers, who used to work for the Los Angeles County Parks & Recreation Department and for North of the River Recreation & Park District, has lived in Kern County since 1975. She hopes that there will be more input allowed. She has been amazed at the number of people and groups that utilize our free parks.

Commissioner Faull stated that we all want the park to succeed and that the County tried to get the word out on the proposed fees as much as possible. We are not happy about the proposed fees, but feel they are necessary due to the degradation of the park and the serious budget cuts to the County departments. The revenue generated would only be used for Hart Park. The County is projecting additional cuts over the next three years.

Ms. Chambers stated that there are tremendous resources in this community and that the public wants to help.

Commissioner Faull encouraged the audience members to attend the Board of Supervisors meeting on February 7th at the 2:00 p.m. session. Some decisions may be made regarding the proposed fees at Hart Park at that time. If anyone has any alternative solutions to the fees, it would be great to bring to them meeting.

Marion Vargas, audience member, stated that the first she heard of this issue was by reading an editorial in the Bakersfield Californian. Then she went to the last Board of Supervisors meeting and afterward looked on the County Parks department website to find out about tonight's Commission meeting. The agenda was available on the website but she could not find any of the prior Commission minutes. She contacted the Board of Supervisors office to get copies of the past minutes e-mailed to her, which they did. When she read the past

minutes from the last 18 months she did not see much about what has been done to reach out to the public for input to the fee issue. This is her first time attending a Commission meeting.

Ms. Vargas said she understands that Hart Park may not be eligible for grants, but asked if we can partner with some businesses or special interest groups. She believes there is much more potential in the community. She asked if anyone has gone out to the park and surveyed people? She would like to see more transparency and accountability with this issue and more community outreach. She thanked the Commission for hearing her concerns.

Commissioner Faull answered that we have sent out press releases to all of the local TV stations, newspapers, and radio stations, including the Spanish media outlets. However, it is up to the media outlet to decide what will be publicized. He agrees that more can always be done. We do have limitations with our shrunken agency and he understands her concerns as he has also been on both sides of the issues. Commissioner Faull has been involved with many related non-profit organizations and has been a part of the fund raising committees.

Jeff Moffit, audience member, current CSUB professor and member of the Cat People. He is happy that there are a group of people willing to come up with alternative ideas for funding Hart Park. He asked if the BOS will make a decision regarding the fees on February 7th?

Commissioner Faull stated that the Commission will be presenting their recommendations regarding free days on Tuesday, February 7th, to the Board of Supervisors.

Commissioner McGiffney stated that Hart Park needs capital improvements to keep the park open and attractive to people. We have looked at everything in our power. The County budget is a mess. We need working capital to fix these things. Things are falling apart. The Board of Supervisors could decide to allocate funds for Hart Park. We are trying to find the easiest and the best way to accomplish that. We have been in the news many times.

Mr. Haney asked everyone to please recognize that the proposed fees will not fill the budget hole. It costs approximately \$750,000 annually to maintain Hart Park. He asked that no one should let the Board of Supervisors decision deter them.

Commissioner Barrera stated that it is the responsibility of the Board of Supervisors to find resolutions to the many issues at hand. We welcome any and all ideas.

Commissioner Faull mentioned that we brought up the idea of a healthy Kern partnership in the past and other community connections.

Commissioner McGiffney recommended to the audience that you come to the Board of Supervisor meeting with alternative solutions to the fees and a timeline to implement any ideas you have for Hart Park. It is not enough to just tell them that you are opposed to the fees without any idea for a viable solution.

Mr. Haney mentioned that since the Parks Department merged with General Services that they have been looking at all kinds of different ideas for Hart Park. The County wants to make the Park an enjoyable place for everyone. If different groups can champion ideas and donations that would be great.

Mr. Moffit mentioned that utilizing and promoting Hart Park for healthy exercise would bring about the best opportunities to partner with the community. He is worried about the people who will not be able to go to Hart Park because they can't afford the fees.

Commissioner Park emphasized that if the fees are put into place, that bicyclists, hikers, runners, etc. will not be charged for traveling through the park. Only parked vehicles will be charged. It will be illegal to park outside of the park.

Mr. Gregory stated that whatever is decided has to be easy and doable.

Commissioner Jamison reminded everyone that the original recommendation has already gone to the Board of Supervisors. They are looking for alternatives. We discussed a wide number of things to help resolve the issue. Because it is a regional park, it cannot receive grants for maintenance. If anyone wants to know what was discussed at previous BOS meetings, the minutes and the videos are all on the County website for past meetings. He encouraged everyone to go to the BOS meetings. What they would like to hear about are alternative ideas to fees.

Mr. Haney stated that if the BOS passes the fees, the money will only be used for Hart Park maintenance and improvements. It could be a temporary fee until there is enough money in the fund to do the repairs and improvements needed.

Commissioner Faull mentioned that there are State bond acts that give a pool of money to Kern County. However, the bonds for parks did not pass with the voters in 2014 or 2016.

