

Parks Advisory Committee Minutes

May 10, 2012

Members Present: Pat Hoover, Carl Stiefbold, Damien Gilbert, Les Weinstein, Cat Koehn, and Larry Dunlap

Members Absent: None

Staff Present: Mike Russell, Howard Schussler, John Moriarty, Phil Guyette, Dave Stockdale, and Sam Fox

Guests Present: 7 members of the public in attendance

Pat Hoover, Chair, called the meeting to order at 6:03 p.m.

- I. Public Comment – Joe Ferguson, 272 Banton, Eugene, OR., Mr. Ferguson appeared with his daughter Johannah. He stated that he has lived in the Whitley Park neighborhood for many years and that he and Johannah, who attends nearby Madison Middle School, go to Whitely Landing every day during the summer months to pick up cans and trash in the park. He referenced a time just a few years ago when the gates to Whitely park was locked and not available for use. Mr. Ferguson feels now that by making regular visits with Johannah to pick up discarded cans and helping to keep the park clean that he and his family are helping to take back the park and make it presentable for all park users. Mr. Ferguson is acquainted with the group of regulars that several neighbors to the park have complained about. He acknowledged that although this group does consume alcohol regularly at the park, they are also responsible for building the horse shoe pits in the park and also for occasional weed removal and trash pickup. He feels that by having the regular presence of this group in the summer evenings playing horse shoes, that it helps to keep the drug-users and homeless campers away which led to this location's closure a few years ago and he voiced his concern that if the park has an alcohol ban that it will force this group to find another park location therefore leaving Whitely landing without a constant presence and allowing the criminal element to return. Mr. Ferguson stated that just since the temporary alcohol ban was initiated there was a load of garbage dumped at the boat ramp, and also a garbage can set afire. He reported that he and his friends notified Lane County Parks of the trash can fire and also of the illegal trash dumping and then helped Parks staff collect and remove the garbage. Mr. Ferguson added that he would be interested in being involved in a discussion between the two groups who are at odds over the use of this park: the beer-drinking horse shoe-playing group, and nearby neighbors.

Paul Blankenship, 983 Rio Vista, Eugene, OR., Mr. Blankenship began by stating that neither he nor Mr. Ferguson drink alcohol but are both a part of the horse shoe-playing group which regularly use Whitely park. He acknowledged that although the group does drink beer and sometimes get loud, they always

quiet down when asked and try to police themselves on their behavior. Mr. Blankenship said that as long as he's been with this group he has never seen any fighting or other bad behavior, nor has he seen the police make a presence except when the neighbors call the Sheriff's office. He stated that he has bad knees and for a long time was not able to access the park because of the previous poor maintenance issues, but now that he has gotten involved with this regular group, they have not only cleaned up the park but also made it more accessible for handicapped and disabled users by clearing brush and cutting the grass and making the bank areas fishable. He also supported Mr. Ferguson's comments that if the alcohol ban becomes permanent at Whitley Landing, the horse shoe group will not be there to help keep the criminal element from returning to park which will eventually result in more homeless campers, drug use, and garbage issues. Mr. Blankenship asked that Lane County Parks reconsider its decision to permanently ban alcohol at Whitley Landing.

Jason Morris, 2338 Moore St., Eugene, OR., Mr. Morris has lived in the Whitley neighborhood for most of his life and frequently visits this park location. Mr. Morris' concern is with the new signage for the alcohol ban. The sign references an Oregon Revised Statute which would allow searches of a person and of their belongings such as a backpack or clothing. Mr. Morris advocated to have the temporary alcohol ban lifted and the signage removed so his rights would not be violated so he could visit the park and not be subject to searches of his person or belongings.

Lisa Fitzgerald, Kendra Street, Eugene, OR., Ms. Fitzgerald appeared with her son Riely. She also spoke of her concern with the signage pertaining to searches. Ms. Fitzgerald does not want her child approached and questioned about why they are in the park or subject to personal searches just for being in a public park. Ms. Fitzgerald stated that her son Riely is a special needs child and he may not act like other children which may be misinterpreted as suspicious behavior by others and that his actions might provoke an inquiry by someone authorized to perform searches in the park. She is concerned that this action would cause her son unnecessary stress just for visiting a public park. Ms. Fitzgerald would like to see the signage removed, and if the sign is required to stay, she would like to see it reworded so it does not include the allowable action of searches of a person or their vehicles.

