



RECREATION ADVISORY BOARD MEETING MINUTES

February 8, 2023

The meeting was called to order at 1:35 PM

Board Members Present: Lauren Watkins, Chair; Brad Long, Vice Chair; Casey Van Rysdam, Marty McEachean, Deb Chapin, and Bill Bowen. Absent – Harold Dockins

Staff Present: Ryan Kane, Director; Jamie Baccari, Assistant Director; Carrie Miska, Business Manager; Sydney Lindblad Beach Operations Manager; Teddy Meyer, Recreation Facilities Manager; Diane Gorski Project Manager

Also Present: Commission Chair Christian Whitehurst

Approval of the Minutes

Chair called for approval of the January minutes. Motion by Long, seconded by Van Rysdam, approved 6/0.

Public Comments

Chair opened the floor for Public Comments for non-agenda items only and reminded everyone that each speaker would be given 3 minutes.

Lauren Kelly and Aber Dubois, representatives for Florida Prime Sports thanked the RAB for funding their grant request in January and provided an update on the organization that included the status of their 501c3 tax exempt application, staff reassignments, leadership events, fundraising, food and uniform donations and community outreach. Van Rysdam asked if Prime had any challenges due to lack of inventory and Kelly that there were many challenges. They are looking forward to the lights being installed at Rivertown. Prime continues to juggle growth. Kane explained that the county is waiting for FPL to install the transformer. Felipe Munoz introduced himself and stated that they were waiting for the tax certificate. He shared the organizations mission statement, upcoming events, new programs and improvements, increased participation numbers, the need for additional playing fields, providing programs in Hastings and other areas of the county and giving back to the community through food donations and mentoring. He expressed their willingness to continue to partner with organizations in St. Johns County. Commissioner Whitehurst suggested Munoz reach out to the pastor at Mount Moriah Baptist Church in West Augustine. McEachean offered to work with Prime to help reach those in need in Hastings and West Augustine.

Reports

Lauren Watkins thanked everyone for their support. She thanked Van Rysdam for his leadership over the years and for the RAB binder he shared with her. She provided condolences to Chapin for the loss of her father on behalf of the RAB.

Whitehurst, County Commission Chair, welcomed Watkins as the new chair and wished her the very best. He said that he was looking forward to all of the ideas that have traditionally come out of the RAB. He stated that the county is doing everything they can to increase capacity at all of the ballfields. He stated that it is time to get creative and consider things that are outside the box. He said that he is prepared to take any and all realistic suggestions back to the BOCC to see if they can be put into action. Van Rysdam asked about the status of the Comprehensive Plan in terms of developer requirements. He stated that the RAB was looking for ways to address the issue by coming up with a recommendation for the BOCC. Whitehurst stated that developers have been able to go and check the box and meet the requirement to fulfill their obligation and that hasn't historically served the community. He said that over the next 2 years the county will be working on the Comprehensive Plan that will be in effect for the next 20-25 years and that the RAB recommendations will be an important piece of the process. He stated that we need to be prepared to be a county of 500,000 people and to figure out what is needed to meet these needs in terms of recreation in future years.

Naming Policy

Watkins asked if anyone had any questions or comments on the Naming Policy as it has been shared by and proposed by county staff. Long shared that the Park Foundation is very interested in this as it plays heavily into their plans. Long motioned to approve the policy as is. Chapin asked about the 12 months waiting period and wanted to know what the theory was behind waiting?

Kane replied that the policy had been reviewed and approved by Administration and Legal. He explained the BOCC makes the final decision on naming and that the wait is to allow time to vet the request and make sure that the request is appropriate. The BOCC can waive the requirement if they see fit. Van Rysdam stated that it was an appropriate policy to wait 12 months to alleviate the raw emotional reactions and allow time to ensure the request is in the best interest of the county and suits the facility. Bowen seconded the motion. Motion passed 6/0. Watkins recommended that the department create an internal policy for parcels that have not yet been officially named. Kane stated that this would be helpful in many ways and that the other departments in the county that are affected should be included in the discussion. He stated that staff will work on this and bring recommendations to the RAB in the near future. Van Rysdam stated that removing the branding of the neighborhood will help identify parcels as park properties and not development properties. Watkins said it would make it easier for the public to understand what parks the county was responsible for.

