

Kern County Parks and Recreation Commission

Public Services Building
2700 M Street
Bakersfield, CA 93301

May 25, 2016
6:30 P.M.

MINUTES

A meeting of the Kern County Parks and Recreation Commission was held on Wednesday, May 25, 2016. Vice-Chairman Jamison presided.

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

Absent: Mark Faull, District II (Chairman)

Staff: Bob Lerude, Director, Kern County Parks and Recreation Department; Suzanne Boyd, Kern County Parks and Recreation Department.

Others: There were 6 others present.

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 6:30 p.m. Flag Salute: Vice-Chairman Jamison

1. Approval of the Minutes of April 27, 2016

Pa-Ba motion to approve the Minutes. All ayes, motion carried.

2. Public Presentations

No public presentations.

3. Correspondence – Receive and File

- a. Three (3) letters from Mesonika Piecuch, Executive Director, ORV Watch, re: OHV funding requests. RECEIVE AND FILE.

Ms. Mesonika Piecuch, Executive Director of ORV Watch submitted three (3) separate letters regarding the grant requests for the Friends of Jawbone, Stewards of the Sequoia, and the Kern County Sheriff's Office. Commissioner Park asked if the letters had been seen by anyone else in the audience. The representatives present for the organizations making the grant requests stated that they had read the letters. There were no comments.

Pa-Mc Motion to receive and file. All ayes, motion carried.

4. Old Business

- a. Off Highway Vehicle (OHV) funding request – Friends of Jawbone. RECEIVE PUBLIC INPUT, DISCUSS, AND MAKE RECOMMENDATION.
- b. OHV funding request – Stewards of the Sequoia. RECEIVE PUBLIC INPUT, DISCUSS, AND MAKE RECOMMENDATION.
- c. OHV funding request – Kern County Sheriff's Office. RECEIVE PUBLIC INPUT, DISCUSS, AND MAKE RECOMMENDATION.

No public comments were made on the OHV grant funding requests. Commissioner Barrera asked the representative for the Friends of Jawbone if they have made funding requests in years past or is this the first time they have requested funds? Commissioner Park stated that they have made past requests and the amount they are requesting this year is very reasonable for the amount of work they do on the detailed map production, etc. Commissioner McGiffney stated that the Commission needs to be sure to prioritize each request in the order of importance. Commissioner Jamison reminded the audience that at last month's meeting the Sheriff's Office had recommended that the Commission approve full funding for the Friends of Jawbone and Stewards of the Sequoia and that they would accept the remaining funds.

Director Lerude reminded everyone that all the applicants this year are applying to the State for matching funds.

Vice-Chairman Jamison asked if there were comments from the public on this issue. Kye Seale, attendee from Lake Isabella, asked if any of the funding awarded to the Sheriff's Office will be used for search and rescue efforts.

Sheriff Sargent Fred Wheeler stated that part of the fund money will be used for a four (4) seater Razor range vehicle. They usually get approximately 30% of their requested funding. This year they requested \$630,000 and hope to receive at least \$189,000. They are going to donate two (2) used quads to the Park Rangers. They work very closely with the Friends of Jawbone and Stewards of the Sequoia and believe they do excellent work and would recommend they be fully funded.

Commissioner Park asked Sargent Wheeler if using cell phones would be more efficient than using radios. Sargent Wheeler stated that they do often use cell phones but they are not always in areas where cell phone reception is good. They not only use the mobile radios but also sometimes use old satellite phones.

Commissioner McGiffney asked about the "approved riding areas" as referenced to in Mesonika Piecuch's letter regarding the K.C. Sheriff's Office OHV grant request. Sargent Wheeler answered that it is true that there are no "approved riding areas" in Tehachapi but there are people who ride OHV's illegally in the area and the Sheriff's Office is responsible for patrolling all areas of Kern County. They monitor the Tehachapi area on a regular basis. They are working to address the issues with her group.

Bruce Miller, representing both Stewards of the Sequoia and the Friends of Jawbone, stated the groups work diligently to use the requested funds to the maximum leverage or advantage. He

said there is a lot of competition for grant funds. Any good OHV program needs to have 3 basic fundamental components. They need an opportunity or a place to go, Stewards of the Sequoia meets that need. They need to have education and that is where Friends of Jawbone fits in with their map program. The third component is law enforcement and the Sheriff's Office fits that need. The 3 components make a complete triangle of services.