Joan Abbott, 211 Chapman Dr., Eugene, OR., Mrs. Abbott has lived on Chapman Drive near Whitley Landing for 35 years and she stated that she has seen this park go from good, to bad, to worse. She has volunteered her time over the years to pick up trash and debris after windstorms, and cleaned the restroom. Mrs. Abbott inquired about a cleaning and maintenance schedule for the park and a list of services that were to be performed. She mentioned the vault toilet at this location and how it does not have flush toilets. Mrs. Abbott would like to see hand sanitizer available for the restroom and also requested a recycle container and signs that would help encourage park users to pack out their garbage. She does not recommend a dumpster as she feels that just encourages people to dump t.v.'s, furniture, and other household garbage, and she also requested a sign requiring that dogs are required to be on a leash while in the park. Mrs. Abbott states that the park has been more quiet since the temporary alcohol ban has been in effect, and she would like to encourage more community involvement in helping to keep the park clean and maintained, and that she is willing to help organize and coordinate those efforts.

Steve Abbott, 211 Chapman Dr., Eugene, OR., Mr. Abbott reported that the No Alcohol signs that were installed had been torn down the following day. He also distributed photos to the PAC taken at Whitely landing showing the damage and also copies of a letter from Mothers Against Drunk Drivers which was sent to the Parks Manager and the PAC chairperson, Pat Hoover. Mr. Abbott reported that he has been working on coordinating a work group to participate in park maintenance and has requested approval from the parks manager to clear areas within the park for better visibility and also asked for interested members of the audience to see him about signing up to volunteer in this effort.

- II. **Approval of Minutes, Announcement/Agenda Modifications** – The March 2012 minutes were reviewed. A couple of grammatical errors were made and there was a motion to approve.

**Motion (Carl Stiefbold): The PAC recommends approval of the March 2012 PAC meeting minutes.**

**Second: Les Weinstein**

**No further discussion.**

**Motion passed unanimously (5 in favor, 0 opposed)**

There was an effort made to explain the timeline of the approval of meeting minutes and when they appear on the Lane County Parks web site. Minutes must first be transcribed from the prior meeting, then reviewed by the committee. Once the committee members approve the minutes at the following months' meeting they are then added to the web site and made available for public viewing.

Because the June advisory committee meeting involves a tour of parks related locations, there is not usually a June meeting. The Parks Advisory Committee does not meet during July and August due to the busy summer season and will not resume until September. Because of this schedule, the minutes from this meeting may not be reviewed and approved until the meeting scheduled for September.

- III. **Membership Sub-Committee Recommendation** – Mr. Russell reported that a subcommittee met to review the applications and interview the two candidates who had applied for the at-large PAC vacancies. The subcommittee consisted of Damien Gilbert and Cat Koehn. The two applicants were Mr. Bill Fisher and Mr. Carlos Alvarez. Mr. Gilbert and Ms. Koehn recommended Mr. Alvarez for the position. There was discussion as to the expiration timelines for current members and a request to keep Mr. Fisher's application on file in the event of another vacancy.

**Motion (Cat Koehn): The PAC voted to approve Mr. Carlos Alvarez to fill the currently vacant at-large position on the Parks Advisory Committee.**

**Second: Damien Gilbert**

**No further discussion.**

**Motion passed unanimously (5 in favor, 0 opposed)**

Mr. Russell will prepare a Board packet with recommendations to add both Larry Dunlap as Commissioner Sorenson's appointment, and Carlos Alvarez as the at-large appointment as members of the Lane County Parks Advisory Committee.

IV. **Staff Reports:**

- 1) **i. Action Item:** Mr. Russell reported that the temporary alcohol ban at Whitely boat landing has been in effect now for about one week, and that as reported earlier in the meeting, the posted signage had been forcibly removed from the park. Mr. Russell also reported that there was an illegal garbage dump on the boat ramp and Parks staff was called in to document and remove the garbage. Mr. Russell has also received calls that alcohol use continues at that location in spite of the ban and signage. Mr. Russell again reiterated that although the ban is in effect, there continues to be no immediate way to enforce it due to limited staff and resources on behalf of both the Parks department as well as the Sheriff's office. Ms. Koehn asked about the wording of the new signs and the concerns of the people who spoke earlier in the meeting about searches. Mr. Russell and Mr. Schussler explained that the type of sign, and the violation for this type of ban is considered a Violation of Restricted Use. The sign references Lane Code (LC), Lane Manual (LM), and also Oregon Revised Statutes (ORS). This particular ORS includes a list of possible actions which would be allowed if a person were to violate that posted use. One of the actions listed is the right to search a vehicle, a person, and their personal items. Lane County Park Rangers are not trained to conduct searches, or perform search and seizure. Lane County Sheriff's Deputies however, are trained in searches and can perform that duty within their authority. Mr. Russell stated that the signs need to state the violation to tell Sheriff's Deputies what they are enforcing and gives them the authority to act, but It does not state that a search is mandatory, however it does allow that action if necessary. Mr. Russell remarked that Lane County Parks staff will review the verbiage and determine if some other wording would be more appropriate. He also said that signs may need to be posted up higher in the trees or other locations which would be more difficult for vandals to reach.