Strategic Dashboard

Carrie Miska, Business Manager presented the Parks & Recreation Strategic Dashboard for the first quarter of Fiscal Year 2023. A brief discussion followed.

Game on Triathlon Major Impact Special Event Applications

Lindblad gave an overview of the annual Game on Triathlon Major Impact Special Event Applications. She stated that these events have little impact on the surrounding impact and are very well received in the community. She shared that the July 30th event will be held at Vilano Beach and the May 21st and October events will be held at Mickler's Beach. This group works with staff, Marine Rescue, and law enforcement to ensure public safety. Van Rysdam asked if staff had a record of complaints and Lindblad stated that we have not received any complaints. Conversation followed. Chapin motioned to recommend approval of the three event applications. Long seconded the motion. Motion approved 6/0.

Florida Pop Tennis Major Impact Special Event Application

Lindblad stated that the USPTA Florida Pop Tennis (paddle tennis) was hosting its 50th tournament year at St. Johns County Beaches. This tournament is held at Butler Beach Memorial Day Weekend with approximately 75 participants. Lindblad said that the county works with law enforcement to ensure public access during the event. Tony Cubbedge, Event Organizer provided an overview of the event, event sponsors and community support. Van Rysdam motioned to recommend approval of tournament to the Board of County Commissioners. McEachean seconded the motion. Motion approved 6/0.

Perfect Game TDC Cat III Grant Application

Meyer provided the background for the Perfect Game request for \$10,000 TDC CAT 3 Sports Tourism Grant money for the North Florida Kickoff Classic on March 3-5, 2023. Angel Natal from Perfect Game attended via Zoom. Watkins asked what Perfect Game would do with the additional \$2,500 if it was granted. He answered that the additional funding would be used to offset facility costs. Facility costs include facility rental and staff fees. Van Rysdam shared that Perfect Game Tournaments provide a positive economic impact. Natal stated that he would be attending the March RAB meeting as there are additional grant applications. He said that he plans on discussing community outreach at that time. Discussion relating to the logistics, economic impact, site fees and community service followed. Long motioned to approve \$7,500, seconded by Van Rysdam. Motion approved 6/0.

TDC CAT II Grant Application Portal and Submittal Windows

Meyer provided an updated on the grant portal that will facilitate the grant application being completed electronically. He presented the proposed grant submittal window dates for application submittal. Long requested 2 months be given to the RAB for application review. He suggested the submittal due dates be changed to June 1 and December 1. Watkins asked how the changes will be noticed. Meyers announced the new position that will be added to his staff to work on this program and sports tourism. Lengthy discussion relating to the grant program, the application process and funding followed. McEachean motioned to approve June 1 and December 1 as due dates for grant application submittal with a second by Long. Motion passed 6/0.

Comprehensive Plan – Land Development Code

Watkins mentioned the RAB Land Development Code change recommendations. She plans on meeting with Growth Management and Kane to better understand options. She said that she would be able to make recommendations at the March meeting as to whether the RAB should workshop this or set up a subcommittee. Whitehurst suggested finding out from the legal department what we can demand from the developer that is legal. He referenced Florida State Statute 70.001 aka Harris Act: Protection of Private Property Rights. Watkins asked the RAB to send questions or ideas relating to this topic to Diane to ensure that it is added to the agenda for the meeting with Growth Management.

Staff Reports

Ryan Kane, Director shared the following updates:

1. The County closed on the Genovar Property in December. There will be an open house for county staff and the RAB later this month.

