



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

June 8, 2022, Minutes

The Centre at University Park

**Attendance:** Matt Buie, Ashley Martinez (Virtual), Linda Smith, Abby Jennings (Virtual), Cannon Fletcher, Director Doris Wright, Dustin Smith (Virtual), Samuel Ellis

**Absent:** Lauren Eldridge, Ricardo Ante, Ren Bressinck, Demetria Murdock

**City Board of Director Liaison:** Director Capi Peck

**LRPR Staff:** City Attorney Beth Carpenter, Leland Couch, Angela Nelson, Shawanda Robinson, J.P. Rogers

**Welcome and Introductions:** Chairman Buie called the meeting to order and welcomed everyone present. Chairman Buie proceeded with the agenda to the roll call and approval of March's minutes.

**Roll Call and Approval of Minutes:** Deputy Director Angela Nelson called the roll and Chairman Buie reported a quorum was seven (7) members (four in person and three virtual) in attendance. Official business will be voted on during the meeting.

Chairman Buie then entertained a motion to approve the May commission meeting minutes.

The May commission meeting minutes were approved.

**Citizen Communication:** No citizen communication.

Chairman Buie then called for any staff reports.

**Staff Reports:** Director Leland Couch started staff reports by mentioning that he was covering operations, and mentioned that Parks Maintenance Manager J. P. Rogers would cover a few points on maintenance.

Director Couch spoke on operations, which included any construction projects that were going on. Many of these have been previously reported on in the past, so only updates were given. Kanis Park kickoff of the first pre-construction meeting is to take place next week. For MacArthur's all-inclusive playground, the Board approved another addition, a phase II to the project. He mentioned that it was very important to him to finish that project. Western Hills' playground was still under construction at the moment, and they were looking to purchase a pavilion and restroom to continue that project.

Right now, staff and construction crew are working at Rebsamen Pro Shop, since there were some failures down in the outdoor deck area, and improvements needed to happen. A new

treehouse was completed in Riverfront Park and a small grand opening will happen as soon as landscaping is complete.

The Dunbar Community Garden is working on a new sculpture at the entrance, that will start later in the fall. West Central plans for an outdoor recreation center will be happening soon. After the crew finishes the construction at Rebsamen, they will start on a new pavilion at West Central. Director Couch also mentioned a new cargo container getting delivered to start on some improvements. Those were just some of the upcoming and ongoing projects happening.

Director Couch gave way to questions, but none were asked at the time. Director Peck mentioned how she thought the new treehouse was very nice and that she enjoyed the view. Director Couch mentioned that the treehouse was right off the Arkansas River, and it was both developed and constructed by Parks staff.

Director Couch yielded the floor to Commissioner Buie for staff reports.

### Administration

Deputy Director of Administration, Angela Nelson, reported no updates.

### Recreation

Deputy Director of Recreation Services, Shawanda Robinson reported the Summer Playground Program, started June 7, 2022. Dunbar, has two-hundred and five (205) children, forty (40) at East Little Rock Community Center, one-hundred and twenty (120) at Stephens, about twenty-eight (28) at Watson, about twenty-six (26) at J.A. Fair (Teen Camp), and roughly thirty-five (35) at Romine. West Central Community Center has around one-hundred (100) children. She mentioned that she was looking forward to all of the fun activities that we have for the children at the Summer Programs and Camps.

Director Wright asked the number of children at East Little Rock, and made a correction about West Central's summer program. Wright mentioned that West Central did not have a Summer Playground Program, but was a Summer STEAM program, funded by Esser Grant, not the city.

Golf was the next topic. The Parks Commission Tournament was held on May 27<sup>th</sup> at Rebsamen Golf Course, but allowed Chairman Buie to speak more on that at a better time.

Tennis was the next topic. Two tournaments just finished. Both turned out great at Rebsamen Tennis Facility. We had the Wild Card and Little Rock Tennis Pro tournaments, where there were both large turnouts. Deputy Director Robinson got the chance to go out and enjoy some activities.

