

Kern County Parks and Recreation Commission

Public Services Building
2700 M Street
Bakersfield, CA 93301

Wednesday, September 28, 2016
6:30 P.M.

MINUTES

A meeting of the Kern County Parks and Recreation Commission was held on Wednesday, September 28, 2016. Chairman Faull presided.

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

Absent: Gregory McGiffney, District IV

Staff: Bob Lerude, Director, Kern County Parks and Recreation Department;
Bret Haney, Division Director, General Services Department

Others: There were 11 other people present including Jose Gaspar, reporter from Channel 29.

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: Chairman Faull

1. Approval of the Minutes of August 24, 2016

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

2. Public Presentations

None.

3. Correspondence – Receive and File

None.

4. Old Business

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

Commissioner Faull said this is the 10th meeting discussing a potential fee for Hart Park since April 2015. We have not been in a rush or eager to implement the fees. The structure for the fees is starting to take shape. We are trending toward a daily and annual

parking fee. There will be no fees for any vehicles just traveling through the park to get to other locations nearby. We are considering a \$5 daily fee or a \$50 annual fee for parking. We are also looking at different methods of fee collection. Self-collection can be cumbersome. We are considering an electronic kiosk pay station similar to what some of the colleges use. We hope to make it convenient for everyone.

Hart Park has never had entry or parking fees in the past. We would like to establish a special fund to be used for Hart Park only for maintenance and improvements. A fund that would not go into the County general fund. Our parks provide many benefits to the community but they require funds to maintain safety, cleanliness, and repairs. The Parks Department staffing has been cut over 50% in the past 10 years. An additional 5% budget cut was implemented this year and another 5.6% cut will happen next year. Also in the next 2 years an additional 2.1% cut will be implemented each year.

Recently the Board of Supervisors looked at the difficulties involved in keeping the Parks and Recreation Department as a stand-alone department so on September 13th they voted to merge the department with the County General Services division.

The Commissioners have been concerned over the budget cuts that have taken place over the past 10 years. They feel we may be reaching a critical tipping point. We need to be pro-active in finding ways to support our parks.

Commissioner Barrera complimented Director Lerude and his staff on accomplishing so much with so little. They have done an excellent job in getting grants to make improvements. But the grant terms and conditions do not allow the money to be used for operating funds. Some companies have partnered with the Parks Department, for example the Wonderful Company in Lost Hills.

Director Lerude commented that in the past our department has used many volunteers especially for park clean-up events. We have utilized Work Release crews through the Sheriff's office. But we are still very concerned about the degradation of our parks and do not want them to degrade further. We welcome comments and suggestions from the public. Our options may be limited. Some of the grants we have utilized require that the park is to remain open to the public.

Commissioner Faull stated that the Parks and Recreation Commission doesn't make the decisions we only make recommendations to the Board of Supervisors. We will need a media plan before implementing a fee schedule. Strict enforcement will be needed after a grace period.

Director Lerude has given a great deal of information to the Commissioners. We have researched other California regional parks and the fee ranges are very wide. Suggestions have been made for signage at the park as well as security cameras. It has also been suggested that perhaps we make allowances for some free parking days at the park throughout the year, possibly to coincide with the 3 day holiday weekends.

We have Park Rangers and security officers. The Rangers go through the same training as the sheriff or police department officers.

There are approximately 300-500 vehicles per day in Hart Park. We have many community volunteers. We are not able to close any parks or buildings because of the grants that are connected to them.

We have a great deal of vandalism in the local parks. During the recession we had lay-offs three (3) years in a row. We leased out approximately 10 buildings to other non-profits and cities, etc. We definitely do not make any money maintaining the buildings. There are no rental fees for non-profit organizations. We are the only County that does not charge fees to the non-profits.

Commissioner Jamison stated that Kern County is the only county in California that doesn't charge a fee for non-profits to use their facilities. There has been a continuous degradation of these facilities.

Commissioner Park mentioned that most of us agree that we need park fees but we don't like implementing them. There will still be a planning stage for the pay stations, outside of the park parking, traffic citations for illegal parking, etc. There has to be a design stage also. The Parks & Recreation Department will have to work out all the issues of the implementation, design, etc.

