



## **Parks and Recreation Commission Meeting Minutes**

December 13, 2023

The Centre at University Park

**Attendance:** Matt Buie, Samuel Ellis, Cannon Fletcher, Ben France, Linda Smith, Summer Campbell, Chemia Woods

**Absent:** Lauren Eldridge, James Ferstl, Mike Bernardo, Ron Bara, Capi Peck

**City Board of Director Liaison:** City Director Andrea Lewis

**LRPR Staff:** Leland Couch - Parks Director, Angela Nelson - Deputy Director/Administration, Shawanda Robinson - Deputy Director/Recreation Services, Justin Dorsey - Deputy Director/Operations, Beth Carpenter - City Attorney, Courtney Perry - Safety and Training Coordinator, Susie Matheny - Facility Recreation Supervisor, Michael Simmons - Parks and Recreation Outdoor Coordinator, Brittany Nichols - Parks Marketing and Social Media Coordinator

**Welcome, and Introductions:** Chairman Buie called meeting to order. Recognized that 6 members are present, giving them a Quorum that allows them to proceed with business.

**Roll Call and Approval of Minutes:** Chairman Buie asked for changes to meeting November meeting minutes. Commissioner's Fletcher and France, along with Director Couch all advised that they were not present during the previous meeting. Chairman Buie asked that the November meeting minutes be adjusted to reflect the changes. Commissioner Woods asked that the minutes be amended to reflect that she was present at the meeting. Chairman Buie asked for a Motion to approve amended minutes. Commissioner Fletcher made the Motion. Motion 2<sup>nd</sup>, by France. No discussion, Motion passed.

**Citizen Communication:** No Citizen communication

Chairman Buie, called for Deputy Director Angela Nelson to give her staff report but she stepped out. Director Leland Couch asked that Deputy Director Shawanda Craig give her report.

### **Staff Reports:**

#### Recreation

Deputy Director Shawanda Craig stated that she was going to talk about the community centers. We have 5 Community Centers. East Little Rock, Dunbar, Southwest, Stephens, and West Central. They're getting ready for the youth basketball league. The league starts on January 8, 2024. Each location Latchkey, programs are doing holiday events and having different activities



for them to do up until the end of this week, when school ends on the 15<sup>th</sup>. Each location is preparing their 2024 calendar of events. They're working on various programs, activities, and events. We're working on implementing Steam & Stem projects. Looking to implement other various programs such as aviation and coding in our programs in 2024.

Commissioner France asked who teaches the STEM programs. Shawanda stated that they're looking for instructors and partnering with different entities who are already doing these types of programs. She asked if they knew of anyone to reach out to her and let her know also. The USA is falling behind when it comes to these types of programs, so they want to implement these type programs. In the near future most of the jobs will be going in that area.

Sherrie is here to do a presentation so she will let her talk about the Therapeutic division. The McArthur Museum is still doing their community center and school outreach program and working on various programs for 2024. They are hosting a movie at McArthur, "Silkies Hike", and participated in "Corvettes and Veterans. They also, joined 140 museums around the world, including 38 museums in the U.S. to screen *The War to End All Wars – The Movie* and lots of other interesting events. If you had not had a chance to go by the MacArthur Museum, please go by, they will be open during the holidays.

We have our Outdoor Recreation Coordinator on board. He has Facilitated 3 weeks of the Walk in the Park program. The program will take place in 6 different city parks and will continue until Dec 16<sup>th</sup>. Set a date for a collaborative program with The Orienteering of Central Arkansas club. We will be hosting a "Basics of map and Compass Skills" class on Dec 7th and Dec 10th. Deputy Director Craig asked if the program had already started and was told yes it had started. Deputy Director Craig, said that she's a little behind, she's just getting back. This concludes the report. She asked if there were any questions.

Chairman Buie asked if they were any questions. Commissioner France asked when she wanted to start the STEAM program. Deputy Director Craig said that they haven't set the programs yet. We're just looking to implement them into the way they program the centers. Chairman Buie welcomed Shawanda back, she's been out for 6 weeks. Sue Matheny has been great filling in at the office for her. We appreciate her. Welcome back, Shawanda. Director Couch, proceeded to move on to Operations.

