



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

July 12, 2023

The Centre at University Park

**Attendance:** Matt Buie, J.T. Ferstl (Virtual), Samuel Ellis, Linda Smith, Mike Bernardo, Ben France(Virtual), Director Andrea Lewis, Ron Bara

**Absent:** Lauren Eldridge, Cannon Fletcher

**City Board of Director Liaison:** Director Andrea Lewis, Director Capi Peck

**LRPR Staff:** Leland Couch, Angela Nelson, Shawanda Craig, Justin Dorsey, J.P. Rogers, Briana Hatfield, City Attorney Beth Carpenter

**Welcome, and Introductions:** Chairman Buie called the meeting to order and welcomed everyone present.

**Roll Call and Approval of Minutes:** Briana Hatfield called the roll, and Chairman Buie reported that a quorum in attendance was seven (7) members. Chairman Buie thanked everyone for coming; Chairman Buie then asked for the June 14th minutes to be approved. The motion passed, and the minutes were approved.

**Citizen Communication:** Chairman Buie yielded the floor to Mr. Kevin with Model One Commercial Vehicles, LA. Mr. Kevin inquired about the City of Little Rocks use of 100 percent electric vehicles and inform the board about Ford E Transit vehicles. Mr. Kevin asked, if the Parks and Recreation or Water Departments have maintenance vehicles on their procurement list for this year or next year? Director Couch entertained the question. Director Couch mentioned questions of that nature should be directed to the Fleet Director, Mr. Willie. Mr. Kevin followed up with a question inquiring about allocated funds for EV vehicles. Director Couch noted yes there are funds available, in general. Director Peck followed up with recent purchases of EV vehicles and commented on Fleet's goal for the transitioning of vehicles. Further information would be provided by Director Peck or Director Couch, if wanted. Mr. Kevin inquired about the City's changing infrastructure. Both directors commented and agreed that would be a question for the Fleet Director, Mr. Willie. Mr. Kevin ended by inquiring about the need of wheelchair equipped vans for the senior recreation centers. Director Couch answered going forward there will be a need as the department grows. Director Couch noted the recent purchase of a new van

for the Therapeutic Division. Shawanda Craig mentioned updating throughout the Centers. Director Peck informed Mr. Kevin about contacting the Sustainability Division within the Public Works Department, as well as the Fleet Department for further information.

Chairman Buie then called for any staff reports, giving Director Couch the floor.

### **Staff Reports:**

#### Director

Director of Parks and Recreation, Leland Couch, informed the commission of some highlights the department is excited to share. The Interstate Park roadway reconstruction will kick off the first week of August. The Board finalized the construction of a new playground at Boyle Park by pavilion three (3). The over \$700,000 funds will be coming from grants and matching grant money from the city. The addition of the Boyle Park Mountain Bike Trail.

Director Couch noted the department's ongoing tornado cleanup efforts. Since the temporary closing of the Rock Creek Trail, unsheltered individuals have moved into an area near the Home Depot. The department has been actively addressing the relocation and cleanup of the camp. Contractor DRC, the Public Works and the Parks Department are now actively working together removing the tree debris. Delay was noted due to federal funding and the sustainability of the natural area. Reservoir Park has had major tree debris removal. The park is still closed, for the foreseeable future. Murray is partially open. Delay has been due to utility aspects of the park. In-house projects include Riverfront Park. A donation was given for an addition to the treehouse. Director Couch recommends all to visit the treehouse area.

Director Couch gave Deputy Director Nelson the floor.

#### Administration

Deputy Director of Administration, Angela Nelson, informed the commission that the Resources Division has ongoing tasks of addressing administrative policies, updates, and dealing with Human Resource related issues. The Department as a whole is focused on being consistently consistent in efforts. Ongoing progress consists of onboarding with staff. Excited for the new Administrative Assistant for Director Couch to come aboard. Newly advertised Outdoor Recreation Coordinator and a Parks Marketing and Social Media Coordinator, and continual positions available in our maintenance area. Goal is keeping the department productive and keeping the inventory current. Main goal is to update all of our outdated electronics and IT loaner items. Administration is wrapping up management's 6 month performance review of employees from January to June. On the Finance side, the department is staying ahead of processing invoices and processing any outstanding purchase orders. The second Park Stat meeting will be Friday, July 28th 2023. Management and staff will meet to discuss progress and any areas that may need attention. The meeting will cover April through June of this year. Accreditation efforts

are consistently moving along by monitoring progress, sorting and grouping of information. For certain sections, the department is adding supporting documents and relative information.

