

Minutes of December 8, 2011 Meeting

Denver Parks and Recreation Advisory Board

Attending. Darrell Watson, Leslie Twarogowski, Keith Pryor, Anne Green, James Coleman, Ronald Picaso, Michelle Fenton, Mary Ewing, Florence Navarro, Derek Sandos, Jason Robinson, Noel Copeland, Jay April, Dan Smink

Parks and Recreation employees in attendance were Lauri Dannemiller, Scott Gilmore, Erin Brown.

5.30 pm Minutes from November meeting were approved.

Manager's Report

Lauri Dannemiller introduced Scott Gilmore as the new Deputy Manager of Parks and Erin Brown as the new Deputy Manager of Recreation.

Lauri spoke to Dody Erickson and Fred Weiss regarding fee increases for facilities. She has decided to delay the implementation of the recently approved fee increase. She would like to have a more consistent and predictable policy for fee increases and she does not believe that this delay will have a significant effect on the 2012 budget. Lauri said that the proposed fee increases were inconsistent and were based on various and sometimes illogical data. Lauri said that she'd like to bring a more standard and consistent fee increase structure to the Board in two to three months.

Darrell Watson gave her a handless applause for this decision, especially as it relates to public feedback he'd received regarding the fee increases.

Lauri, Erin, and Dolores Moreno looked at long-term users and special considerations. They spoke to the city attorney who said that they CAN accommodate longer term users (such as the Denver Squids swim team) for periods of six months at a time. For instance, a group can schedule time from December to May, with arrangements made by November 1st.

5.43 Anne Green arrives

Lauri continued talking about the specifics of special consideration circumstances. 50 percent reduction in fees would be considered for some nonprofits. These groups must prove a benefit to the community. Some nonprofits might receive a reduction larger than fifty percent.

Lauri updated the Board on the proposed Washington Park trail rerouting. A meeting on November 16th had approximately forty five citizens in attendance. Lauri stated that some of the citizens aren't considering the health of the trees or the safety of runners in this situation. A couple of suggestions were made by the audience and are under consideration. The next meeting will take place January 10th at Steele Elementary School.

Lauri gave the board an update on the Occupy Denver protesters. She said that there has not been a lot of activity for her department beyond some minor graffiti removal. General rules of the park have been respected.

Lauri stated that the department has recently received some great press coverage by Jeremy Meyer of the Denver Post regarding their refurbishment of the Washington Park boathouse and the City Park pavilion.

Scott Gilmore introduced Gordon Robertson to discuss the River North project. Gordon explained how the future park might look. A company called Civitas has done models and conceptual designs, which were presented to the Board. Parks and Rec will work with Public Works to realign Arkins Court. A developer offered to donate 1.2 acres to the future project, which may take several years or more to realize. A large old building on the site might be preserved as an open-air pavilion that might host art shows, movies, etc.

Darrell asked the new board members to introduce themselves.

James Coleman introduced himself as the Director of Programs and Community Outreach at ACE Scholarships.

Ronald Picaso introduced himself as a long-time Parks Department employee. He is currently retired.

Michelle Fenton said that this is her last meeting with the Board. Darrell thanked her for her service.

6.00 Bob Finch, Director of Natural Resources, said that the department was looking at resources to update the Buffalo Bill museum and other mountain park plans. They are considering updating regulations regarding administrative citation processes. Currently the Department must call the local police to solve problems that an administrative citation process would handle, such as climbing on Red Rocks, trail-only usage, dogs in parks, etc. His department will have a progressive compliance process structure, with first contact, written warnings, etc. According to the City Charter, the Manager has the power to adopt regulations like these, but must bring them before PRAB. After that, a forty five day period must be observed before the policy can be put into place.

Among other changes, the Department wants to set a curfew for mountain parks, currently 11 pm, to be changed to sunrise-to-sunset open hours at the request of Jefferson County. They'd also like to implement a use-by-trail-only regulation in these mountain parks, some of which are fragile tundra environments. Also, trails will be demarcated for specific uses, such as bikes vs. pedestrians. Also, bicycle speed limits are being considered. Wildlife feeding might also become an offense.

Keith Pryor asked how many new rangers that these new policies might require. One full time ranger plus one or two seasonal rangers in each park district might be needed. Currently Denver has three full-time rangers overseeing five districts.

These changes are not so much about enforcement but to provide a means to teach the public how to properly use the parks.

Keith Pryor noted that a constituent has pushed for more rock climbing opportunities, and asked if a possible space for that use might be located. He also has significant concerns regarding the possible bicycle speed limit and encouraged more creative solutions to meet Mayor Hancock's goals of ten percent bicycle-to-work commuters.

Pryor also noted that some parks – like those in New York City – require all adults to be accompanied by children on playgrounds. This might be a good policy for downtown playgrounds which sometimes have homeless adults on playgrounds.

Bob Finch replied that they can leave bicycle speeds and playground regulations out of the current regulation rewrite so that those issues can be more fully vetted.

Darrell Watson started a discussion regarding values committees and these new regulations, and asked to see timelines be stuck to so that these policy issues wouldn't turn into a year-long discussion. Lauri said that she'd also like to see timelines shortened. Keith involuntarily volunteered to see this process through to fruition. Patrick Wheeler in the city attorney's office is working on these proposed changes, which have been discussed for many years.

Lauri said that she'd have an informal meeting with city council on these issues to gain feedback. She wants feedback before, not after, these regulations are put into place. Noel does not want to volunteer, but wants to address signage, such as on tennis courts which have long lists of what NOT to do. Bob Finch said that in the future, they'd like to propose entire packages based on usage, such as a Tennis package, a boating package, a policy set regarding sports fields, etc. Bob said that the signage should mirror regulations, and the first thing the Department needs to do is clean up the regulations. Pryor suggested that we should engage INC, City Park Alliance, etc. and Watson added that he has other neighborhood group suggestions for this process.

6.45 Values Committee discussion begins

Darrell spoke regarding the Engagement Committee and encouraged all committees to meet at least once a month. The committees are Engagement, Equity, Sound Economics and Sustainability. Darrell explained that his committee, Engagement, wants to expand communication with groups like INC and FANS.

Keith Pryor have a brief talk about Sustainability. They talk about projects such as the new bathrooms at City Park and radio-controlled water irrigation, concrete that allows water to seep through instead of running off into the wastewater system.

Noel spoke of the Equity committee, which wants to ensure equitable park usage, and whether opportunities are equal for different types of users in different geographical regions of the city.

Jay April gave a brief talk regarding the Sound Economics committee. They meet monthly at Racine's and often include Fred Weiss. They review budgets and make recommendations.

Dan Smink volunteered to be on the Sound Economics committee. Jason Robinson and Anne Green volunteered for the Sustainability committee. Derek Sandos said that he'd like to stay on the Equity committee. Derek also announced that a Christmas gift charitable event would take place at North High School on December 17th at 7 pm.

Darrell asked if it is possible to set up a public PRAB blog on the denvergov.org website to offer opportunities for public comment and ease external/internal communication. LinkedIn won't work because it is not public, but a possibility of a Google-based group was discussed. Darrell asked if the Board could get a more specific demographic profile of those citizens attending meetings. For instance, at the Wash Park meeting, how many attendees were FANS? Lauri said that this is sometimes difficult to discern.

Mary Ewing thanked Scott Gilmore for his thoughtful comments at the Washington Park/FANS meeting.

7.10 Meeting adjourned.