2. Disc Golf open house schedule at the County Fairgrounds on Monday, February 13, 2023 from 5-6 PM. The proposed project will be built on the abandoned 9-hole golf course facility.
3. Veterans Park pickleball parks will be opening soon. There will be a soft opening for the 6 new courts followed by a ribbon cutting event in the near future.
4. Mills Field Parking Lot renovation is nearing completion.
5. Cornerstone Park Playground had \$500,000 allocated for it in FY23. Staff is creating the project SCOPE using Collier Blocker Puryear as a template. The project will go out to RFP that will provide the opportunity for community feedback.
6. Treaty Park renovation design is being finalized. It will include 6 tennis courts, a new, enhanced dog park at a different location and additional parking.
7. 4470 Coastal Highway has been named Tortuga Park by the Board of County Commissioners. This facility includes a beach walkover, public beach access, public restrooms, showers, changing rooms and parking. This is set to go out to bid and then to the BOCC for approval of the contract.
8. Palm Valley West Boat Ramp Improvements are underway. This is an addition of a boat ramp on the western side of the Palm Valley Bridge.
9. OSPOrts has been collecting community feedback and using the feedback to create conceptual designs. Approximately 4,000 surveys have been submitted. They will present the Master Plan Concepts to the RAB in March to allow public feedback.
10. Countywide park signage project is underway to provide information in a clean, concise and standardized system. A QR Code has been added that will send you to the Park Ordinance for additional information.

Van Rysdam asked about the funding for the Mills Parking lot project and Kane replied that the American Rescue Act funding was being used for the project. He asked how long it will take to build the playground at Cornerstone. Baccari stated that the SCOPE to installation it could take up to a year. He then asked Kane if the signage project was funded. Baccari responded that we have money identified for it in the advertising line. Kane said that the signage project will be done in piece meal until completed. Chapin asked if the Cornerstone Park Lighting project was moving forward and Kane replied that the project needed to be reviewed by the Palm Valley Overlay District as a variance is needed. She asked for clarification on the Overlay District and Baccari explained that it a review board made up of citizens. She explained that there are guidelines that determine what can or cannot be developed in their footprint. Kane said the overlay is 600' off of A1A.

Jamie Baccari, Assistant Director provided the following updates:

1. February 27 – March 10, 2023 Summer Camp Lottery Registration
Van Rysdam asked if there was capacity issues and how many children are turned away. Baccari stated that she would provide a breakdown of the program once it was over and the statistics can be collected.
2. Geocache Challenge – Geocaching Passport challenge once completed participants receive a unique geocache coin.
3. Youth Basketball tryouts are this weekend. Coaches are needed.

Board Reports

Brad Long, Vice Chair, shared that the Park Foundation has an active listing on Indeed.com for the Executive Director position and so far they have received 84 clicks, 16 applications with two solid applicants. One applicant lives in Jacksonville and has extensive experience and they will be interviewing him tomorrow. He announced that the next Foundation meeting will be February 21, 2023 due to the Valentine's Day holiday.

Bill Bowen shared an update on the St. Augustine Disc Golf Lighthouse Open with one hundred participants this past weekend. The group raised funds for improvements. He stated that they used the Late Riser Food Truck from the Golf Course. He anticipates holding tournaments at the new golf course and using them. He hopes there will be another hotel built in the area.

Marty McEachan stated that he was working with a couple of communities and groups in West Augustine and Hastings. He said that if anyone had food or clothing to donate or knew of organizations that are interested in donating to please get with him and he will make sure it is distributed where it will do the most good. He stated the need for food and clothing is number 1. Watkins asked for specific items that were most needed. McEachan said that feminine hygiene projects, non-perishable foods, easy to prepare foods, blankets, socks, underwear and senior items. Van Rysdam suggested getting in contact with Ellen Waldon with Home Again and the pastor at Mount Moriah in West Augustine. He stated that he is partnered with Kids, Inc as well.

Bowen motioned to adjourn, seconded by Long. Motion passed 6/0.