Therapeutics Recreation Division was the next topic, with their summer camp dates starting on the 6<sup>th</sup> of June as well. They have two locations, Ottenheimer Center and at War Memorial Pro Shop, where they will be until July 21<sup>st</sup>.

Pool openings were the next topic. Jim Dailey had a pool party known as \$1 Day on May 28, 2022. Over eighty (80) people attended, and there were giveaways and door prizes. They had live music, and refreshments. They will host The World's Largest Swim Lesson on the 23<sup>rd</sup> and

asked the Commission to stop by and check it out. Fitness in the Parks date has changed to June 28<sup>th</sup>, along with a Movie night, and Robinson advised them to join in.

Senior Programs was the next topic. They are busy doing their activities and programs as well as interacting with the children at those locations. They're doing their best to share the spaces

Deputy Director Robinson gave room for questions, to which Director Wright stated she did.

Director Wright asked about the sports aspect, to which Deputy Director Robinson spoke. Baseball was supposed to start on the 6<sup>th</sup>, but due to rain it was postponed. Director Wright asked about the number of teams, to which Deputy Director Robinson stated that there about thirty-five (35) to forty (40) teams. The category are three and four (3 & 4) year olds, five and six (5 & 6) year olds, seven and eight (7 & 8) year olds, and there are no twelve (12) year olds. The games will be played at West Central Community Center.

Track, and soccer are both coming up. Basketball clinics are going on at Dunbar on Saturdays, and Volleyball clinics are happening on Sundays. Basketball numbers are slow, with only two (2) to five (5) kids showing up, on the 4<sup>th</sup>, but it was the first time they met. The volleyball clinic has about twenty-five (25) to thirty (30) kids showing up.

With this, Deputy Director Robinson opened the floor to questions, but none were stated at the time.

### Parks Maintenance

Parks Maintenance Manager, J.P. Rogers opened parks maintenance reports by mentioned that the Board approved the contracts for our thirty (30) parks, eight (8) community centers, and three (3) large parks (Riverfront, Allsopp, and MacArthur) the previous night. Contractors are already out, and hopefully things will be caught up. They have been coming in early to start, because between the weather and other aspects, they have gotten behind. To the internal crew, there are still fifteen (15) parks. Seven (7) people have been hired (four being full-time), yet there are still twenty-one (21) open vacancies, since CDL drivers are hard to find.

At this point, some catching up is occurring, but other areas (i.e. parts of Hindman) are hard to access because of the environment, but the higher use areas are being cut, since they are drier.

Rogers opened the floor to questions but none were asked at the time.

Director Couch mentioned having a successful "Music in the Park" event on the previous Friday. It was a small event, and they look forward to other events. He was looking forward to a couple of different tournaments, and invited the committee to give any ideas they had. He mentioned the event in Allsopp will be in October.

Director Peck asked for the approximate attendance, to which Director Couch stated there was no counting of people, since it was an outdoor public event, but roughly around three-hundred (300) attended. It started slowly, but picked up around 5:00 p.m., but around 7:00 p.m., it started to fall off. Money was raised for the volunteer services, and awareness was raised around Parks and Recreation.

With no further reports, Chairman Buie proceeded to move down the agenda to old business.

**Old Business:** Chairman Buie opened up new business by mentioning noting there were two additional items that needed to be discussed, to which City Attorney Carpenter mentioned sending out an amendment agenda ahead of time. He then asked the commission.

The Commission welcomed three (3) new committee members: Abby Jennings, Cannon Fletcher and Dustin Smith. Chairman Buie then gave the floor over to Commissioner Dustin Smith, tell about himself.