Commissioner Barrera said he is glad to see new faces at tonight's meeting. He hopes to see everyone at the next BOS meeting. It is incumbent upon the Commission to pass something to move this issue along for change. If we don't do that, then we are not doing our job. He is glad this is finally getting the attention of the media so that Hart Park will get the care and funding that it deserves. We really need the public to participate.

Bill Cooper, from the Kern River Parkway Foundation, asked the Commissioners to report to the Board of Supervisors the number of people here tonight. He believes it will create a certain dynamic with them.

Commissioner McGiffney mentioned that not only have the County departments been affected by the oil slump and lower property tax revenue, but it has greatly impacted many local businesses as well. He said we need to ask the BOS the hard questions about making parks a priority. Issues have to be brought up to the BOS or it won't be addressed. If they don't hear from the public on certain issues, then they will assign different priorities to items then what you may want to see.

Commissioner Faull said the BOS is forced to prioritize in this very difficult budget situation. But you can let the BOS know what your priorities are within the County.

Division Chief Haney said a donation fund has been established in the past for parks.

Audience member, Carol Lair asked about a foundation being set up for the park. The Commissioners replied that the people in the community would have to establish a foundation for the park. The Commission is not empowered to establish foundations or friends' groups.

But members of the community do have that power.

Commissioner Faull said we should let this be a new beginning to the next chapter for Hart Park.

Mr. Cooper said that the City has a parkway foundation but that the County has never really developed a parkway concept. They have a river corridor. If the City and County could come up with something, at least along the river, that would be great. It is really tough when you don't have a paid staff and you have to rely on volunteers. The Kern River Parkway Foundation has been active since 1984.

Commissioner Faull mentioned that State parks funding has also been cut dramatically over the past 35 years. They have gone more toward user fees. This has gone before the State Legislature many times in the past to look for solutions.

Mr. Haney stated it is the intent of General Services to go back to the Board of Supervisors with the same four free days originally recommended unless the Commission has additional recommendations for free days.

Commissioner Park commented that if we consider 12 free days, falling on major holidays, then this could all be a moot point and not worth all the consternation as we would not raise much money with the fees.

Commissioner Faull remarked that we talked about a number of free days previously and settled on four (4). The free days would impact revenue but it could help the low income community who visit Hart Park. He thanked Commissioner Jamison and McGiffney for taking the time to go to the Board of Supervisors meeting on January 10th and speak on the Commission's behalf.

Commissioner Jamison mentioned that after the Board of Supervisors meeting on January 10th, Supervisor Gleason asked him if he thought the Commission may be receptive to recommending 12 free days rather than just 4. Commissioner Jamison told Supervisor Gleason that he would present the idea to the Commission.

Commissioner McGiffney stated that having free days on national Monday holidays would encourage people to recreate on those days, rather than just on Saturday or Sunday. He believes it would be a good idea so the community would get used to it.

Mr. Haney reminded the Commission that they need to be clear and concise in choosing the free days. They should be easy to remember and always be the same each year.

Commissioner McGiffney would like to encourage the Monday holidays.

Commissioner Park asked Division Chief Haney if General Services has decided about the special groups who utilize Hart Park regularly. Would they be subject to the parking fees?

Mr. Haney replied that they have talked about giving the volunteer groups free parking. It is a definite consideration. We still have details to work out.

Commissioner Faull stated that if the fees are approved by the Board of Supervisors, it will

be a systematic approach with a media plan. Normally at the State park level, volunteers are not charged fees. This may be an idea for the County to consider as well.

Commissioner Barrera commented that there are a large number of agreements in place for the many things that are accomplished for the parks for free. General Services is continuing the efforts of retired Director Bob Lerude.

Mr. Miller thanked the Commissioners and audience members who drive a long way to attend the monthly Commission meetings. He said many people in the community would be happy to pay higher taxes to improve the parks. He would advocate that the free days be selected on the days when there are less people in attendance at the park than normal.

Commissioner Faull commented that Mondays generally are not one of the biggest park use days of the week.

Mr. Gregory asked if the usage at Hart Park has been studied?

Commissioner Jamison replied that Director Lerude had completed a vehicle count study over several months last year and Monday was determined to be the least used day.

Commissioner Barrera thinks the free days should be uniform, possibly the four previously recommended holidays plus one free day per month, i.e. the first Saturday of each month. This could be a 1st alternative. With a notation delineating that large groups would still have pay for a permit to reserve a certain area of the parks.

Commissioner McGiffney recommends the 10 national Monday holidays plus the 2 State free fishing days.

Commissioner Park was concerned about the lost revenue with 12 free days.

Division Chief Haney replied that the General Services department has estimated each free day will lose approximately \$1,000-\$1,500 per day in revenue.

Commissioner Park doesn't feel confident with the vehicle count that was performed earlier last year. It was his understanding that the count was accomplished by Park Rangers using a clicker counter. He would be willing to put off the fee decision a little longer until more information can be gathered.

