

MINUTES

PARK ADVISORY COMMISSION

4:00 p.m. -- December 16, 2003

Time: Chair D'Anieri called the meeting to order at 4:06 p.m.

Place: Council Chamber, Second Floor, 100 North Fifth Avenue, Ann Arbor, Michigan.

ROLL CALL

Members Present: Berla, Berauer, Cohen, D'Anieri, Macomber, Reneaud, Riseng, Rodgers, Satarino

Members Absent: None

Ex-Officio Members Present: Johnson, Miller, Woods

Ex-Officio Members Absent: Aeschbach

Staff Present: Bemish, Borneman, Dehring, St. John, Worba

Others Present: Judith Judge, 1500 Barnard, 769-7501
David Leroy, 716 Sunset Road, 761-6142
Kathy Linderman, 1760 David Court, 663-3911

INTRODUCTIONS

Miller introduced new PAC member Brigit Macomber.

PUBLIC COMMENTARY

Judith Judge, 1500 Barnard, said she was before PAC about two months ago regarding Greenview Park and she and her neighborhood remained concerned that the schools are looking at non-educational uses for part of the site. Contact by her and her neighborhood had been made regarding this site with the City Natural Areas Preservation staff and their cooperation had been appreciated. She understood that the status of the site would taken up by the City in future. She said in 1991, major consideration was paid as to whether Greenview Park would be used as a site for a senior center and City Council adopted a resolution recommending that the schools and the PAC look at ways to maintain Greenview Park as open space. In 1992, PAC issued a response letter stating that the School Board should relinquish interest in the land as it was already used as public space. She said that in 1975, the School Board made pledges that this land would remain open in exchange for which three variances given to them. She thought that recently the School Board was looking at this issue again and also had a real estate development class study the site. She said that the School Board deferred a request of the neighborhood to put in play equipment at the site. She was concerned that the deferral meant the School Board had other ideas for the site. She said in 1992, when the School Board voted to use the property for the senior center, it was done without discussion with the City's Parks and Recreation Department about whether the site was suitable for use as a major facility. She requested PAC pay attention to the site because she saw another attempt at development of the site could occur.

She asked that the legal question of the waiver of development rights be looked into as well. She said she would be talking with the School Board as well. She noted that although most people thought the site was a City park, it was owned by the Public Schools. She noted that the City has the site master planned as a park. She said they have enough neighbors to complete removal of Buckthorn on the site, but have a problem with disposal. She thought the question was how to create a vision of open space within City for this area, maybe with some pathways. She hoped consideration by PAC for acquisition of this site would occur.

David LeRoy, 716 Sunset Road, President of the Greater Sunset/Brooks Neighborhood Association, regarding the purchase of Sunset Brooks as a park, thought that part of the rationale and the vision of this project was to preserve adjoining space, especially woodlands to the west of the site of the proposed park, as well as to preserve a corridor along M14. He said to accomplish this, a number of neighbors agreed to deed restrict some of their lots. He said a number of meetings have occurred with Parks and Recreation Department staff. He thought the core property owners surrounding the proposed park site still supported giving conservation easements/deed restrictions. He thought the property owners further away from the proposed park area, were more concerned about the legality of the deed restrictions. He was committed to agreeing to deed restrictions on his property. He said he would be available to answer questions.

Kathy Linderman, 1760 David Court, member of Leslie Science Center Advisory Committee, had concerns about staffing at the center. She said, at the science center, there was one permanent employee, two seasonal temporary employees, and six staff employees. She said staff employees work year round, but were treated as temporary employees. She said they were fired for two weeks in December and then rehired. She said they were professional people, with college degrees, and they were the teachers of our children. She felt it was a great disservice to them and to the children. She said they were paid between \$10-\$13 per hour with no benefits, no paid time off, and were able to purchase major medical insurance at \$1 per every hour they worked, which most could not afford. She was concerned about this, had spoken with Councilmember Johnson about it, and wanted it addressed by PAC.

MINUTES OF PREVIOUS MEETING

None.

REHABILITATION AND DEVELOPMENT MILLAGE PROJECT UPDATE

No questions.

CITY COUNCIL ITEMS UPDATE

Satarino, regarding Traver Woods, asked if staff had checked whether an additional two acres would be donated by the developer. Miller responded that when the sale was negotiated, the 2.1 acres immediately south that leads to Leslie Woods were to be resolved during the site plan review process. She said there was no written agreement at the time of the closing, but it was understood that it would be dealt with when the site plan was reviewed.