Pat Hoover remarked that she is concerned that after the testimony given earlier at this meeting and the confusion on alcohol ban and signage, the fact that there are two new committee members since the vote at last months' meeting, and the tie-breaking vote that was needed between the voting committee to approve a permanent ban of alcohol at Whitely Landing, Ms. Hoover asked that there be further opportunity to gather information and a reconsideration of this permanent ban by the Advisory Committee. Mr. Russell distributed a copy of a letter to each of the PAC members from Barbara Stoeffler, Founder of MADD of Lane County. The letter addresses Ms. Stoeffler's concern that once the 30-day temporary ban at Whitely Landing is through that the danger of drinking drivers would resume, therefore, she is advocating for a permanent alcohol ban at this park. The committee members continued to discuss a temporary alcohol ban versus a permanent ban with Ms. Koehn questioning whether or not the sign verbiage would contain the reference to the ORS stating the possibility of a search of a person or vehicle, and Mr. Stockdale and Mr. Russell confirmed that it is State law and would be part of the signage; Mr. Weinstein inquired as to how the City of Eugene addresses alcohol use in their parks when laws state it is not a permitted use, and Mr. Russell replied that although he is unsure of the City's procedures on this matter, that Lane County Parks seeks voluntary compliance on posted uses in the parks and that Rangers would ask the offender to pour out the

beverage or leave the park. Mr. Russell stated once again that he will not be training or authorizing Parks staff to search people or vehicles and that would be up to the Sheriff's Department to enforce. Mr. Schussler and Mr. Stockdale clarified that the current signage only references Lane Code, which references Lane Manual, which then references ORS and the right to search, not that the signs directly state that a search will happen anytime there is a violation of this posted use. Ms. Hoover then spoke of the Lane County Parks mission to provide recreation areas for all users and not limiting who can use the parks or what they can do while they are visiting. There was also discussion about the alcohol ban at Baker Bay park which is also a Lane County Park. Mr. Russell advised that the alcohol ban at Baker Bay is a requirement by the Army Corps of Engineers in all of their parks and because Lane County leases the land and maintains that park, it is a requirement of that lease agreement. There is no lease agreement or any such requirement at Whitely Landing. Mr. Stockdale brought up the possibility of utilizing the St. Vincent de Paul program that was brought to the committee several months ago to have a camp host move into the Whitely location to be a security presence which might help discourage undesirable behaviors and crime in the park. However, he also noted that there are no services such as hookups electricity or water for a camp host to use while residing at Whitely park, and that space for an R.V. would also be an issue but could be looked into. It was noted however, that the process for the host option would take longer than the current timeline allows for Mr. Russell to move forward on his communication with the Board of Commissioners before the current temporary alcohol ban expires.

Damien Gilbert then made a motion that the PAC move to reconsider their last vote which was to install a temporary alcohol ban at Whitely Landing for 30 days, and do not act upon a permanent alcohol ban at this location until there has been an attempt at mediation between the primary user group and the neighbors of the park. Ms. Hoover reminded the committee members that the Parks Advisory Committee is just that, a group of members who advise the Parks Manager on their thoughts and opinions of what they think is in the best interest of all the parks in its jurisdiction, and that the Parks Manager can consider their recommendations when making his decisions and communications to the BCC.

**Motion (Damien Gilbert): The PAC to disregard their previous recommendation for 30-day temporary alcohol ban at Whitely Landing and to not pursue a permanent alcohol ban at this location at this time.**