Chairman Buie thanked Deputy Director Nelson for her report and then called for questions. There were none, so Director Couch gave Deputy Director Craig the floor.

### Recreation

Recreation Programs Deputy Director, Shawanda Craig, greeted the floor by discussing the hiring of various recreation positions. Registration for playing volleyball has started. Registration for Men's Fall 40 & Over League has started. With FEMA vacating the West Central Community Center, the center is able to start on some much needed renovations throughout the facility. Once complete, there will be a thorough cleaning and a re-opening of the center to the public. Welcome back announcement will be pushed to the surrounding community. Baseball season is going well. The Mayor, Arkansas Travelers representative, and the Travelers mascot recently were at the baseball fields passing out cards and things to the kids. Softball and baseball programs are going very well. The center will be hosting playoffs in the upcoming weeks. Deputy Director Craig encouraged everyone to attend, if able. Summer Playground Program is still going well. They have about 208 children at Dunbar Community Center, 120 at Stephens Community Center, 84 at the Southwest Community Center, 32 at J.A. Fair, 38 at Washington Elementary, and 40 at East Little Rock Community Center, and the Summer Laureate Program has 100 children. Tennis courts 5, 6, 9, and 10 have been resurfaced at Rebsamen Tennis. Various tournaments have kept the facility busy all summer. Staff have shared that the two recent tournaments created a 2-3 million dollar economic impact for the City of Little Rock. Jim Daily Aquatics Center is in need of seasonal and year round lifeguards. Jim Dailey has upcoming events. They are having a "Movies in the Pool", starting around sunset. While the golf facilities have been busy, they have been experiencing some challenges with the larger amounts of rain we have experienced this season. MacArthur Military Museum will be hosting a movie night on July 18th, a documentary Medal of Honor: The History.

That concludes Deputy Director Craig's report. Chairman Buie called for questions. There were none, so Director Couch gave Deputy Director Dorsey the floor.

### Operations

Deputy Director of Operations, Justin Dorsey, greeted the floor by thanking Director Nelson and her staff for working through several positions and getting them advertised. He mentioned that the Maintenance Division has been really busy during this summer. Between mowing, garbage, and various additional issues the staff is keeping their heads up and working hard. Urban Forestry's main goal is to focus at War Memorial. They have finished, for now, at Murray. Arkansas Razorback game is coming up on September 2nd. Serval crews are focused on maintaining and cleaning the gateway area in preparation for game day. As Director Couch mentioned previously, several employees and departments took place in the unsheltered cleanup

along the Rock Creek Trail. Director Dorsey encouraged the floor to visit Main Street. Robert Hen, Main Street Coordinator, has been recently working on sustainability and beautification projects along Main Street. Projects for Kiwanis and Pankey parks have been approved. Operations team is starting to get some designs, in preparation for popup meetings with the neighborhood and commission. As Director Leland mentioned, the boardwalk addition to Riverfront Park's treehouse is a large project, but will be a great addition. There will also be an addition of a picnic table to the area. Lastly, Director Dorsey mentioned finalizing documents with FEMA, pertaining to Murray Park. Bids, Quotes, and PO's have been pushed through and repairs should start soon. It is exciting to see progress on that.

Chairman Buie called for questions, and Commissioner Ben France asked about where the funding for the updates to Kiwanis and Pankey Parks would be coming from; a curiosity of the process. Deputy Director Dorsey mentioned there was a budget approved for the funds. Ideas and suggestions were submitted from the neighborhood on the front end when solicited for the bond. Currently staff is putting together some preliminary plans and proposals with the budget and neighborhood input in mind. Commissioner Ben France followed up with a question about if Board approval happens after the final input from the neighborhood. Deputy Director Dorsey responded yes sir.

Chairman Buie thanked Commissioner Ben France and opened the floor to Commissioner Bernardo.

Commissioner Mike Bernardo asked about Kanis Park and whether there were any new estimated dates for the bridge. Deputy Director Dorsey responded by mentioning a follow-up meeting after the commission meeting with the owner of the company. The bridge part of the project should be completed and will be drivable by the end of the month. Commissioner Bernardo also inquired about the responsible party of the graffiti management under the 630 overpass. Director Couch responded, the importance of graffiti removal on park property in a timely manner. Director Couch noted the areas owned by the Highway Department are handled differently. Our goal is to contact ARDOT as soon as graffiti is seen. There has been talk about creating vegetation in front of the affected areas to prevent further graffiti. Director Couch mentioned utilizing 311. 311 is a very useful tool available to the city.

