

Kern County Parks and Recreation Commission

Kern County Museum
Old Standard School Building
3801 Chester Ave.
Bakersfield, CA 93301

Wednesday, October 26, 2016
Tour: 5:30 P.M. – Meeting: 6:30 P.M.

MINUTES

A meeting of the Kern County Parks and Recreation Commission was held on Wednesday, October 26, 2016. 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: Bob Lerude, Director, Kern County Parks and Recreation Department; Bret Haney, Division Director, General Services Department

Others: There were 9 other people present including a reporter from Channel 17.

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 6:37 p.m. Flag Salute: Chairman Faull

1. Approval of the Minutes of September 28, 2016

The minutes seemed to have some portions under the wrong heading. Suzanne will review the minutes to put the correct items in the correct place. Ja-Pa, all ayes. Minutes approved with noted changes.

2. Public Presentations

Lorraine Unger asked all of the Commissioners to please speak up so that everyone can hear.

3. Correspondence

None

4. Old Business

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

This is the 11th meeting since April 2015 where we have discussed the possibility of vehicle fees. We are looking at daily and annual fees. We have compared the proposed

fees to other regional parks in other California counties.

We are looking at the fee structure and why it is happening. The fees will be for vehicles that park in Hart Park only. People who are driving through the park, walkers, bicyclists, horseback riders, etc. will not be charged a fee. The proposed fee will be \$5 daily or \$50 annually.

We have been discussing ways to implement the fees and have decided that an electronic pay station would be the best solution. We would need a pay station that accepts cash, credit and debit cards, and makes change.

We have been discussing what will happen to the fees that are collected. We want to put them into a special fund directed for Hart Park only for maintenance and improvements. We will not support the fees going into the general County fund.

The Parks staffing has been reduced over 50% in the past 10 years due to County budget cuts. More cuts will be happening in 2017 and in the next few years. Commissioner Faull thanked the Parks staff for all their hard work and accomplishments with so little money in their budget. The Commission is concerned about the Parks Department reaching a tipping point of no return. The department has contracted out some services. They have achieved grants which must meet specific criteria and do not provide operational funds. We have some company partnerships and many volunteers. An excellent example of a corporate partnership is with the Wonderful Company in Lost Hills.

Director Lerude is retiring in early December. The Parks & Recreation Department will be incorporated with General Services on November 1st.

The Commission is concerned about the degradation of Hart Park. We need a strong media presence to promote the new fees for the park. We are considering some free parking days, perhaps to coincide with the free fishing days, the Monday holidays or one Monday per month, or the school holidays. The Parks & Recreation Commission only makes recommendations to the Board of Supervisors, we do not make the final decision.

Before we implement any new fees, we need to create ordinance language that will need approval from County Counsel. Buena Vista Aquatic Recreation Area has daily and annual fees, as do other County regional parks. Kern County has tried to get voters to pass a 1/2¢ sales to fund the Libraries and other projects but it has been voted down. Oil revenue and property taxes are way down and that is a big reason why the County departments have had to take a 5% cut this year. We will be subjected to a 5.6% cut in 2017, and an additional 2.1% cut in 2018 and 2019. Many local residents do not realize that the Board of Supervisors only has control over less than \$300,000 of the \$2 billion total County budget. The Federal and State government regulates money that is spent by the County for public health, mental health, and social services.

To save additional money the department utilizes free labor through the Sheriff's Office Work Release Program, but we can only use the inmate for one day at one location in a 6 month time period. We have used people in other community service programs through MAOF, CalWorks, etc.

To generate more revenue, people often ask why the Park Rangers don't fine more

people for littering but the misdemeanor offenses have to be committed in the presence of an officer to receive a ticket. We have been working with the schools to educate the children about litter control.

We are saving money by deeding some of our buildings to other city governments. We are getting ready to deed the Veteran's building in Shafter to the city of Shafter. We have already deeded buildings to the cities of Lost Hills, Wasco, and Delano. When we privatize maintenance to public companies we save quite a bit of money. On average it costs approximately \$87,000 a year for maintenance with an outside company vs. \$450,000 for County employees to maintain due to the higher salaries and benefits. Soon we will use the same model in Boron, California City, and Rosamond.

Public Comments

E.J. Rutledge, audience member, stated that last year when she first heard about the possible parking fees for Hart Park she was against them. But as she has learned more at the Commission meetings, especially regarding graffiti, litter, vandalism, and a general disregard for our parks by many people in the community, she now agrees with the Commission that the fees are needed. But she will only agree if the funds are used at Hart Park only, not rolled into the County general fund.

Carol Lair, audience member, is representing a group of 15 friends. They are opposed to any fees and comment that it has "always been free". They don't understand how the fees will be enforced. There may be a lot of vandalism to the kiosks. Is there a possibility of giving 1 free hour per day? Large groups with many cars may not be able to afford the fees. Carol and her friends fear that the public may retaliate over the fees by causing more damage to the park. She asked if possibly a foundation could be set up to take donations for Hart Park. Can this be explored?