He then moved quickly to committee reports. Starting with the Master Plan & Vision committee, Commissioner Linda Smith stated, that they met the prior day, and all were in attendance (four (4) commissioners and staff), and the outcome was very worthwhile. The first thing that happened was the committee each got a copy of the Master Plan and Vision Book, which was adopted in 2020. They then looked at the Strategic Plan Book. Commissioner Smith stated that the Master Plan book was designed to be a ten (10) year document, and the Strategic Plan Book was designed to be a five (5) year document. Both of these books were reviewed, and they mentioned ways to share information better online as far as having them linked to the public access. They also talked about ways for the commissioners to take special interest in the parks they live in close proximity to. They will be meeting again, but did not set an exact date. Commissioner L. Smith mentioned possibly having quarterly meetings for that committee.

She mentioned that attached to the Agenda, she asked Deputy Director Nelson to add two pages from the Master Plan. The first is how the staff classifies parks, which she feels is a great way to consider which parks have different needs and purposes. The second page serves as a description for the parks. She told the Commission to let her know if they did not receive a copy with the Agenda.

She then gave the floor to questions, but none were asked at the time.

Next with Outreach & Social Media, Commissioner Ashley Martinez stated that their first meeting was planned for Wednesday June 15<sup>th</sup>. They will be meeting with staff, attempting to understand how Outreach and Social Media works, what opportunities there are for assistance in those aspects. She is looking forward to meeting with staff and reporting back at the next meeting.

The floor was given to questions, but none were asked at the time.

With Parks Conservancy Committee, Commissioner Bressinck was not present at the meeting. Chairman Buie spoke regarding a fundraising effort, but mentioned collaborating with Commissioner Bressinck before going into detail about it.

Chairman Buie opened the floor to questions, but none were asked at the time. He then thanked each committee chair for their leadership in taking this on.

Chairman Buie then mentioned the Parks Commission Golf Tournament, mentioned that Commissioner Eldridge was not present due to a work conflict. He stated that around \$2200, would go towards Deputy Director Robinsons' recreation program. He mentioned figuring out

where that money would be best spent. He stated he did not know the number of teams, to which Deputy Director Robinson stated eleven (11) teams participated. He mentioned sponsors, and thanked Director Peck for assisting with the food. He opened the floor to questions, to which Deputy Director Robinson mentioned that everyone had a great time, the sun was out, it was a great day, and she thanked everyone for the donations and sponsoring. Chairman Buie mentioned getting a more in-depth report from Commissioner Eldridge.

With regarding the City Parks Conservancy, Chairman Buie mentioned a campaign that the commissioners will have access to, either with a QR code or a URL. He mentioned posting it on your social media, and talked about making donations to the City Parks Conservancy. He stated that it was tax deductible, and it would be put into a new special account. Director Couch stated that this new account took the golf proceeds and served as a place holder to utilize, and any other funds could be put in this account. The account was set up as a donation-type account, and not a revenue-type account. Chairman Buie mentioned that additional conversations would be had in order to decide whether they wanted the funds to continue going to recreation or to another place.

Then proceeds to New Business.

**New Business:** Chairman Buie opens discussion on the bond issue. He mentioned that Director Peck, wanted to share a couple of words regarding this. Director Peck then mentioned that Director Wright has one of her two meetings in Ward 6 later on in the evening, so they are going through to each ward to get ideas. She stated that Parks was getting a pretty piece of it, so she encouraging everyone to get out and go to the meetings, and provided a small schedule for it. The bond election is on August 9<sup>th</sup>, and she stated it was highly important to Parks, Streets, and Drainage if it passes.

Chairman Buie asked Director Wright if she had any additional comments, to which she did. It was inaudible.

Chairman Buie thanked both Director Wright, and Director Peck. Director Peck mentioned that like Director Wright stated, we have to act on what we said, in reference to it. She mentioned that the reason the bond issue passes every year is that it is clearly seen. She mentioned she had something else, but decided to wait.