Chairman Buie called further questions. Director Couch had a follow-up regarding Director Lewis question about Kiwanis and Pankey parks projects. The Department is in the process of getting designs and proposals. Director Dorsey is in the process of getting neighborhood input. Director Couch is working with Sky Browner, local contact in Pankey, and getting in touch with the president of the Neighborhood Association. Director Couch mentioned staff attending a back to school event or creating a pop-up event in the park. Director Couch commented on the timeline of park projects, along with promoting them on social media.

Chairman Buie thanked all who spoke for their time and efforts. Chairman Buie recognized Commissioner Ron Bara's attendance of his first meeting. Commissioner Ron Bara mentioned his reasoning behind becoming a Parks Commissioner.

### Old Business

Chairman Buie opened the old business by asking Director Couch to mention some of upcoming events. Director Couch noted two upcoming private events War Memorial Park is to have a lifestyle medic Central Arkansas walk and Murray Park is having a bass fishing tournament. Friends of Fouche Creek will be hosting a creek cleanup. The Parks staff will be having a Pushy Plants event in Boyle Park. The Pushy Plants group is dedicated to the removal of invasive species of plants within the parks. At War Memorial, Catholic High School alumni will have a bike opening for a local chapter.

Chairman Buie thanked Director Couch and encouraged the Commissioners to attend if given the availability. Chairman Buie then moved on to the next order of business: crime analysis.

Director Couch responded by mentioning Mr. Courtney Perry and how appreciative Director Couch was for Mr. Perry's report last month. With new findings, Mr. Perry requested to give his final report next month. Chairman Buie also commented on Mr. Perry's report and how all are looking forward to his next report.

Chairman Buie then moved on to the next order of business: scorecard analysis of park assets. Director Couch mentioned his appreciation for those who participated. Director Couch explained his intentions with the information and went over the following highlights. In the Recreation Division: pickleball, playgrounds, and new sports were all mentioned a couple of times. In the Programs Division: summer playground programs, outdoor recreation programs, and tennis. A new position with the Program Division has been opened, the Outdoor Recreation Program Coordinator. In the Facilities Division: pickleball, Murray Park river trail access, and golf. In the Community Centers: security, sport facilities, maintenance and development. We would like for our starting focus to be golf, pickleball, tennis and new sports. Under Parks: River trail, Murray, the river area, Community Centers, and playgrounds. Focusing on the playgrounds will help us advertise more on our neighborhood parks. Miscellaneous would include security, maintenance and development. Director Couch mentioned he will work with staff to finalize the information and eventually use the information to push it out to the public. Example mentioned is Rebsamen Golf Course. Director Couch appreciated everyone's input and looks forward to further discussion and ideas.

Chairman Buie thanked Director Couch and called for questions. There were none. Chairman Buie then moved on to the next item of business: Golf Tournament. This item falls under the purview of Commissioner Lauren Eldridge who is absent from today's meeting. Item has been tabled.

Chairman Buie then moved on to the next item of business: sub-committee reports. Chairman Buie opened the floor to Commissioner Ben France to speak on social media outreach. Commissioner France commented on how excited he is for the new Parks Marketing and Social Media Coordinator. Chairman Buie tabled the conversation due to the absence of Commissioner Lauren Eldridge, unless Director Couch had anything to mention. Director Couch had nothing to add. Commissioner France inquired about the potential candidates the department currently had for the position. Director Nelson did not have accurate information to share at the time.

Chairman Buie then moved on to the next item of business within the sub-committee report, master plan. Commissioner Linda Smith updated the floor about the master plan. The sub-committee has not met due to a number of calendar conflicts. The sub-committee does plan to meet before the next commission meeting. Commissioner Smith asked if there was a limit of people available to work on a sub-committee. Chairman Buie informed all there was not a limit. City Attorney Beth Carpenter confirmed, no limit for sub-committee members. Commissioner Smith recommended adding Commissioner Mike Bernardo to the master plan sub-committee.

Chairman Buie moved for a motion to add Commissioner Bernardo to the sub-committee. Commissioner Smith motioned, seconded by Commissioner Bara. Motion passed.