**Second: Carl Stiefbold**

**Motion passed (3 in favor, 2 opposed)**

**Mr. Russell will prepare a Board packet and proceed with a recommendation for a 30-day temporary ban and to suggest that the parties seek remediation with the help of the Parks division before he considers any other action.**

ii. Information Item: Mike Russell discussed the upcoming budget meeting scheduled for this Thursday, May 17, 2012 where the budget committee will begin considering reductions of staff

and loss of services and the use of discretionary funds in the form of car rental taxes (CRT). Lane County Parks' budget currently relies on approximately \$260,000 per year in CRT for its funding. The Board will consider taking either all, a portion of that funding from Parks to fund some of those services. This would result in an 11% - 12% reduction to the Parks annual budget. If the budget committee approves that decision, the Parks Manager will begin to consider options such as reducing maintenance at some of the lower use parks and boat ramps, selling some of the surplus properties that the department will not have funding to enhance, and raising the cost of Day Use and Annual parks passes. Another option which parks staff is already exploring is increasing the number and type of events happening in the event fields in the Howard Buford Recreation Area (HBRA). On average, HBRA entertains 4-5 events each year, ideally, 5-10 events could take place generating approximately \$25,000 per event in revenue. Because of interest which has already been generated in this area, Mr. Russell informed the committee that he approached the Board and requested special dispensation of CRT to help fund the installation of electricity for the event fields at HBRA to accommodate the larger venues mentioned. This request was approved.

iii. Information Item – Parks Supervisor Selection – Mike Russell introduced Supervisor Ranger Todd Bowen as the replacement for Phillip Guyette who will be retiring May 31, 2012. Ranger Bowen will begin in his new capacity effective June 1, 2012.

iv. Information Item – Mr. Russell also advised that the Parks office will officially move into its new location in the Lane County Public Works Customer Service Center (CSC) on June 1, 2012. The address of the CSC is 3050 N. Delta Hwy, Eugene, OR. 97408. The first day of business for the CSC will be Monday, June 4<sup>th</sup>.

v. Information Item – The Richardson Park marina dock replacement has been completed and there will be a press event and a Grand Opening celebration for the public on May 18<sup>th</sup> with a ribbon cutting ceremony at 4:15 p.m. There will be live music, and a bbq picnic beginning at 5:00 p.m. sponsored by Sanipac.

- 2) i. **Action Item** - Natural Areas Update – John Moriarty gave a presentation on a restoration project that Lane County Parks appreciate support from the PAC regarding the Meadowlark Oak Savannah in the Howard Burford Recreation Area (HBRA). The restoration project is consistent with statewide management goals as well as habitat management goals and will involve an area of approximately 24 acres in the SE corner of the park. HBRA itself consists of more than 2,000 acres. The project is an effort between the Friends of Buford Park and Lane County Parks in tree and brush removal to encourage oak tree crown growth as well as natural areas and wildlife habitat. The Meadowlark Oak Savannah project is being presented to reduce the loss created by the encroachment of fast-growing Douglas fir forest, big leaf maple, spruce, and some incense cedar that over-top and suppress and kill the oak savannah below. There are more than 200 native wildlife species including the state bird, the western meadowlark, which take advantage of oak savannah habitat. HBRA currently has some of the largest oak habitat remaining in the

state of Oregon and the goal is to protect that habitat and to encourage conservation of the area. In order to do so, the removal of thousands of stems of trees (approx. 20,000 bd. ft.), stumps and slash would be removed or ground to ground level. In addition to protection of the oak savannah, the removal of trees and brush will aide in fire suppression within HBRA. Lane County Parks will attempt to reuse the wood within the park where possible or sell off for a value to help defray costs of the construction project. Funding for the project is supported by the Oregon Department of Fish & Wildlife with a grant from the Oregon Watershed Enhancement Board. It will be important to get the message out to the public as to the benefits of the project, but that this will also be a logging operation within in the park.

Due to the seasonal conditions required for this type of project, Mr. Moriarty is asking the PAC to endorse this effort so that when the Parks department goes to the Board of Commissioners to present this project as an informational only item, the commissioners will be aware of the impact the project will make and the amount of public feedback that may be involved.

**Motion (Les Weinstein): The PAC moved to endorse the project**

**Second: Cat Koehn**

**No further discussion.**

**Motion passed unanimously (5 in favor, 0 opposed)**

ii. Parks Tour – Mr. Moriarty confirmed that the annual Parks Tour which takes the place of the June Parks Advisory Committee meeting will be held Saturday, June 9<sup>th</sup> this year. The plan is to tour Vickery Park in conjunction with the McKenzie River Trust to view its Berggren Watershed Conservation Area immediately next to Vickery Park, to also visit Richardson Park to view the newly completed marina dock replacement, and a stop at Whitely Landing park.

**3) Good of the Order/Concerns of the Committee – None noted**

**4) Adjournment – Meeting adjourned at 8:36 p.m.**

The next meeting is scheduled for September 10, 2012 at 6:00 p.m.