Commissioner Faull thanked Carol for her comments and suggestions. He hopes there won't be retaliation and reprisal. Our hope is to generate enough revenue to maintain and improve the park.

Lorraine Unger, audience member, mentioned that she is very involved in the Library effort and that they operate with a very small budget. She stated that she reads the Bakersfield Californian everyday but has not yet seen anything in the paper regarding the proposed fees for Hart Park. Lorraine mentioned that many Hispanic families frequent the park and it may be a good idea to have people who are bilingual to through the park every day to talk to the people. She feels very negative about charging fees.

Director Lerude stated that the Board of Supervisors has not enacted the same ordinances as the cities have. We do not have developer fees for parks. Maintenance district fees are part of the property tax bill in the cities but not in the County. Those fees are used to subsidize the city parks. We are looking into a county wide foundation for our parks. Anyone who is interested can specify where they would like their donation to be used while they are living or from their estate. We can explore this option further.

Barb Hayes, audience member, President of the Cat People. She has gone to and used Hart Park daily for the past 22 years. The park has deteriorated a great deal during that time. We need strong publicity for the park. She believes the fees are a way to get the

park back on track.

Tom Little, from the Sheriff's Office, thanked Bob Lerude for how he has maximized the budget and has done a fantastic job since he has been with the Parks & Recreation Department. He stated that public safety has been a sacred cow with the County until recently. Tom has been in Kern County since 1981 and he has noticed that Hart Park has deteriorated significantly since then. He said if the fees will improve the quality of the park then he is all for it.

Commissioner Comments on Hart Park fees

Commissioner McGiffney commented that they do not want to shut the park down but due to continued budget cuts, that could be the next step if we don't implement fees. We cannot control what the media decides to publicize. We have to be smart about how we handle our parks in our very large county. We need creative ideas. The Parks & Recreation Commission can help set up a foundation. More people would go to Hart Park if improvements are made. This park has been overlooked for a very long time. We are not doing our jobs if we don't move forward on this issue.

Commissioner Park stated that Commissioner McGiffney made a good point on improving the park. We still don't know what the approximate revenue would be. Another large expense would be electronic meters. Someone would have to empty the machines daily. It would take approximately 4 hours every day of a Rangers time to do this and to write citations.

Director Lerude stated that the department is still collecting attendance figures. We don't have Rangers on duty 24/7. They used to write citations for no alcohol permits but it is not an issue anymore. The question has been asked, "What is going to happen to the park in the next few years?" Grants are usually for low income neighborhood parks, regional parks do not qualify. If we do nothing, it will continue to deteriorate. Budget cuts continue, costs continue to go up.

Commissioner Park remarked that we always send out press releases to all local media including the Spanish outlets.

Director Lerude commented that in the past we used to have community meetings in the parks and we had CSUB students do surveys.

Commissioner Jamison stated that we are not solving problems but just reacting to budget deficits that no one has a way to solve. The real problem is the budget itself. There is a difference in how different counties are managed. Some do not have the budget woes that we do. Kern County administrators need to do a better job of managing the budget. The County departments are always expected to do more with less money, especially in the last 12 years.

Commissioner Barrera remarked that he grew up in the 5th District and he has noticed that the parks in Arvin, Lamont and East Bakersfield are not kept up as well as they are in other parts of the County. We are looking for creative solutions. People are usually ok with paying taxes if they can see the direct benefit of them. He is in favor of the fees. If it

doesn't work out then we can look at other ideas.

Commissioner Faull read the e-mail to everyone that suggested free parking at Hart Park Monday-Friday before 3:00 p.m.

Barb Hayes, Cat People, has been frustrated by the media. If someone can go on the radio or TV stations, then the public is more responsive.

Commissioner Jamison remarked that people generally see things on TV but there are approximately 43 radio stations in the County and people only listen to certain stations.

Commissioner McGiffney stated we should go forward with more media coverage and make our recommendations to the Board of Supervisors.

Director Lerude stated that we don't charge non-profits for facility rental fees. When we recommended in the past that non-profits pay \$5 hour for our buildings, the BOS didn't want to touch it because of the public outcry.

Carol Lair recommended that we create a Hart Park Facebook page as a social media outlet to put important information. She believes that social media is the way to reach people, especially the younger people.

Commissioner Faull stated that we can do social media, we can reach out to different groups like the Audubon Society, etc. We have big issues to grapple with. We have less government funding and now we are looking at more user pay systems. We used to be able to create and maintain the parks in the past but the political climate has changed. Other counties have been creative, we need to get creative too.

Bob Rutledge said he agrees with Commissioner McGiffney. We are talking this to death and we need to move forward. It is time to move on.