Commissioner Faull mentioned the following holidays as a suggestion for free days, especially for families and school aged children: New Year's Day, Martin Luther King Day, President's Day, César Chávez Day, Easter Monday, Memorial Day, Columbus Day, Veteran's Day, Thanksgiving Day, and Christmas Day. Also the 2 free State fishing days, the 1st Saturday in July and the 1st Saturday in September. This could be the 2nd alternative.

Mr. Gregory feels that Commissioner Park had an interesting idea to put off the fee decisions until further studies have been done. Or perhaps if the fees are implemented, then they can be studied for one year afterward before deciding on the best free days.

Commissioner Faull remarked that there is no perfect solution to the issue.

Commissioner McGiffney stated that possibly they can consider the first Monday of each month as a free day, as a 3rd alternative.

Commissioner Barrera reminded the audience and the Commission that when large groups reserve a space in the park they still must pay fees for a permit.

Commissioner Jamison stated that it would take a full year of the proposed fees to get an accurate determination of the revenue that can be generated.

Commissioner Barrera reminded the audience that the Parks department has been cut until we have hit bone. Cuts were also happening in better economic times over the past decade.

Mr. Gregory recommended a marketing pitch be made to new companies that come to Kern County that the parks can be an attractive recruitment tool for employees relocating to our County.

Bill Cooper announced that there will be a County General Plan open house tomorrow evening at 6:00 p.m. in the County Admin building, 1st floor and invited everyone to attend.

6. Department Staff Report

Division Chief, Bret Haney stated that the General Services multipurpose room on the 3rd floor of the County Administrative building will be the new home for most of the Bakersfield Commission meetings.

Starting in March new security equipment will be installed on the 1st floor, similar to what is installed at the Courts building, with metal detectors and x-ray.

Mr. Haney reported that next fiscal year's budget reduction for the County departments of 5.6% may not end up being across the board. That will add additional challenges to the department.

The Information Technology Services (ITS) department is currently revamping the Parks website. They will be adding the historical Commission agendas and minutes for easy access by the public.

Mr. Haney received a phone call from former City Councilman Russell Johnson, has asked if someone from the Commission can speak to the Kiwanis Club regarding the proposed fees for Hart Park. Commissioner Jamison offered to speak to the club.

General Services Director, Jeff Frapwell, will be leaving Kern County on February 24th to accept a position in Santa Barbara. The department is hoping that there will be an internal promotion in the department to replace him. This may or may not impact the Commission.

7. Commission Comments

Commissioner Barrera thanked all the new people in the audience for attending tonight. He encouraged them to also attend the Board of Supervisors meeting on February 7th. The Supervisors are being prudent. Please go with constructive ideas. We need to look at the revenue aspect.

Commissioner Park asked Bret Haney if, since the merger, the Parks managers and contact numbers are the same? Mr. Haney replied that they are, only the main location has changed.

Commissioner Park feels that the County Admin building is an inconvenient meeting place for the public and that the County has more convenient places to meet. He stated it is difficult to find your way for parking and to get through the very large building to the conference room, it is very cumbersome. It will be more difficult to access when the security checks begin in March. He believes the location was more for the convenience of the General Services department rather than the public. He preferred the Public Services building on M Street.

Division Chief Haney thanked Commissioner Park for voicing his concerns.

Commissioner McGiffney stated that some things reported in the news regarding the proposed fees at Hart Park have been distorted. It is not true that the fees will just be for residents of Kern County. The fees will be for all visitors to park. We want to encourage people to visit from other parts of the State and Country. We want to improve the parks not close them. We are being made out to be the bad guys in the media when in fact, we are trying to help the park. We need to be more efficient with County funds. We appreciate everyone who took time to come to tonight's meeting. Please attend the BOS meetings to let them know that you think the parks are important to you.

Commissioner Jamison thanked everyone for coming to the meeting tonight and for all of the new discussions. We are not just creating fees. We don't want fees and wish we didn't have to recommend them. We do need free days as some people cannot afford a \$5 fee. The public perception is that our taxes continue to rise yet it seems our services continue to diminish. I cannot disagree with that thought. We are paying for many things that we never had to pay for before. But if we don't maintain what we have, at some point it will be lost.

Commissioner Faull thanked everyone for their input and for staying so long tonight. We hope we can make pathways forward and work together to resolve this issue. Just remember that the media has its limitations too in reporting on news. They have also been hit by budget cuts and reduced staffing. We live in a changing world and can no longer do business as we have in the past.

8. Dates and Locations of Future Meetings for 2017:

February 22, 2017, 6:30 p.m. at the Kern County Administrative building, 1115 Truxtun Avenue, General Services, 3rd floor multipurpose room.

Future meeting dates and locations (*subject to change*):

March 22 – To Be Decided
April 26

9. Adjournment

Ja-Mc Motion to Adjourn. All ayes, motion carried.

Chairman Faull adjourned the meeting at 9:49 p.m.