

**OFFICE OF THE CITY COUNCIL**

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**CITY COUNCIL SPECIAL COMMITTEE ON PARKS MEETING MINUTES**

**City Council Chamber, 1st floor, City Hall**

**October 4, 2017**

**10:00 a.m.**

**Location:** City Council Chamber, City Hall – St. James Building; 117 West Duval Street,

**In attendance:** Council Members Scott Wilson (Chair), Doyle Carter, Danny Becton, Lori Boyer, Tommy Hazouri (arr. 10:58 a.m.)

**Excused**: Council Members John Crescimbeni and Bill Gulliford

**Also**: Peggy Sidman – Office of General Counsel; Heather Reber – Council Auditor’s Office; Adri Segui – Legislative Services Division; Jordan Elsbury – Mayor’s Office; Daryl Joseph – Parks, Recreation and Entertainment Department

**Meeting Convened**: 10:11 a.m.

Chairman Wilson called the meeting to order and the attendees introduced themselves for the record.

Daryl Joseph, Director of the Department of Parks, Recreation and Entertainment, distributed and discussed information on the City’s regional parks. He explained that regional parks are typically over 50 acres in size, located on major roads, have a wide variety of active and passive uses, and serve a 10-mile radius area. The regional parks are in varying stages of development, and improvements are planned for a number of those parks, some to be done in conjunction with private partners such as athletic associations. Council Member Boyer asked for information on what amenities have been conceptually master planned for each of the regional parks and what is actually planned for construction. She referenced a park she had recently visited in Memphis, TN that was both very large and extremely well developed with a wide variety of uses and amenities. Council Member Becton asked for information on what private athletic associations are affiliated with which parks and what their responsibilities are for programming and maintenance. In his experience, the quality of private maintenance varies from park to park and group to group. Ms. Boyer suggested that parks with substantial water bodies (i.e. retention ponds or lakes) be considered for their potential for water usage such as kayaking, canoeing, sailing, pedalboats, etc.

At the Chairman’s request, Mr. Joseph provided specific information about the facilities available at each regional park. The major maintenance challenge at the 9A-Baymeadows Park is overuse of the playing fields killing the grass. The fields have recently been renovated and re-sodded. There is a substantial lake that has the potential for attractive water use development. He said that the new FY17-18 budget has increased funding citywide for field mowing and maintenance (fertilization, herbicides, etc.).

Council Member Becton said that pickleball is a growing sport that should be accommodated in city parks, and he has been approached by an organizer about potentially hosting a pickleball tournament in Jacksonville, possibly at the convention center. Council Member Carter noted that his district is hosting the disc golf national tournament at the Cecil Commerce Center golf course. Ms. Boyer pointed out that these types of tournaments should be coordinated through or at least assisted by Visit Jacksonville because of their tourism potential. Mr. Becton said that Jacksonville tends to be a professional sports town that doesn’t capitalize on the potential of amateur, especially youth, sports. Katie Mitura of Visit Jacksonville said that her organization and the Jacksonville Sports Council are always interested in attracting and assisting new events.

Blue Cypress Park is planned for a replacement swimming pool and has a golf course whose private operator has recently dropped out of their contract. An RFP for golf course operation will be issued early in 2018. That park has direct river access that is unique. Mr. Carter noted that when a golf course is left unmanaged, as previously happened in his district, recovering from that non-management period and the attendant degradation of infrastructure (irrigation system, cart paths, sand traps) makes it difficult for a new operator to be financially successful if they have to bear the entire cost of restoring the facilities.

Cecil Field Recreation Complex has a nice gymnasium and also has a lake that could be developed attractively for water uses using a private concessionaire to rent boats. Ms. Boyer said that retention ponds/lakes offer ready opportunity for calm water uses (paddleboarding, canoeing, pedal boats, etc.) without the challenges posed by the currents in the St. Johns River.

Lonnie Miller Regional Park has fewer amenities than some other regional parks, but is very popular for community gatherings. Weekend waste pickup has been scheduled because of heavy usage and waste production over the weekend that can’t wait until Monday for cleanup.

Losco Regional Park has the City’s only artificial turf field.

Ms. Boyer stated that when she drove by Metropolitan Park last week, it appeared that all of the gates were locked at 4 p.m. on a weekday, giving the appearance that the park is closed to the public. Ms. Joseph said he would check on the gate closure hours.

Patton Park has a large number of soccer fields in continuous heavy use, and qualifies as a regional park because of its acreage, not the variety of its facilities, and there is room for additional development, although none is currently planned. Ms. Boyer asked about the definition of regional parks with regard to amenities versus size and suggested that the committee needs to consider the dispersion of different types of park amenities (i.e. soccer fields, baseball fields, tennis courts) throughout the city to meet community needs. Mr. Becton added swimming pools to that list of amenities that need to be equally distributed. Chairman Wilson noted that the Southside area of Jacksonville has no regional park.

Palmetto Leaves Regional Park has a lake that could be attractively developed and visible from I-95, and a biking/walking trail could be developed in the JEA power line right-of-way. Mr. Carter said that the restroom facility at Palmetto Leaves is convenient to the soccer/football fields, but is too far away from the baseball/softball complex. Mr. Joseph said development of an additional building with restrooms is in the long range plan.

Pope Duval Park is very under-developed and has great potential for implementation of a master plan.

Taye’ Brown Park hosts softball tournaments and is an amenity to users of the Equestrian Center.

Tillie Fowler Regional Park is leased from the U.S. Navy and is primarily a passive recreation park (trails, picnicking). The lease is currently being re-done and the Navy has no interest in selling the park to the City.

Sheffield Regional Park was built at the site of an old dairy farm and is popular with school group tours.

The committee asked Mr. Joseph for additional information on facility ages and maintenance needs and a map of gaps in coverage by types of amenities (ballfields, pools, tennis courts, etc.) so that the committee can determine where there are needs. In response to a question from Council Member Hazouri about acquiring more small neighborhood parks, Mr. Joseph cautioned that maintaining and improving current properties is more important at present than adding additional acreage that will need maintenance.

Referencing the committee’s charge document, Ms. Boyer said that it is important to distinguish between the quantity and the quality of the nation’s largest park system. Second, how can parks be used for youth engagement and development? The gap map will help identify shortcomings in facilities that meet youth activity needs. Mr. Hazouri said that maintenance is a perennial problem, and that the City has abandoned the practice of hiring park directors to be present in parks to supervise children at play. He reiterated the importance of simple neighborhood parks easily reached by walking for informal play and relaxation.

Public Comment

John Nooney echoed Council Member Boyer’s comments about Metropolitan Park being locked up and inaccessible to the public most of the time. He believes Metro Park could be a tremendous asset for riverfront downtown recreation if properly developed and opened up. He advocated for more public access to the river, especially downtown.

The committee will meet again in 2 weeks, preferably in the Council Chamber.

**Meeting adjourned:** 11:32 a.m.

Minutes: Jeff Clements, Council Research Division

10.4.17 Posted 5:00 p.m.

Tapes: Special Committee on Parks meeting – LSD

10.4.17