Chairman Buie moved to the next topic: introduction of social event for Commission, to which Director Couch was given the floor. He stated it was a place to talk about the fact that committees are starting to meet, with the first happening at the beginning of the week, and more taking place in the following weeks. Chairman Buie mentioned having a social, so that the committees could meet outside of these meeting criteria. City Attorney Carpenter mentioned that just to be on the safe side that if any committee business were to come up, make sure to notify the PR person. He mentioned using either a pavilion or Community Center to get to know each other more outside of this setting. Director Couch then stated that if there were no further discussion, he would begin looking for a venue for this event. Director Peck mentioned kayaking around Maumelle. Commissioner L. Smith stated that Commissioner Jennings had her hand raised for a comment, but it was an accident. She liked the idea of doing something in a park.

Director Wright mentioned that if they build her a pool, she'll learn how to swim. Commissioner D. Smith mentioned the World's Largest Swimming Lesson was coming up, but Director Wright stated she didn't like a lot of people, but she thought about it. Director Peck made a bet with Director Wright that if she took a swimming lesson, she would make 10 pound of the Arkansas Pecans that she likes. Director Wright stated she would consider it.

He then turned the floor over to Stephen McAteer, Museum Supervisor

### Parks Guest

Stephen McAteer, Museum Supervisor at MacArthur Park, open the floor by stating he was given between three (3) and fifteen (15) minutes. He introduced himself, and stated he had known some of the Commission members for years.

Mr. McAteer has been with MacArthur Park since 1999, and has seen it grow from an idea to what it is today. He mentioned working with the City to renovate the building, and opening in 2001 as the MacArthur Museum of Military History. HE stated that since that time, the museum has seen over 600,000 people, from all fifty (50) states and over fifty (50) countries.

McAteer mentioned that the last two years had been exceptionally interesting, due to COVID. It has allowed them to think outside of the box. He mentioned that there were still some aspects that they will still use coming out of COVID. He stated he has to reevaluate what he considers to be a museum visitor, and now talks about a museum experience. During COVID, since there were no physical visitors, they had to think outside the box and take the museum to them. What they've been doing was developing their virtual programming, and now they have a three-tiered classification for a visitor: on-site, off-site, and virtual. He stated that in 2021, they had 37,000 visitors with 2/3 of those being virtual. He stated that he felt the need to be in-person, to get the sense of place, but now he realizes that you can do the same virtual.

McAteer mentioned he was looking forward to the new normal, and learning from the lessons. He brought up the Children's Reading Program. Previously, they took it to one school, but due to COVID, they have gone virtual and can reach around 5,000 students every month throughout the state. He mentioned that this would continue, including some after-school programs at Community Center Programs.

He mentioned being under construction from all sides, and was looking forward to the end of construction.

McAteer brought a packet, which he included information about the museum: its origins, some of the programs they do, and a couple of upcoming activities. He mentioned that one of the activities coming up is on Sunday night at MacArthur Park, in collaboration with the Arkansas Wind Symphony, to host a Flag Day Concert at 7:00 p.m. He stated to come out and listen to patriotic music, and said that it was the 25<sup>th</sup> Anniversary. He brought up how at the end, the Veterans in the crowd are commemorated. McAteer mentioned that he will be with the ice cream station, because Blue Bell gives them 1,000 servings of ice cream for this event.

The next flyer in the packet was for Movies at MacArthur, an event that has gone on for five (5) years. The film for June is called War Torn. The reason for this event is a two-fold one: (1) it took a look at various military conflicts of the past, and (2) to look at the various issues that are confronting veterans of today. This movie takes a look at the latter, and takes a look at issues like PTSD from the Vietnam War. Everything is free (popcorn, drinks, and movie). It is the third Tuesday of every month January- November. McAteer invited the Commission out to the event.

McAteer mentioned they were getting ready to transition from the after-school program to the Summer Playground Program, where they go out to all six sites. This year, they have partnered with the Clinton Presidential Library, and they're joining them to go to the sites and every week on Friday, they are inviting one site the opportunity to come to both the MacArthur Museum of Military History and the Clinton Presidential Library.