Jose Soto, audience member, recommended a geo filter for social media like SnapChat. He also asked what happened to the paddle boats at Hart Lake?

Director Lerude answered that Paul Woollomes used to run the paddle boat concession until he was 93 years old. Then it went to bid. The concession was then awarded to a father and son who ran it for awhile. Then they had a falling out. The father owned all of the equipment and his son couldn't access it. The concession is out for bid again. Geo filters are free.

Commissioner Faull asked if the Commission wants to do more media outreach or make a decision.

Commissioner Jamison wants to move forward. We haven't had the public participation that we would have liked. We can continue with more public comments and good ideas. The more input the better the chances of it being approved.

Commissioner Park believes we need to make a hard push with the media.

Commissioner Faull commented that we could have next month's meeting in Bakersfield

rather than Rosamond so that we can get more public input from the community.

Director Lerude said we will have to go to County Counsel for ordinance language, then we will need a public hearing 30 days later.

Commissioner McGiffney commented that we need to get the proposed ordinance language and begin a media blitz.

Commissioner Faull asked if we need a motion to propose the ordinance? He has crafted a proposed language template for food for thought. We need more data and to reach out to the Hispanic community. Our target date for next month's meeting is November 30th.

Director Lerude stated that we can meet in East Bakersfield at the Veteran's building.

E.J. Rutledge asked if fliers can be put out at Hart Park or social media?

Jose Soto remarked that we need social media to reach more people, Facebook, SnapChat, Twitter, etc.

Bret Haney commented that a flier may not have room to explain the background of Hart Park.

Tom Little recommended a bar code or QR code on the flier that would direct the user to the Parks website.

Commissioner McGiffney stated that we need to create a sense of urgency.

Director Lerude will contact CSUB regarding the cost of the parking meters. Fresno and Tulare Counties already charge fees and their counties are similar to ours.

Commissioner Faull recommended allowing one more meetings to obtain more public input.

b. Recommendations for Certificate of Recognition recipients.

The Parks & Recreation Department are making the following recommendations:

1. June Schmidt – Friends of Frazier Mountain Park
June and her group fill in rodent burrows at the park. They have swept off sand from the sidewalks, picked up rocks, pulled weeds and picked up trash.
2. Lamont Boys and Girls Club – Margarita Madera
Margarita and her group clean up the park on a regular basis.
3. Greenfield Family Resource Center – Elizabeth Gutierrez
Elizabeth and her group have cleaned up the park including cigarette butts and trash and held a community health and safety fair.

Commissioner Faull also would like to recommend a certificate go to the Cat People.

Commissioner Jamison agreed.

Commissioner Jamison and Park recommended all 4 individuals and also a certificate for Johnny Crabtree, retired Area Park Supervisor, for his years of dedication and service to the County and the residents of the Kern River Valley.

Director Lerude will put the certificates together and invite the recipients to the next meeting.

5. New Business

None

6. Department Staff Report

Director Lerude gave the Commissioners a list of projects by District.

There are some possible new lessees for Sam Lynn Ballpark, now that the Blaze has moved. Northwest Baseball League will be the main lessee and a sub-lease will go to the Pecos League.

North Kern Golf Course gave notice recently and they will transfer management to the Sorensen brothers who manage Buena Vista Golf Course.

Construction has begun on a walking path at Potomac Park and should be completed by mid-January 2017. The walking path will encompass the entire parameter of the park. The park will be open during construction.

There will be a community meeting in Frazier Park on Thursday, November 17th at 6:30 p.m. They will be presenting the results of a community survey on the possible restriction of alcohol, tobacco, e-cigarettes and marijuana at Frazier Park.

Our transition with General Services is moving along smoothly. We will have an annual "All Staff" meeting on Wednesday, November 9th. The move should be completed by Monday, December 12th. The Parks administrative staff will move from 2820 M Street and will be relocated to the County downtown admin building on the 3rd floor with other General Services admin staff.

A decision has not yet been announced for the new County CAO. We should be hearing something soon.

7. Commission Comments

Commissioner Jamison thanked everyone for coming to the meetings, especially when the meetings are long and it doesn't seem like we get much accomplished.

Commissioner Park complimented Commissioner Faull for his leadership of the Commission.

Commissioner McGiffney thanked the audience members for their input. He commented that the budget issues will tie us up tight. We have a very diverse county and we need to put more value in our parks. We want the facilities to improve. We need to make it all work.

Commissioner Barrera thanked the audience and his fellow Commissioners for staying late at the meeting tonight to discuss all the issues.

Commissioner Faull offered his thanks and appreciation to the public attendees for helping the Commission to understand their concerns.

8. Date and Location of Next Meeting:

November 30, 2016, 6:30 p.m. at the Public Services building, 2700 M Street or the East Bakersfield Veteran's building, 2101 Ridge Road.

9. Adjournment

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

Chairman Faull adjourned the meeting at 9:33 p.m.