Director Couch asked for Commissioner Smith to clarify if the committee has met before and just hasn't met recently. Commissioner Smith commented they met in January and would like to meet again.

Chairman Buie then moved on to the next item of business within the sub-committee report, Parks Conservancy. Commissioner Lauren Eldridge is the Parks Conservancy liaison. In her stead Chairman Buie gave the following announcement. The Parks Conservancy has begun a public campaign. If you see the information on social media, please share to create awareness for the Parks Conservancy. The parks conservancy will have its very first event for their Friends of Parks Conservancy. More information will be available soon.

Chairman Buie then began addressing New Business.

### *New Business*

Chairman Buie opened the floor to Director Couch to address Fourche Creek Park. Director Couch wanted to inform the Commissioners of ideas for creating a park. Similar to that of a previous discussion about Rose Creek Park. Director Couch gave a brief history of partnership between Rose Creek Neighborhood and the Parks Department. With that being said, Fourche Creek Park has not been officially recognized as a city park. There is an official water trail on Fouche Creek, a partnership with the Arkansas Game and Fish and Friends of Fourche Creek. The Parks Department has maintained the park area. Roughly 1,800 acres with several access points available that the department would like to develop further. Director Couch then asked the Commissioners if they would support recognizing Fourche Creek as an actual city park. This

would be the first step in moving forward to naming the area Fourche Creek Park. Next step would be to take the request to the City Board for approval.

Chairman Buie then opened the floor to the Commissioners. Commissioner Smith inquired about the proposed boundaries of the park. Director Couch mentioned the zoning of PR. The boundaries considered for the park would be those zoned for PR. Exact boundaries as of this meeting were not available. Commissioner Smith followed up with a question about if the Parks Department was currently maintaining the area mentioned. Director Couch mentioned the natural swamp bottom area that is Fouche Creek. Due to the terrain there are cleanups to maintain the area, but the resources to collect all the trash are not currently available. Multiple City Parks abut to the creek already. Along with several different trails both current and future development. Commissioner Smith followed up with a question regarding structural plans for the proposed park. Director Couch mentioned there will not be any additional structures at this point. There is potential discussion about a future stand-alone area for the “entrance” to Fouche Creek Park.

Chairman Buie called for any further questions or further discussion. Commissioner Mike Bernardo mentioned he was unfamiliar with Fourche. He questioned Director Couch about what criteria makes a parcel of land usable for a city park. Director Couch mentioned the city is already maintaining and making plans in the Fourche Creek area. Director Couch believes it is important to recognize the area as an official city park. There is already the mentality that the area is being used as a park. The choosing of park land is a whole different conversation. Chairman Buie recognized Director Peck. Director Peck mentioned she along with others already assumed the area was a city park. Fourche Creek is such an important area geographically because of the watershed, trails and Gillam Park. Along with the multiple partners involved in the conservation easement. Director Peck mentioned a group was interested in filming in the area for a new Indiana Jones film, using the Cyprus trees. Director Peck mentions several reasons why the City should recognize the Fourche Creek area as an official park. Director Couch thanked Director Peck commented on the nature and wildlife aspects of the area he had yet to mention, minus all the trash. Director Couch mentioned floating of Fourche Creek on August 7, 2023. The creek is the city’s biggest watershed and flood plain. Due to the sudden flow of water, building of structures would be a hassle.

Chairman Buie called for any final questions or further discussion. There were none. Chairman Buie called for a motion of the naming of Fourche Creek Park as an official City park. Commissioner Samuel Ellis motioned, seconded by Commissioner Ben France. Motion carried.

Chairman Buie then moved on to the next item of business mentioning he believed the Commission has already spoken on the golf tournament and scorecard analysis. If further discussion was needed, Director Couch would let the floor know. There was no further discussion needed.

Chairman Buie called for agenda items for next meeting. There were none.

Chairman Buie recognized Director Peck had to leave the meeting early. He then dedicated the last five (5) board liaison feedback. Opening the floor to Director Lewis. Director Lewis was thankful for the updates received and looking forward to taking information back to share with the public.

This concludes the Wednesday, July 12, 2023, Park Commission Meeting. The next meeting will be Wednesday, August 9, 2023, at The Centre at University Park at noon. Buie encouraged all who could attend the following events in person. Chairman Buie thanked everyone for their reports.

Chairman Buie thanked Commissioners and others for joining.

**Meeting Adjourned, 12:56pm.**