The meter equipment chosen should take cash and credit cards.

Audience member Mark Sites from the Back Country Horsemen asked if there are equestrian figures from the Bureau of Land Management. Mr. Sites said he would not support fees at Hart Park if they just go into the general fund.

Audience member Pat Montoya, Back Country Horsemen asked how will it work for people just driving through the park to go to work, etc.? She also asked if staff from the Sheriff's Search & Rescue and Mounted Rescue would be able to park their vehicles in Hart Park while they are working. She said we need to design the lines for the parking fee meters so that there will be no bottleneck of traffic for the people just driving through the park. Ms. Montoya thanked the Parks staff for the quick response when she called about the repairs that were needed on the horse trail.

Audience member Adrian Garcia, long time resident of Kern County is very fond of Hart Park. He has noticed that it has visibly gone downhill in the last several years and that is very disheartening to him. He believes one of the biggest problems is with the piles of trash that accumulate, especially during the weekends. The trash receptacles are not animal proof and wildlife gets into the garbage and makes an even bigger mess, especially at night time. He is also concerned that many of the families that currently use Hart Park will not be able to afford the fees and will then go elsewhere.

Director Lerude said the staff will be working on all of the issues that have been brought up before anything is implemented. We may also have extra staff to assist on busy weekends at the park.

Commissioner Faull thanked everyone for their comments. He stated the Commissioners are also concerned about the affordability of any parking fees for Hart Park.

Audience member, Carol Lair, has lived here since 1958 and is a volunteer with the Cat People. She considers Hart Park a real community treasure. There is wildlife around there

that many people don't know about. It is critical to educate the public. She likes the idea of a 3-6 month grace period. It is great that anyone can use the park. She would hate to see our residents get resentful about the fees. She would like to suggest to use the money for improvements in the park. She is concerned that people will park outside of the park and walk or ride their bikes in. Groups like the Audubon Society do bird watching there occasionally and they may not wish to pay the fees for the number of cars that would be in their group. She would also like to see more drought resistant trees and plants in all of our parks. Carol stated that this has been one of the worst kitten seasons that she has ever seen. They picked up 15 kittens in one week. We need more education on spay/neuter and on dumping unwanted animals.

Director Lerude suggested that it could be a good opportunity for different groups to consider carpooling. This would mean less potential air pollution and fewer accidents. Mr. Lerude said that in the past our department has worked with the Parkway Foundation for plants and trees along the Kern River.

Commissioner Faull thanked Carol for her comments. He also hope the proposed parking fees will encourage carpooling. He suggested that perhaps we would partner with the Audubon Society to have yearly events at Hart Park. He also suggested a campaign to raise awareness with the public.

Director Lerude stated that we need to expand our volunteer groups.

Audience member, Bob Rutledge, said he has been in contact with the Fish & Wildlife people about having a fish plant in the winter months. Director Lerude stated that it wouldn't be a problem.

Commissioner Faull thanked everyone for all the food for thought. He asked the Commissioners to give any additional thoughts that they may have.

Commissioner Jamison said he appreciated all the public comments tonight. We need to move forward on the Hart Park fees. He has some doubts about them but will bring those up at the appropriate time. Our taxes are used to pay for many things that we no longer have. We are fee'd and taxed to the nth degree.

Commissioner Faull remarked that this is a painful issue especially for low income people.

Commissioner Park stated that this issued has been well publicized by the TV news and he thinks we need to move forward to the Board of Supervisors.

Commissioner Barrera remarked that the Commission has taken it's time and has received a great deal of information from the Parks & Recreation Department. We need to ask ourselves how we, as a community, can invest in parks. He commended Director Lerude for his leadership of the department. Commissioner Barrera is in favor of moving forward.

Commissioner Faull asked if school groups would pay a fee when they are on a field trip to Hart Park? Director Lerude answered that if they use a bus for the trip then that would be considered one vehicle and pay accordingly.

Commissioner Barrera said that he hopes that we don't unintentionally punish or harm people by the fees.

Commissioner Faull replied that this will create a reaction and other issues as we move forward. We seem to be getting the general consensus that everyone is ready to move forward.