To finish, the last flyer was about an event that will take place in March of next year. They had put the event off for two years, a bi-annual event. This event will be a traveling exhibit from WWII Museum in New Orleans. They've raised of \$52,000 in sponsorship for this event. This includes two (2) \$15,000 sponsors, one being Stephens, Inc. McAteer mentioned he was looking forward to hosting this event, after putting it off for long.

McAteer opened the floor to questions, to which Director Wright made a statement.

Director Wright asked Mr. McAteer to hold up his flyer, and then directed attention to the "We Can Do It" statement. She stated that it was a throwback to one of her favorite movies, Captain America, and asked about showing that movie. McAteer mentioned that the schedule for this year was already complete. Wright stated how much she loved Marvel movies, and how Captain America was about the war.

McAteer stated that at the event in March, that someone will recreate the war history and have Rosie the Riveter, so if you come, you'll meet Rosie.

Chairman Buie then asked for any further questions or discussion.

Chairman Buie made the statement that there was a relatively new playground on their premises, and asked if he could give any details on it. McAteer stated that he was looking forward to it being the quickest project. He stated that he and the Mac Park meet every Friday, and were getting ready to show the culmination of that goal. He thanked Director Couch for shepherding that through, and they were ready to do the ribbon cutting for that sometime in July. Director Couch stated that the goal was for July.

Director Couch mentioned how great he was doing, and asked McAteer to speak on the improvements to the facility that occurred some time ago, and how he still gets money from the grants and things that he applies for updates to our facility and to explain how important the Mac Group are to the park and the museum. He also stated that the museum was open for public meetings, and asked for more elaboration in this.

McAteer agreed in that the building was open for public meetings, and are always looking to have events there. He mentioned that he enjoyed the meetings there, because you get to see what

a great park it truly is. Between the entrance to the building and the entrance to the meeting room, there are at least half a dozen points of interests that you can visit. They are always open, and looking forward to visits in the future.

Regarding the renovation that happened in 2018, the museum was shut down for six (6) months, and cost \$1.6 million. It included reconstruction and renovation for the wooden porches on the back of the building, ripping out the old HVAC system that was 25 years old and not functioning very well and putting in a new state of the art VAB system, as well as added LED lights and repainting. He stated that none of the money came from the citizens of Little Rock or the Parks Department budget, because it was funded by the Two-Cent Bit Tax that Director Peck shepherded through in 2015. Around another \$30 million went to the renovation of the Art Museum next door. These improvements addressed the structural and environmental problems that the building faced. He mentioned the building was solid, yet there were issues at the time, but they have now been addressed in a long-term manner.

Regarding the Mac Park group, McAteer mentioned he had the privilege of helping put together the group in 2007, working alongside Sharon Priest. The group is a group of people that came together to bring an awareness and change the perception of the park, and promote the park. He mentioned the vast improvements, as well as how he was looking forward to even more improvements. He mentioned over \$4 million had already been used on improvements that the group has been instrumental in getting these fund through acquaintances and partnerships and with other entities. He mentioned that it would hopefully bring increased usage of the park.

Director Peck asked if MacArthur Park was the oldest city park, to which McAteer agreed. He stated that the museum is tied to the building, 182 years old, and tied to the grounds. The building is the only one left from a military post built in 1840, shortly after Arkansas became a state. It was used in that capacity until 1892, when it was donated to the city, in exchange for Fort Roots in North Little Rock. The provision was that it would always be used as a city park. On July 4, 1893, it became Arsenal Park, then City Park, and then in 1942 was renamed MacArthur Park, after Governor Douglas MacArthur, who was born in the building, and spent his first six (6) months.

Director Peck encouraged other Commissioners to go if they haven't been in a while, and commended McAteer on his efforts. She mentioned how it was a nice place for meeting, and a fantastic experience with the coolest playground in the city.

Chairman Buie opened the floor for any discussion.

With no further discussion, Chairman Buie opened the floor for agenda items for next months' meeting.