Johnson wanted to discuss the Leslie Science Center staffing issue brought up by a Kathy Linderman earlier in the meeting. He said he was surprised by the information provided by Ms. Kinderman.

Miller responded that each recreation facility is managed by one full-time employee and the rest of the employees are temporary. She said between 300-400 seasonal or staff employees were hired per year, of which, about 300 are hired for the recreational facilities, with the peak time being summer when employees work 40 hours per week. She said some employees work year round, but not full time during the other seasons. She said FTE's have been lost over the past few years; from 84 to 59 full time equivalent employees. She said reductions such as these are occurring throughout the City organization. She said of those who are left, they try to manage the work with the available staff. She said Veterans Park runs 363 days a year with only one full time permanent employee. She said the situation at Leslie Science Center is not unique to the rest of the City organization.

Johnson asked about providing benefits.

Miller said the City determined that as an organization if a position was ½ time, it would be considered a staff position and would be paid a living wage and could receive health insurance that the employee pays for. She said it was a complicated issue but, by the very nature of the services provided, the number of seasonal employees was typical for a parks and recreation system.

Woods wanted more detailed information regarding employees having to be fired for two weeks each year.

Miller responded that the City work rules requires that anyone who works 52 weeks in a year be considered a full time employee, so the two-week termination must occur for the staff employees each year. She said if anyone was doing AFSME-type work, they could not be allowed to work beyond 10 months in a year. She said more detailed information would be provided to PAC.

RESOLUTION REGARDING PURCHASE OF SUNSET BROOKS

D'Anieri said there were two substitute resolutions to be considered, one of which would be sent on to City Council. He provided background regarding why a substitute resolution was necessary. He said PAC passed a resolution advocating the purchase of the Sunset Brooks parcel as a park and forwarded it to City Council. He said City Council then passed a resolution to purchase the parcel. He noted that a part of the PAC resolution stated that before the purchase of the site occurred, conservation easements had to be executed for certain areas surrounding the proposed park parcel. He also noted that the City Council resolution, while it referenced the PAC contingency, did not constrain its approval. He said, since the PAC contingency was not likely to happen due to reluctance by some of the affected property owners and the City Attorney saying it was more complicated to do than originally thought, the question now was (1) did PAC want to revise its original resolution and withdraw the requirement that conservation easements must be granted, supporting the park purchase without a guarantee that easements were received, or (2) did PAC want to stand by its original resolution and ask City Council to rescind its approval of the park purchase.

Moved by Satarino, supported by Berla, the resolution to revise approval of the purchase of 7.4 acres of land owned by the Johnson Holding Company (Sunset Brooks) for Park Use to remove the contingency regarding execution of conservation easements on neighboring parcels at 716 Sunset, 810 Sunset, 902 Sunset, 904 Sunset, 906 Sunset, 910 Sunset and 826 Vesper. Satarino said PAC should keep in mind that many of neighbors supported the contingency and raised \$80,000 toward the purchase of the park property. After discussion, the last Whereas paragraph was amended with the addition of "the assurance of" after the word "without".

Riseng asked which parcels have agreed to give a conservation easement.

Borneman replied that 716 Sunset and 902 Sunset would most likely agree. He said he had not talked directly with 810 Sunset, but had been told they would be supportive. He said 904 Sunset would be willing to do a 40-foot scenic easement from M14. He said 906 Sunset was not interested. He said 910 Sunset would probably be willing to do 30/40-foot scenic easement. He had not talked directly with 826 Vesper yet.

Borneman said all the neighbors have said they want to protect the natural areas on their properties, even if they are not willing to grant easements to the City for these areas.

Johnson felt the conservation easements were important. He was willing to wait until these easements were executed because he felt they positively contributed to the park parcel.

Berauer asked Johnson why City Council did not put the contingency in.

Both Johnson and Woods both thought the contingency was part of the City Council resolution they had approved.

Woods supported the revised resolution without the contingency.

Berla thought the two important neighbors were those who had indicated they would grant an easement. He thought PAC had to decide to go forward without an easement requirement or back away. He wanted to go forward.

Berauer asked when closing would occur.

Miller said the property owner was not aware of the issues facing the City. She said he wanted to proceed to close now.

Cohen thought there were two issues: (1) guaranteed protection in writing for easements or (2) block the purchase because neighbors cannot or would not grant easements. She wondered if there was yet another alternative that could assure that the land wanted by the City as easement areas could be granted.