### Operations

Deputy Director Justin Dorsey stated that, this time from Thanksgiving through Christmas is a difficult time, with everyone taking time off so, were running a little bit shorthanded. Some of the keys that we've been working on with the time change and it is getting dark sooner. There have been a lot of requests for various streetlights around the city, coming from the mayor's office and different other organizations. Even Forestry has all been working to fulfill those requests and we appreciate them. Design and projects Jim Dailey was successfully bid and is still in the works. In the process of working with the City Attorney's office to finalize that contract



and should be issuing a notice to proceed with that project soon. The Allsopp North Bike Trail had a bid that closed with one successful bid. We're just in the process of reviewing the specifications with ARDOT making sure that it's to standard and hopefully we'll be able to take to the board in January and move on with that project.

An update on Interstate is nearing completion. They've gotten all the paving done on the road. They just have some minor punch list items to correct. We're going to put some new signs on the road that we'll be installing there. It's going to be a big improvement to the park.

Western Hills is another big update. The restroom facility is nearing completion, and those permits are in place. Hopefully we'll have utilities installed by the end of the week and that new facility is scheduled to be delivered on January 9<sup>th</sup>. So, it will be exciting to see that work come to completion. There has also been some work started at Reservoir. If you've been there lately you, know how badly it was destroyed by the tornado back in March. It was just taking some on that, so while we had the staff on short crews, we got some staff out there getting started on some demolition. We are in the process of moving and installing some new sculptors in Riverfront Park. So, if you get a chance to walk down there you will notice that.

We are working with LRPD to get cameras connected to the Real Time Crime Center. Asher, Jim Dailey, Rebsamen and Landscape are completed. That's thanks to Chad for getting all of that done. Commissioner Fletcher asked a question about the timeline for completion of the Jim Dailey project. Deputy Director Dorsey advised that it's a 32-week project from the notice to proceed. Director Couch also advised that Parks has just completed getting all of the signatures needed on their end and it is said that the contractors are getting it signed on their end. Director Couch acknowledged and thanked Beth for assisting in that process and that we're moving forward.

### Administration

Deputy Director Angela Nelson reported that they're finalizing the requested licensing requirements. They've completed revenue reconciling. We have various facilities that must input data for revenue so we're finalizing that. Accounting for all payroll records, making sure there are no discrepancies or corrections that need to be made before the year ends. Compiling records from Reservation systems Making sure that all things are documented as they should be for the New year. Also completing procedural and Petty cash audits verifying for accuracy and making sure that everything is accounted for as well.

We're tasked with the yearly performance evaluations that will end on December 31<sup>st</sup>. We have filled quite a few positions and some of those employees and candidates who filled those positions are here today. We have the Parks Marketing & Social Media Coordinator, the Parks Downtown Landscape Coordinator, the Parks Outdoor Recreation Coordinator. We have an Administrative Assistant that will come on board. We have a Trails Coordinator, Supervisor I



(Operations), Therapeutic Specialist and a Therapeutic Recreation Programmer. All these positions will be filled in December, so this is major progress that we have made on that front. As you can see below, we still have some positions that still need to be filled, they are Part-time Secretary, Parks Maintenance Worker Seniors (Community Garden Liaison & Operations), Parks Construction Worker II, Parks Maintenance Workers II, Leader, Assistant Aquatic Specialist, Recreation Programmer (Stephens).

We're always trying to improve our productivity and efficiency. We're continuing monitoring invoices and spending needs. We're focusing on savings and cutting some costs in some areas that will make us run more efficiently. I want to thank IT for helping with cutting costs. This will be a main focus going into the New Year. Chairman Buie, thanks Deputy Director Nelson for her report and asked if there were any questions. Commissioner Fletcher addressed their question to Angela, Leland, or any other member of the Parks Staff present. He asked, where are we at now at the end of the year verses last December? Is morale better? Are positions filled? Director Couch responded and stated that, as he mentioned in the budget meeting for the city, is that a year ago, we were missing a lot of the upper-level positions but, we've been able to fill a lot of the positions and some staff are here to introduce themselves. But we have lost some of the Construction and Maintenance staff. So, we've had to rotate staff around to fill positions as people have left. We're having a hard time getting new staff in, at those levels, and skilled positions such as carpenters, and mason type positions. The vacancy level has stayed about the same at 20 people. Angela responded and stated that people are always seeking employment so that's something that will be somewhat constant. The beginning of the year they were at 30 vacancies and now they're doing good.