Chairman Buie wanted to make sure that sub-committee reports need to go for next month, as well as Commissioner Eldridge's report on the Golf tournament were put on the agenda. He then asked if there was anything else, to which Deputy Director Robinson asked the Commission to see if they could find another platform for our registrations, signing up for recreation programs for our participants. City Attorney Carpenter mentioned there was a procurement process that the



city would have to go through, to which Robinson agreed. Robinson wanted to find something more user-friendly than ActiveNet. Carpenter mentioned that if there was a contract with them, then that would be looked at as well. Director Wright asked about if there was not a contract, what would occur then, to which Carpenter asked Director Couch if there was one. Director Couch stated that they would have to look into it, but he was discussing a Point-of-Sale system potentially newer or better, and she wanted to discuss what it could be.

Director Couch mentioned continually bringing new information to the Commission about what Parks does. He asked if there was any particular staff that the Commission would like to hear, to please let him know, so the person would be here next month.

Also, Director Couch mentioned bringing someone from the unofficially named Rose Creek Park to the meeting. He stated that there was a group that are very adamant about doing projects there. Currently, they are doing a trail system, and raising money by donations. Couch stated he wanted them to come and talk about their local park. Chairman Buie stated that he would add it.

Chairman Buie asked for any more thoughts, and Director Peck raised her hand. She mentioned a permanent addition to the agenda: upcoming events that commission would be invited to attend. Peck stated she saw a lot of interesting events, but she was sure there were other event. She mentioned attaching a list. Director Couch mentioned that the Social Media & Outreach committee can help with this. He stated that Parks & Recreation keeps a calendar at Ms. Ramona's desk (front desk) with all the events. Couch mentioned to adding things to the website, like the Master Plan, and was working alongside members at City Hall to keep things transparent.

Next, Director Wright let everyone know that the Dunbar Neighborhood Association is now as 501(c3) and they've applied for a community program contract, and they have received it. They are partnering with the Martin Luther King Commission, and their goal is to implement a Comic-Con for the children. Wright stated they are getting CALS to help set it up, and getting a reading program for prizes for the most books read and the best costume. They have a celebrity, Anthony Mackie who played the Falcon, to try and come in and talk to the kids and judge costumes. They are also working with local talents to come in and present their comic books, LeRon McAdoo agreed to come and participate. Dr. Hassan Rashaad also agreed, appearing in the movie The Black Panther as one of the kings' guards, and is projected to be there. Everything is getting firmed up, and Wright encouraged Commissioners to come out. The date is August 13<sup>th</sup>, and they have acquired all the funding necessary. It will be located at the West Central Community Center. She is trying to bring in the Youth Summit for the Martin Luther King Commission, bringing in over 500 children, to have musical entertainment. She mentioned that everything could be spread out. She mentioned she had be having this concept for three (3) years. The MLK Commission has brought many celebrities to the city, including Vivica A. Fox and Master P. She is looking forward to this, and it is a back to school event as well.

Director Couch then asked Director Wright to mention the radio station that is inside of the West Central Community Center. She stated that KWCP 98.9 FM was the name and it was licensed to the John Barrow Neighborhood Association. It was done by a state grant by a state representative

in 2016. Now that the contract is resigned, our radio station can do more for the kids. She mentioned an on-site broadcast media learning lab. It is a 24-hour station, and is fully automated. She mentioned that PSAs were put up on it as well. She stated that all PSAs were free to put on, and they work with all schools and colleges, especially the ones without a radio station, and they published their own magazine.

Director Peck mentioned the bond meetings that were located on the City of Little Rock website, and she thank Angie for this. She mentioned that there were some more money coming for Parks, Community Centers, and the Senior Center. Director Peck stated that her and Director Wright were champions for Community Centers and Wright mentioned they were both champions for seniors, and she was surprised that with everyone else being seniors, there weren't more initiatives.

Chairman Buie thanked everyone, and mentioned that he wanted everyone on a sub-committee. The time for the next meeting is July 13<sup>th</sup>, at the Centre at University Park.

With no further discussion, Chairman Buie adjourned the meeting at 1:04 p.m.

**The meeting was adjourned.**