

City of Clearwater

*Main Library - Council Chambers
100 N. Osceola Avenue
Clearwater, FL 33755*



Meeting Minutes

Tuesday, May 25, 2021

6:30 PM

Main Library - Council Chambers

Parks and Recreation Board

Roll Call

Present 6 - Chair Bruce Rector, Vice Chair Mark Rodriguez, Board Member Lisa Tuttle, Board Member Jason Hood, Board Member Patrick Raftery, and Board Member Martin Armstrong

Absent 1 - Board Member Scott Thomas

Also Present – Jim Halios – Parks & Recreation Director, Patricia O. Sullivan - Board Reporter

Awaiting approval

1. Call To Order

The Chair called the meeting to order at 6:30 p.m. at the Main Library.

To provide continuity for research, items are in agenda order although not necessarily discussed in that order.

2. Citizens to be Heard Regarding Items Not on the Agenda

Via e-comments, Elizabeth Davis wrote, "We have bathrooms all over Clearwater in our Neighborhood Parks, and some other locations, but there are no instructions on site, to explain to residents how it is possible to have them open for a party, or neighborhood event. WHO can they call? where is the website application? How much does it cost? Please ask. We are also alone in the county, as on our trails we have no open, public bathrooms for the public to walk, ride, enjoy our space. The Ream Wilson, Del Oro Trail, and more, are missing facilities from dawn to dusk. Surely we have staff that could open and close 3-4 bathrooms across our city for our residents. Cherry Harris, Del Oro, Countryside. please ask for this and let's get better at delivering for our tax paying residents and voters."

3. New Business Items**3.1 Discussion of Plans to Provide the Updates Suggested by the Citizens and Council Member Beckman to the Lake Bellevue Recreation Area**

Parks & Recreation Director Jim Halios said the City wanted to develop a master plan for the Lake Bellevue area, included renovating Belmont and Ed Wright parks. Staff will reach out to the neighborhood in August to gather resident preferences for park enhancements.

It was recommended a board member attend the meeting.

3.2 Recreation Center Hours of Operation and Programs

In reference to a recommendation to standardize recreation center hours, it was stated that recreation centers tailored their hours and programs to the communities they served.

Mr. Halios said Countryside Recreation Center changed its opening time from 7:00 to 5:00 a.m. following a time study in response to multiple requests to accommodate working people with earlier hours. Ross Norton Recreation Center's modified hours reflected minimum community use on weekday mornings except during summer. Unheated swimming pools traditionally opened 2 weeks before Memorial Day; weekends had highest pool use.

3.3 Consultant Selection and Parks & Recreation Master Plan Timetables

Mr. Halios reported the Purchasing Committee had selected a consultant to lead the conservancy discussion for Imagine Clearwater. He will negotiate a purchase order with the applicant and provide the board a link to the consultant's information.

Mr. Halios anticipated efforts to update the Parks & Recreation Master Plan would begin in fall. The City will issue an RFP (Request for Proposals) for a consultant in late summer.

3.4 Review Repair and Marking of Sidewalk Process

It was reported a Clearwater neighborhood website listed many concerns that sidewalks marked for repairs were untouched for long periods of time. It was noted the City could be liable for trip and fall accidents on sidewalks marked as safety hazards. It was questioned if the volume of sidewalk repairs was greater than Parks & Recreation could handle. Pinellas County was encouraged to increase the gasoline tax to fund more repairs to sidewalks, rights-of-way, etc.

Mr. Halios reviewed the City's sidewalk repair program; the department was responsible for 600 miles of sidewalks. The Engineering Department handled large-scale sidewalk and curb replacements. Following significant staff reductions, the backlog increased to approximately 2,500 repairs. The department contracted grinding sidewalks not requiring removal/replacement. As laurel oak trees in Countryside reach the end of their life spans, roots lift and damage sidewalks. He will address the City Council re managing the City's tree canopy, especially in rights-of-way where utility conflicts occur.

Mr. Halios said the department tried to repair sidewalks with ½ inch or higher trip hazards as soon as possible. He said the County gasoline tax funded road and infrastructure repairs; he will investigate if the City could use it to fund sidewalk repairs.

3.5 Nuisance Species Removal in Parks

AND**3.6 Vegetation Control for Coyote Management**

Concerns were expressed that Forest Run Park sheltered coyotes within its overgrowth and significant number of nuisance species. It was recommended that removing nuisance species and controlling foliage would improve management of coyotes, which were audible in the park.

Mr. Halios said ground crew maintenance cleared park paths via the “mow, blow, and go” method. The department was not equipped to manage coyotes or control nuisance species. The volunteer coordinator managed a robust online recruitment process on the City’s website and organized a volunteer activity every weekend. On a recent weekend, volunteers removed nuisance species from Moccasin Lake Nature Park.

3.7 Changing Tree Trimming Practices in ROW for Power Lines

It was questioned if the City was authorized to stop power companies from aggressively trimming trees in rights-of-way by removing the center branches, which effectively cuts out the hearts of trees.

Mr. Halios said the power company’s tree trimming methods frustrated the City. The City did not control the easements which extended 10 feet on each side of powerlines. Power companies were authorized to do all necessary to preserve powerlines, considered vital infrastructure.

Discussion ensued with a comment that it would be better if the power company would remove a tree rather than maiming it and a recommendation that residents should not plant trees under powerlines.

Mr. Halios said the City was responsible for clearing vegetation blocking streetlights. The City’s education process needed improvement; many residents were unaware how tall trees grow. Staff had been reduced to 10 urban foresters and one arborist. Planning & Development Department was working to clear all trees from City rights-of-way and swales. The City worked with the University of Florida to produce a spreadsheet listing tree species with information on how wide a tree will grow and how far trees needed to be planted away from sidewalks. Rather than removing or partially uprooting trees, City sidewalks now meander around tree conflicts. The Parks & Recreation Department budget was less than the Police and Fire departments.

3.8 Food for Thought: See above.**4. Old Business Items:** None.

5. Director's Report

Mr. Halios apologized for the last minute delay of the Imagine Clearwater groundbreaking; an August date was being considered. He had sent out an email re the successful workday at Kings Highway Center with the Boys and Girls Club, the Buccaneers, Jabil Inc., and staff. He discussed partnerships and responsibilities for entities operating out of closed city recreation centers.

6. Board Members to be Heard

Member Raftery said the Mayor could have commented privately to Councilmember Becker re her attendance at advisory board meetings instead of in public where it received newspaper coverage. He said the board encouraged public input.

Mr. Halios said when a citizen contacts a Councilmember re a Parks & Recreation Department or Board topic, the Councilmember brings the matter to the City Manager who then contacts Mr. Halios with the issue and asks that the Councilmember and City Manager be kept in the loop.

Member Rodriguez said his mother lives downtown, visits many City parks for exercise and was very impressed with Crest Lake Park upgrades.

Chair Rector said he recently played golf with his son at the Landings. He said he was impressed by how important it was for citizens and businesses to take ownership of City and neighborhood parks. He said volunteer help would have been beneficial when tourist litter on Clearwater Beach recently taxed Parks & Recreation staff. He encouraged residents to volunteer.

7. Adjourn

The meeting adjourned at 7:05 p.m.

Attest:

Chair
Parks & Recreation Advisory Board

Board Reporter