### Safety and Training

Safety and Training Coordinator, Courtney Perry stated that he was going to run through the reports from January to December 2023. This first slide, each month I send out Safety Education and Training to all divisions and these numbers here represent the rate of return that these numbers come back to me as complete; See the basic trend of it. December is Zero, because all of the numbers have not come in yet. Go to the next slide. The same idea here. This represents how we did overall as an organization. Chairman Buie, asked question if these were employees who were taking the training Coordinator Perry, explained that he creates a training each month and sends it out and after they complete it, these are the number of people who respond to him. This slide was for overall as an Organization and Individually. The same deal with the AED training, each unit is supposed to check their AED each month and get back to me that they've done. This is real important and should be better across the board but he's working on that. This is how we've overall as an organization in 2023. Zero down here for War Memorial. The facility has been closed, just up until a month ago. That's why they reflect Zero. Again, this is each facility. Each supervisor inspects their facility every month and then gets back to me that it's



been done, and these are the percentages. Again, December is Zero and Overall, how we're doing as an organization.

In addition to all of that I tally all of the incidents and do some math. This slide is from 2011 to 2022. What this is telling us here is that if you're in between the yellow line and the red line you're doing pretty good. Those who are outside of that need some work. This is also from 2011 to 2022 so the numbers are more dramatic. These actually are 2022 numbers, which kind of give an idea of where we are. This gives us an idea of where each division is. Those who are over the red line, we are addressing with training and such. So, this is pretty much the form. Each person is important in safety risk management, so this is their opportunity to communicate with me, so this form allows them to communicate with me. This is a hazard form in which they can communicate with me about the hazards that they see. Chairman Buie asked for questions.

Commissioner Smith asked, how many employees are trained to use the AED at each facility? How often were they used in a health emergency last year? Courtney responded that he wasn't sure of the number at each facility and that we have 180 parks. He stated that he'd look into that. He stated that we have not had to use one in real time. But the important thing is to be prepared. Director Couch asked Perry to answer the question in reference to how many people he had put through the training. Perry advised that in reference to the AED and CPR trainings, that at least 2 people per unit, per division who are AED, CPR, and First Aid trained and that they had been doing pretty good on that. Shawanda Craig added that they have not had to use the AED this year, but they have 53 full staff have been trained for use and the Maintenance crew, but she was unaware how many maintenance people were trained.

Chairman Buie thanked everyone for their reports. He opened the Floor to Director Couch for Introductions. Director Couch Introduced and Welcomed Parks Marketing & Social-Media - *Welcome Brittany Nichols*. Director Couch Introduced and Parks Outdoor Recreation - *Welcome Michael Simmons*. Chairman Buie thanked everyone and welcomed them aboard.

Chairman Buie recognized Director Couch, who has a special guest.

Director Couch introduced Sherrie Shinn, who is the Therapeutic Recreation Program Coordinator. She has been with the Parks department for over 20 years, and she does a lot for the Department. The Board requested her to be at the meeting last month, but she had a scheduling conflict. She is here today to present her report.

#### Presentation on Therapeutic Recreation Program by Sherrie Shinn:

Sherrie Shinn presented a report on the Therapeutic Recreation Program.

Youth Programming -The division offers a 6-week summer day camp program for youth with individual recreation plans and goals. They use the children's individual education plans from



the school district to create continuity between school and summer goals. The programming focuses on introducing recreation and leisure experiences and improving social skills and community integration. Therapeutic Recreation Facility-The division has the only community-based therapeutic recreation facility in Arkansas. They provide recreation and leisure opportunities for citizens with disabilities and emphasize the importance of support and intentionality from the city. They are the only facility in the regional area and even in other states like Oklahoma and Texas that offer similar programs. Branch Out Program -The adult program called the Branch Out Program runs four days a week and focuses on participant-led programming. The participants have input and choice in programming to improve their quality of life and increase skill sets in their interests. The program aims to integrate participants into the community by visiting parks and other facilities and building relationships with parks and recreation staff.

Volunteer Service and Advocacy-The division engages in volunteer service within the department and the city, including the Little Rock Zoo. They provide advocacy and bridge the gap between the disability community and the city. They also aim to be a resource for other divisions in the department for programming for persons with disabilities. Upcoming Events are a Christmas program coming up at Wildwood Park for the Arts, where participants will perform a play called, A Redneck Reindeer. The program gives participants the opportunity to gain confidence and perform for friends and family. They are excited about upcoming conversations with Ms. Shawanda and potential future programming initiatives.

Youth and Adult Program Numbers - The youth program has 18 to 22 participants, and the adult program has 20 to 21 participants. The program ratios are maintained at 1 staff to 5 participants for safety and therapeutic value. Transportation availability and accessibility influence the program numbers. We have a new van that carries 2 wheelchairs and 12 seats. Chairman Buie thanked Sherrie for her report.

