

Meeting Summary – Parks and Recreation Council October 6, 2021

Virtual Meeting- Zoom

Members Present: Haywood Rhodes (Chair), John Greeson (Vice- Chair), Andrew Landstrom, Tim Tippin, Chris Colvin, Greg Hughes, Xilong Zhao,

Members Absent: Cecily Kritz, Gina Reyman, Mikki Fleming, Robert Smith

Staff: David Stancil, Beth Young, Kalani Allen, Dan Derby

Public Viewer: Lindsey Ware, UNC Journalism student

Chair Haywood Rhodes called meeting to open at 6:33pm. DEAPR Director David Stancil introduced Kalani Allen the new Administrative Support for Orange County DEAPR. The September 1st meeting notes were reviewed and accepted.

Report of the Chair: Chair Rhodes discussed appointment of a new member. Rhodes stated that other applications may have been submitted that Council was not aware of. David Stancil responded that the Clerk's office is transitioning to new software for their database applicants, and it is not always communicating with the database on Intranet. Stancil explained factors that BOCC may have used on decision to appoint the new council member Natalie Ziemba on October 5. Stancil stated BOCC office did send official notice of appointment of Ms. Ziemba to him and Kalani Allen this afternoon. Stancil added that a welcome package will be sent to Ms. Ziemba and he expects her to be at the November meeting. Stancil explained that PRC is currently full with 12 members.

New business: Chair and Vice –Chair Elections- Chair Rhodes opened the floor for members to nominate for chair and vice chair. Tim Tippin raised the question whether someone can nominate individuals not in attendance. Rhodes asked Stancil if he has heard from anyone else that may have expressed interested. Stancil said he had not heard, from any members about nominations prior to the meeting. Tippin asked if the council had to do the elections today as there seems there was not a lot of interest. Stancil responded that chair and vice-chair terms have expired, but if there is a failure to take action they can continue in their capacity until the Council can replace them. Stancil explained the roles for chair and vice-chair. Xilong Zhao stated that if someone is serving a second term maybe they can continue in their positions until their terms expire. Stancil stated that the officers are a one year appointment and typically a chair can serve three consecutive terms, but that is not required. Stancil stated that, for example, current vice-chair John Greeson could serve as the chair until he rotates off in March 2022. Greeson responded that he can do that if it helps out the Council. Stancil added that Greeson could serve as chair for the next five months as his term will end in March 2022 and a new chair would need to be elected in March 2022. Zhao responded and said that he can step in and be Vice-Chair. Rhodes stated Greeson has agreed to serve and nominated him for Chair. Rhodes asked for last call for nominations for chair. No other responses for nominations for chair were given. The Council agreed that Greeson was approved by acclamation to be chair.

Vice-Chair Elections- Rhodes and Stancil asked Zhao if he is fine taking the vice chair role as he expressed interest. Rhodes explained the roles of vice chair. Stancil responded that DEAPR staff Beth Young and Kalani Allen will help Greeson and Zhao as well. Zhao said that he encourages other council members to serve but would serve as interim. Rhodes said council has a quorum tonight and can vote. Rhodes explained that Zhao can be vice chair and later on give others the opportunity to serve. Stancil asked Zhao if he would serve as interim vice chair until a new time comes that will occur at a later time. Zhao agreed. The Council approved Zhao as vice-chair.

Parks Division Annual Update- Dan Derby, Superintendent of Parks provided his annual update to the Council. Derby spoke on the tremendous usage increase of parks due to COVID 19 and the reopening of athletic activities ranging from soccer, baseball and football. He added that this fiscal year has presented staffing issues for the Parks division. Parks has gone from the usual 12 seasonal staff to 7, and currently now having 3 seasonal workers. Derby said staff have worked really hard to make sure events are able to be held and fields ready for activities. He gave a history of the changes in Orange County Parks system from when he was hired in 2004, from going from 4 parks to now 12, and 200 acres to about 1300 acres of land that make up parks and preserves as of 2021. Derby gave an update on the Blackwood Farm Park that is currently closed for renovations. The County hopes to reopen the park in a year. Derby closed with updates on the Mountains to Sea trail (MST). Tippin asked if Derby could give a status update about MST near Seven Mile Creek and how close it is to being connected to Oconeechee Mountain State Natural Area. Derby spoke on his view of the MST. Derby noted that the County and partners have purchased property and are looking to connecting to trails in Orange County, and looking for solutions as it relates to Highway I-40. Greg Hughes asked about the location of the North Campus and if it is an office space only or recreation. Derby replied that it is office and facility maintenance space only. Stancil added that the North Campus does house the new Parks Operations Base, a central location for Parks to have supplies and equipment located, and he noted that he has discussed an open house for the council and others to come visit the new facilities. Hughes asked did the new location free up space for other use somewhere else. Stancil explained the old location on Millhouse Road was shut down and staff were relocated to a mobile unit, but are now are in the new facility at North Campus which is more centralized. Dan Derby provided his contact information to the council in case anyone would like to reach out to him.