Miller said if PAC does not approve this resolution, but approves the second resolution to rescind purchase offer, PAC could still want to move forward with the purchase of the park property, but only when the deed restrictions are in place for the easement areas. She said this would delay the purchase of the park property and she did not know if the property owner was willing to do so. She added that if PAC approves the resolution recommending City Council rescind the purchase offer, she would have to take that resolution to City Council for it to either approve or rescind the purchase, as City Council had the final say.

Berauer asked if conservation easements were feasible.

Miller replied that the recommendation from the City Attorney's Office was that it would be better to have deed restrictions rather than conservation easements. She noted that some of the neighbors had voiced their willingness to sign a deed restriction rather than a conservation easement.

Satarino thought it was not fair now to rescind the offer to purchase the park site because one or two neighbors was not going to execute an easement. He thought the site stood alone without the need for easements from the surrounding property owners. He thought PAC should learn more about deed restrictions vs. conservation easements for future park purchases, but this purchase should not be held up because of PAC's inexperience with them.

D'Anieri thought PAC had three alternatives: (1) PAC could support the first resolution removing the contingency, (2) PAC could approve the second resolution rescinding its approval of the purchase of the park site, or (3) PAC could modify that second resolution (rescinding its approval) adding language stating that Council should postpone the purchase until other things have occurred, such as deed restrictions being executed prior to purchase.

Macomber asked if the resolution removing the contingency was approved, would deed restrictions be pursued?

Miller replied yes.

Satarino did not want to delay as the land owner wants to close for tax reasons.

Berauer thought it would be good to insert language in the resolution removing the contingency regarding trying to get deed restrictions instead of conservation easements.

Riseng believed most of the property owners are supportive of giving conservation easements.

Moved by Berauer, supported by Riseng, that the resolution removing the contingency be amended to add a second resolved stating that "Resolved, that PAC urges Parks and Recreation staff to work toward acquiring deed restrictions and/or other forms of legal protections on as many parcels as possible".

Vote on amendment passes unanimously.

Vote on resolution removing the contingency with amendment: 7 – yes, 2 - no (Cohen/D'Anieri)

Second resolution rescinding approval of the purchase of the parkland was not discussed since the first resolution was approved.

COSTS TO MANAGE/RESTORE NATURAL AREAS

Borneman said memorandum in packet was in response to questions previously raised by PAC. He said the range of cost per acre to manage/restore various natural areas was just within hundreds of dollars of each other.

Satarino asked what was the cost per acre to maintain Dickens Woods.

Borneman replied that he could not answer for sure. He said removing invasives and adding native plants takes time. More important to him was to make people realize that not all green areas are alike. He said to choose sites carefully, as higher quality sites would cost less to maintain. He said volunteer hours could be added to the cost figure. He said there were about 5,000 volunteer hours per year. He said he would continue to better classify the parkland areas and cost determinations.

Woods asked for examples of areas that would fall into the different quality categories. Borneman replied that park areas that have high quality – conservation priority one areas – are: Bird Hills Park, Black Pond Woods, Brown Park, Barton Park, Furstenburg Park, Kiebler-Langford Park. Second priority: Argo Park, Dhu Varren Park, Marshall Park, Hollywood Park, Huron Parkway. Greenspace areas: Dolph, Greenview, Evergreen Park, Ward Park, Northeast Area Park.

Berla asked how parks were categorized.

Borneman replied that staff looked at four things: amount of woody invasives, amount of herbaceous invasives, amount of herbaceous natives, and the forest quality index. He said a top priority conservation area only had 3 percent woody invasives, 3 percent herbaceous invasives, and at least 90 percent coverage of native herbaceous plants.

Woods thought this information was really helpful.

Borneman noted that the Public Schools own or Washtenaw County Drain Commissioner owns land areas that are managed as parks by the City. He noted that we also want to protect areas for wildlife, not just plants. He said birds need larger areas of ground, butterflies and other insects require certain species of plants, and frogs need good water quality. He thought staff could create a map that shows which sites are owned by others, but managed/maintained by the City as parks.

Johnson felt we should also consider wildlife restoration/protection.

Borneman said it was harder to know how to encourage wildlife in certain areas, it was easier to know how to deal with plants, which sometimes encourages certain wildlife/insects. He said the birds at the former landfill site have been encouraged by mowing later in the season, after the nesting season was finished.

SPORTS FIELDS

No discussion.