Bob Rutledge asked if this will be an issue when the Parks department merges with General Services?

Director Lerude stated that he will be retiring in early December.

Commissioner Faull remarked that this will all need to be spelled out for the Board of Supervisors.

Director Lerude reminded the Commission that they have the latitude to propose any of the pertinent details.

Commissioner Faull asked if we want to implement some free days at Hart Park?

Pat Montoya suggested that the Monday holidays may be a good free day. Carol Lair and E.J. Rutledge agreed that would be a good idea.

Commissioner Barrera suggested that possibly the free fee day could also be a free fishing holiday.

Director Lerude thought that would be good as long as it is made clear and simple. There are currently two (2) free fishing days per year. He will look into the issue, gather information, and bring it back to the Commission in October.

Commissioner Barrera recommended we move forward and that we can discuss the free days on a later date.

Commissioner Jamison mentioned that it was not on the agenda tonight to make a motion.

Commissioner Faull asked if the Commissioners could work on their own ideas until the October meeting? By the next meeting we should have the stats on usage. He asked Director Lerude if his department could investigate the number of days and the legal language.

Director Lerude stated that they can come up with a few options.

Commissioner Faull mentioned special fishing days.

E.J. Rutledge requested a hand out for the audience.

b. Recommendations for Certificate of Recognition recipients.

Director Lerude suggested some possible nominees from our list of Gratuitous Service Agreements. We will get a list to the Commissioners in advance of the next meeting.

Commissioner Jamison suggested Johnny Crabtree, Area Parks Supervisor, who will be retiring next month.

5. New Business

None.

6. Department Staff Report

The County implemented just slightly under a 5% budget cut this year for the Parks and Recreation Department. Next year we will be looking at a 5.6% cut and the following 3 years there will be a 2.1% each year. Director Lerude's position will not be filled when he retires in December.

Trees are being planted in the Lake Isabella area. Some of our former Commissioners are paying for the trees and water lines.

Construction will begin in mid-October for a walking path in Potomac Park. It should be completed by mid-January 2017.

The Frazier Park pond has nearly dried up. There were over 100 dead Carp last month. We are considering enlarging the pond and we are working with other County departments to work out a plan.

The Roads Department has been pruning trees in Frazier Park. It is very political in that community. We are having the same reports as before.

We are doing some work at Fellows Park in Taft.

After this year's election, marijuana use may be legalized. We are looking into how we can best deal with that possibility. There will be a meeting on November 17th in Frazier Park to discuss the topic.

The Bureau of Reclamation will start work on Monday on a slurry seal at Lake Woollomes.

Our spray parks will close on Friday, September 30th.

General Services Department responsibilities for the Parks Department will be looked at closely. We have a long way to go to work through all the details.

Commissioner Park asked if General Services or the CAO's office will make any changes with the Commission. Director Lerude answered that ordinance language will change. The operations shouldn't change. There will be a different person as advisor. Currently Bret Haney will be the new advisor, if there are no changes in Directors at General Services.

We should know in the next few weeks who will be hired to replace our CAO, John Nilon, when he retires in January 2017.

7. Commission Comments

Commissioner Park remarked that even the Board of Supervisors seems concerned about the merger with General Services. He feels that the Commission needs to be stronger and give input to the BOS. This could be a way for the public and General Services to work together better.

Commissioner Jamison had no further comments.

Commissioner Barrera thanked everyone for coming to the meeting tonight and for all of their feedback.

Commissioner Faull thanked the public for the new valuable information. We would have preferred that the Parks Department remain a stand-alone department, but we understand the challenges the County faces.

Bill Cooper from the Kern River Parkway Foundation requested a letter of support that is needed for a grant application. He is asking for direction from the Commission. Director Lerude will write the letter.

8. Date and Location of Next Meeting:

October 26, 2016, 5:30 p.m. at the Kern County Museum. Tour 5:30pm, Meeting 6:30pm.

Future meeting location (subject to change):

November 30, 2016 – Rosamond (Hummel Hall or Library)

9. Adjournment

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

Chairman Faull adjourned the meeting at 8:30 p.m.