Old Business: Mountain to Sea Trail (MST) - Stancil provided a document showing maps of the route for the MST. Stancil explained the three phases of the capital investment plan that are guiding the work. Phase one was based on funding from the state and their interest to extend the existing MST before beginning to build new sections. The idea was to get from Riverwalk and Gold Park to Oconeechee Mountain then across Dimmocks Mill Road and into the Seven Mile Creek Natural Area. Stancil explained that the Eno River Association and Town of Hillsborough secured a way to get to Oconeechee Mountain. Currently trailwork is underway within the Oconeechee Mountain State Natural Area. Stancil added that negotiations are still in process with other landowners in between the two points, but have had progress working with the Friends of MST and Eno River Association. Stancil then outlined the projected route for hikers for MST. Currently there is a push to get pedestrian crossing lights on both sides of interstate bridge on Dimmocks Mill Road. Stancil spoke about the conservation easement with the Friends of Moorefields. Stancil stated the second phase is the section from Alamance County near the Cane Creek Reservoir. Stancil added lands owned by OWASA were approved for the MST to traverse on their property from Buckhorn Road and that efforts with other willing landowners were nearing conclusion for adjoining properties (as shown on the map). Stancil went over expectations for the MST route through Bradshaw Quarry Road to connect to Saxapahaw and Alamance County. Stancil explained the reason for the connection of Saxapahaw and Hillsborough towns. An update on MST work was presented to the BOCC on September 14. Greeson asked about Saxapahaw-Bethlehem Church Road and the safety of getting onto the trail. Stancil explained that the connection into Alamance will be on an adjoining road. He also described new easements along NC 54.

Parks and Recreation Master Plan 2030 Review- The 2030 Master Plan document was reviewed from last meeting regarding the progress of the recommendations. Stancil said a lot of the funding identified in 2014 has been redirected to other needs given new and changed situations since 2014. Stancil explained that in November and December the Council would need to start to talk about the work plan for 2022, and whether any of these items should be part of that. Stancil proposed the question does the council have any priorities among the recommendation for the Master Plan in the upcoming year. Chair Rhodes asked what enrollment looked like in the fall for soccer and other programs. Stancil answered that numbers were 68%

of pre-COVID and that generally the County was seeing 2/3 of normal this Fall for participants in recreation activities. Chair Greeson asked about basketball, as that activity was one where the County had to partner up with other facilities due to only having one gym. Stancil said the Recreation division is in the middle of enrollment for youth and adult basketball leagues, and did not have an answer but would have one later on. Rhodes said priority would be maintaining what council has as it relates to working partnerships with schools and sports classes, as that would be more achievable in the next year or two. Hughes agreed that to enhance the plan would be best and asked what kind of utilization of facilities can be enhanced. He asked about partnership with HYAA to utilize any fields that are available and not used. Stancil stated that there is already an agreement with HYAA which provides heavy usage of the fields. Greeson suggested that the ideas that can advance without financing would be able to drive the council forward. Stancil suggested that staff could provide a graded matrix to provide the council with focal points going into with 2022, for the Council's review in November and or December.

Report of the Director- Projects and Programs Update- Stancil reviewed the Soccer.com facility first games. Stancil noted the fields looked good and participation was strong, even had selling of concessions. Stancil did report the County has had a first COVID protocol in the U-15 (under 15) youth soccer league and that league is currently not operating. No other cases have been reported and the league is in quarantine for 10 to 14 day period. Stancil noted that interviews for the Recreation Supervisor position were happening this week. The County is still looking to fill the Turfgrass Manager, which is needed soon to get fields ready for the spring.

November meeting (Racial Equity Plan, Fairview Landfill) – At a previous meeting the council agreed to look at the Racial Equity plan this meeting but Stancil said this may be moved to the November meeting as public hearings are behind schedule. Fairview Landfill- the mitigation work is still in process. Stancil states the state is working on their final plan, and staff hopes that is can be shared with the Fairview Community Watch in November. If the plan is ready by November 3 it will be shared with the council at the November meeting. Stancil suggested that the council may need to change items from November to December moving forward based on the schedule.

Council and Committee Reports:

Intergovernmental Parks Work Group will meet October 13, 2021. Cecily Kritz is the representative from PRC. Kritz will attend the meeting and give a report. Stancil stated they will be getting the report on the Racial Equity Plan at their meeting but it is the same report PRC saw in the summer.

No other Items from the Council.

Friends of Orange County Parks and Recreation – Greeson stated 501c3 status was approved so they are an officially non-profit organization able to take donations. He added they are working on a website - loveorangeparks.org is the domain name for the website. Greeson said the organization is ready to help with projects that need funding and also welcome donations. Stancil asked if the organization is ready to push information out to social media. Greeson answered that he would like to get the website online first and then promote on social media.

The meeting was adjourned at 8:11pm. The next meeting will be held virtually November 3rd.