Commissioner McGiffney asked which areas are having the greatest impact and require the most help right now. Bruce hesitated to answer as he said he doesn't have all the answers. He did say without volunteers our groups and the Forest Service wouldn't be able to accomplish as much as they do. They rely heavily on volunteers to keep staffing costs down. There is a lot of competition for funding. He mentioned that the Federal agencies are woefully short of funds.

Commissioner McGiffney asked what the biggest safety issue with the OHV riders is. Sargent Wheeler answered that the ROV platform is taking over the quad platform. The Sheriff's office needs a newer faster ROV so they can respond more effectively when needed. People don't always know how to operate OHV's or that they should wear helmets. They sometimes mistakenly believe that they do not need a helmet if their vehicle has a roll cage. But major head trauma can happen even when there is a roll cage. We have quite a few safety issues with children not riding safely. If we are able to purchase an ROV RZR then we can not only transport officers to the scene but also needed medical equipment without having to wait for the first responders.

Commissioner Jamison asked about the accuracy of the maps produced by the Friends of Jawbone and who is responsible for the accuracy? Bruce Miller stated that he believes Randy Benis may be the person responsible. He stated that all their mapped routes are legal. He said with the amount of detail that goes into the maps that there is always the possibility of some errors being made.

Ba-Pa motion to fully fund the Friends of Jawbone and the Stewards of Sequoia and award the remaining funds to the Sheriff's Office. All ayes, motion carried

d. Hart Park – Potential Daily/Annual Permit Fee. DISCUSS AND RECEIVE PUBLIC INPUT.

Bob Rutledge, attendee, is disappointed that more people from the community did not come to tonight's meeting. He is against raising fees but he understands why the Parks Dept. needs the revenue. Mr. Rutledge feels the logistics in trying to make a fee schedule equitable and enforceable could be horrendous. He stated that other members of the Cat People are opposed to the idea of fees.

Commissioner Jamison told Bob Rutledge that he knows he has given this a lot of thought and that he is welcome to give his input anytime. Mr. Rutledge thanked the Commissioners for their consideration.

Kye Seale, attendee, asked if people driving through the park to reach other areas on the other side of the park would be asked to pay a fee?

Director Lerude said that we have been talking about the fee issues for the past year and it has been discussed at approximately six (6) different Commission meetings. We are considering charging a parking fee for Hart Park, others people who are walking, biking, or just driving

through the park would not be charged. Our department has taken more cuts than nearly any other County department. We have lost about 50% of our staffing since 2008. We have “cherry picked” fees in other areas, like Buena Vista Aquatic Recreation Area, and it has made our revenue go up. The vast majority of amenities at Hart Park went away because of our lack of funding. If we put the new proposed fees into a special fund to be used exclusively for Hart Park they will not go into the General Fund and cannot be used for anything else but improvements at the park.

Bob Rutledge complimented the department on the cleanliness of the park. He visited Hart Park just a few days ago and he noted that the restrooms were very clean and even were stocked with toilet paper. He only noticed some graffiti on some of the walls.

Commissioner Jamison stated that we have been looking at other regional parks in other Counties to see what sort of fees they are charging. He noticed that L.A. County has substantial discounts for seniors, etc. We are still just talking about it. He asked for input from the other Commissioners.

Commissioner McGiffney stated that he is not a fan of park fees but this would give us the opportunity to help fund Hart Park without having to use a bond, etc. He said one drawback could be enforcement. One thing that is often overlooked is to recapitalize for future funding of infrastructure repairs and maintenance. We definitely need operational funds.

Commissioner Park mentioned that he likes the idea of a \$5 daily/\$50 yearly fee for Hart Park. He asked Director Lerude if our department had calculated yet what the projected revenue could be? Mr. Lerude stated that those projections have not yet been made. He mentioned when the weather is nice and on certain holiday weekends like Easter, the park is very full. But we don't have a way at the present time to take a head count.

Commissioner Park has some concerns about people parking outside of the park and walking in if we implement parking fees. This could be a very dangerous situation as the speed limit is 55mph on some parts of Alfred Harrell Hwy.

Director Lerude said that our Park Rangers are very good at enforcing traffic rules and laws for alcohol, tobacco use, etc.

Director Lerude mentioned that it is more unusual not to charge a fee in most county regional parks. He also stated that Kern County is the only county in California that doesn't charge non-profit organizations for use of our County buildings. There are some groups that make up to \$40,000-\$50,000 on one event in the buildings and they don't pay us a fee! We charge lower fees than the City and NOR.

Commissioner Park stated that if we decide to give discounts to seniors, Veterans, and other groups that this could be a nightmare. He feels we should charge the same price to everyone. Sometimes people appreciate things more when they are not free. Commissioner Park recommended that we present this issue to the Board of Supervisors soon.