LANDFILL PROJECT

Miller provided background on the landfill project. She said in the mid 1990s, the City actively pursued developing the old landfill site. She said a number of public meetings were held regarding parks and recreation opportunities at the site and drawings were developed showing a learning center, hiking trails, and soccer fields. She noted that the site was in Pittsfield Township so City and Township had to work out agreements about what to do with the site and other issues between the City and Township. She said also being considered was moving the City's garages from Main Street and West Washington to the landfill site. She said up until the last six months, the project had been on hold, but now the City and Township had worked out the issues regarding the site, so the City was now going forward to develop the site. She said Bill Wheeler from Public Services would work on the development of the maintenance facility, Brian Wienert would work on the MRF and recycling facility which were already at the site, and Jeff Dehring and Matt Worba would work on development of recreation areas on the site.

Dehring showed an aerial map of site and described where the different uses would be located. He said there was an opportunity to develop a soccer/trail network working with Pittsfield Township. He said staff wanted to inform PAC that the process to develop the site was starting up again.

Berauer asked if soccer fields were possible.

Miller replied that it was hoped that 12-15 soccer fields would be developed. She said a meeting was scheduled with a member of one of the soccer associations this week. She said staff hopes to develop City public/Township public/non-profit organization partnerships to assist in the developing/managing/funding of maintenance costs associated with the recreation site.

Dehring noted that the City would have to comply with Pittsfield Township regulations when developing the site. He noted that the southwest corner of site was the area where they were trying to protect birds by mowing later in the season.

Cohen remembered that bicycle paths were considered for this area connecting to other bicycle paths in the township – a network.

Miller said that bicycle paths are being considered too.

Dehring said a regional bicycle path was being considered by the township.

Satarino thought the City could interface with the township park to the south. He thought the landfill site was a good area to look at for open space as well, and alternatives other than soccer fields.

Miller added that Pittsfield Township had made it very clear to the City that for it to approve the maintenance facility and the composting site, a large portion of recreation uses had to occur at this site as well.

Berla asked once the approval process had been completed, how long development of a recreation area would take.

Dehring replied approximately 1 to 3 years, once the approval process had been completed.

Macomber asked if public input would occur.

Miller replied yes. She said a public forum had been scheduled in January, with more to follow.

LAND ACQUISITION PROCESS

Miller reviewed changes requested by PAC that have been made to the workflow chart and site evaluation forms.

Rodgers thought it was a good start, but further work was needed on the evaluation forms.

Riseng asked if a goal was to compare like parks.

Miller replied yes; for example, to compare a neighborhood park to a neighborhood park.

Satarino requested the addition of a box to the parkland acquisition process chart indicating PAC filling out the site evaluation form.

Bemish said a box would be added to that chart.

Miller said she asked other jurisdictions for their acquisition policies, and if they had a donation policy when looking at acquisitions. She said not many other jurisdictions do acquisitions the way Ann Arbor does. She said neighbor donations/memorial donations occur which affect acquisitions. She asked if some PAC members could help her develop a donation policy.

D'Anieri asked if anyone wanted to volunteer to help Miller with an acquisition/donation policy.

Cohen also thought encouraging citizen involvement other than monetary donations should be discussed as part of the acquisition policy.

Cohen, Berauer, and Riseng volunteered.

REPORT FROM MANAGER OF PARKS AND RECREATION SERVICES

Miller noted that she had scheduled initial interviews for mid-January for the Parks Manager position, then, tentatively, a "meet and greet" would occur for the narrowed group of candidates on January 21, 5-7 p.m. She said the customer service report in the packet included evaluations done of the summer programs. She said another report would be done in the summer for the fall/winter programs. She said the kickoff meeting for next year's budget for the City would start tomorrow. She said the City's goal a year ago was a 10 percent reduction, with this year a 5 percent reduction, and again next year a 5 percent reduction. She said the new PAC member orientation/tours were scheduled for February and March.

Cohen said she has heard complaints regarding natural ice rinks no longer being done.

REPORT FROM COMMUNITY EDUCATION AND RECREATION

None.

REPORT FROM RECREATION ADVISORY COMMISSION

None.

Berla suggested ways to get the community more involved with PAC: have meetings in evenings, provide on the website an email address for public commentary, have all minutes and agendas on the website, and mention that public commentary was welcome at meetings.

Miller asked if he wanted discussion on his ideas to occur at the next meeting.

Berla replied yes.

ADJOURNMENT

D'Anieri declared the meeting adjourned at 6:10 p.m.