Chairman Buie covered the following:

#### Old Business

Recognized that they heard from Little Rock Police Chief Helton and that they did not have any discussion on the second point of the Recreational Resources for the Elderly in Parks, and we've already covered the upcoming events and will strike the Old Business from the next meeting agenda.

New Business First Item is regarding the use of Webex. The idea is that we want to do away with the use of Webex in the next year. Chairman Buie asked for comments. Commissioner France stated he wants to keep it. But doesn't want to impact anyone else. He stated that it's easier to attend when out of town. City Attorney Carpenter advised that per city the Resolution adopted by the Board of Directors regarding virtual meetings, it does require that the Board or Commission members must be located within the City of Little Rock during all meetings when attending virtually to be counted as attending. The only exception is when being out of town on City of



Little Rock business. She restated the Resolution. Chairman Buie recognized City Director Lewis, she stated that she would like for Director Couch to get her a copy of that Resolution because, she was out of the city in Conway when the meeting started and had made it to Little Rock, but she does not feel that this should matter if a member is able to log on. She will take it back to the Board to see if they want to change it because it may cause members to be untruthful about their location at the time of the meeting. City Attorney Beth Carpenter stated that she can send that to City Director Lewis. Commissioner Fletcher asked again when this was brought up? Per Chairman Buie, it's been a topic of conversation for some time since returning to in person meetings and was brought up again in the citizen communication in last meeting. Commissioner Fletcher remarked that due to the nature of his business, it's only been a fluke that he's been able to attend in person as much this year. He watched and feels, last week's comments were self-serving. Commissioner France asked if this could wait to January, since City Director Lewis wants to go over the Resolution. Chairman Buie asked if this was a motion to table. Commissioner France, Made a motion to table Webex Discussion. Commissioner Ellis 2<sup>nd</sup> motion. Voted on Motion. Motion carried to Table discussion on Webex to January Meeting

Chairman Buie, moved onto the topic of upcoming Chairman and Vice Chairman Elections. Next month at the beginning of the meeting, will call for elections for these positions. Advised that he, along with Director Couch, and City Attorney Carpenter are available for questions and encouraged the Commission to review Bylaws to see if that's something they want to do, he is leaving next month, he advised that when the election is held, they will assume their role immediately. Director Couch advised that unbeknownst to Brittany that Mike Garrity was the Social Media Lead but since she's now in the role she will be assuming those duties. Director Couch advised of the upcoming events, The Ugly Sweater Face on Saturday 9a-11a at Two Rivers Park and Fun Walk at War Memorial on December 30<sup>th</sup>, it's a special event. We're not hosting it. Little Rock Runners group is hosting it. It's a holiday event.

Chairman Buie, asked to move on quickly to the next items in the report. The Master Plan Report - Commissioner Smith didn't have any update but wants to review the approved Budget to use as a discussion point with Master plan and have a copy of it. Director Couch advised that the budget had been passed and that Parks got a little more money allocated to them. He thanked the Board of Directors and said that he doesn't know how it will be allocated yet but that he's working with staff to figure it out. He also advised that the budget is on the City of Little Rock website and available to be viewed there.

Chairman Buie, asked for the Social Media Report. Social Media Outreach Report Update-Commissioner France stated that he didn't have an update and had just spoken with Matt. Not sure, may need a subcommittee since the Social Media Coordinator, Brittany Nichols is here. Will meet next for ideas.

Chairman Buie stated that for new Commissioners and staff, The Parks Conservancy Friends program is still active with the Commissioners here. If you want to be a friend, you can sign up online today. Chairman Buie stated that attendance must be better and need to be kept their eye



on. Stated that in the Bylaws if you're missing a certain number of meetings, you are subject to removal. City Attorney Carpenter, read the City Ordinance about removal and that you can be immediately removed if you miss more than 25% of meetings within a year or more than 3 consecutive meetings. The Board members can petition the City for appeal. Chairman Buie, asked for any additional agenda items that need to be added to the next month, January 2024 Agenda. There was no response. Chairman Buie asked for feedback from Director Lewis. City Director Lewis remarked that she is looking forward to learning more about the newly approved Parks budget and wants an update for the Kiwanis improvements, slated for Spring 2024 and welcomed Brittany Nichols and Michael Simmons. Thanks, Merry Christmas, and Happy New Year.

Chairman Buie remarked that he is coming to the end of his 6 year term. He stated that he has enjoyed getting to know everyone. He thanked Director Couch and City Attorney Carpenter for all their guidance along the way and partnership.

Chairman Buie adjourned the meeting at 1:02 pm.