Bob Rutledge, attendee, agreed that if we charge any fees that they should be the same for everyone, no discounts.

Commissioner Barrera thanked the Parks Dept. for the information on the other California

County fees. He feels our fees should be comparable to Tulare County. We need to work harder on getting the public involved. We need visibility to show how the money is going back to the park.

Commissioner McGiffney asked if we can show the average usage at the park. This way we could have a comparison to show the benefits of the fees. Do we have the daily benchmark to maintain the park? Can we show the actual costs and the funding gap? The public is usually less objectionable to fees when it goes into a special fund.

Director Lerude stated that we can have an ongoing update, on a monthly basis, of our park fund balance. He said he can get the information and standards for other parks.

Director Lerude would like to go through the summer doing heavy publicity with press releases, etc. to get the public more involved regarding the proposed Hart Park fees.

Commissioner Jamison said we will bring back the issue throughout the summer.

4. New Business

No new business

5. Department Staff Report

Property taxes are the biggest source of revenue for the County. This year our property taxes have been greatly affected by the drop in oil prices.

The County pension costs are astronomical. It will be at least four (4) years before we see these costs start to decline.

Pioneer Park is close to having the work there completed and is looking very nice. The funds came from a low income housing grant. After the work is completed we will have a ribbon cutting ceremony and a BBQ for the local patrons of the park. The park will have a spray park and a method to recycle landscaping irrigation water.

The County is implementing a 5% department wide budget cut beginning July 1st. There will be a budget hearing meeting on June 21st at the Board of Supervisors Chambers where the first round of cuts will be introduced.

Director Lerude introduced Bret Haney to the Commissioners and attendees. He is the Division Manager for Kern County General Services. There is ongoing discussion to possibly merge Parks & Recreation with General Services. The County may save some money by doing this. We can consolidate our level of service. We will be able to reduce staff through attrition.

Our Park Rangers issued four (4) citations and made one (1) arrest to OHV riders since January.

The Roads Department is working on the rail project on the north side of the river. This project is taking longer than originally expected because the Kern River Parkway Foundation, Bill Cooper and Rich O'Neill, are doing a biological study on the blunt nosed leopard lizard. We potentially may have to mitigate some things before the work can be done.

Public Health is testing the water at Lake Ming in June before it is decided if swimming will be allowed. There is a restriction in place because of the boats and jet skis. It is a safety issue. There needs to be a buoyed off area with ropes. There is no state law required for testing a fresh body of water.

A while back one of the newscasters at Channel 17 said that 9 out of 10 water tests at BV didn't pass standards, but it turned out they testing was for drinking water standards not for swimming standards. This caused a great deal of revenue loss during that time.

Director Lerude let everyone know that one of our extra help Park Rangers, Brad Armstrong, won an award for Officer of the Year at the Kern Valley Exchange Club on May 17th. He has been an extremely dedicated ranger. He has volunteered for many years at Lake Isabella on lake patrol and has been involved in a majority of the rescue operations on the lake.

6. Commission Comments

Commissioner Park stated that he thinks it is a big mistake to bury the Parks Department in a large County Division like General Services. He believes that Parks needs a strong leader and it should be its own division. He has seen these types of mergers before and usually it makes situations worse, not better.

Commissioner Jamison stated that in District 1, Lake Isabella, the skate park people are sending press releases to local papers that are not accurate. Commissioner Jamison went to the Kern Valley Sun and requested that they verify with the Parks & Recreation Department whenever they get newsworthy information from this group.

Director Lerude stated that the Water District will take care of the water line at the skate park. Our planners will be in contact with Teresa, Chairman of the Skate Park Committee.

Commissioner McGiffney thanked everyone for coming to the meeting tonight. He mentioned that we have tried to find the best utilization of the OHV funds. He said the Hart Park parking fee issue is a sticky one. He stated that Director Lerude has done an excellent job with very little funds. We can be a model for other Parks departments and he hopes we don't lose any of the ideas or impetus to allocate funds properly or lose services for the community.

Commissioner Jamison said he found the Parks Mission Statement and history handout to be very interesting. He asked everyone to take particular note of the fact that the Parks department annual budget shows expenses at \$12,396,280 but revenue is only \$2,106,386. It is very difficult to do so much with so little.

7. Date and Location of Next Meeting:

June 22, 2016, 6:30 p.m. at the Buena Vista Aquatic Recreational Area. More details to follow.

8. Adjournment

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

Vice-Chairman Jamison adjourned the meeting at 8:13 p.m.