

WHITEHALL PARKS AND RECREATION COMMISSION

JANUARY 7, 2016 – SPECIAL MEETING

The Special meeting of the Whitehall Parks and Recreation Commission was called to order at 6:03 pm by Chairperson John Fethers. In attendance: Mike Adkins, Kyra Barnes, Tiffanie Charles, Fethers, Katie Quincel, Greg Thurman, Zach Wright (arrived at 6:05), Director Steve Carr and Shannon Werner. Guests: Council President Jim Graham, Councilpersons Wes Kantor, Lee Stahley, Larry Morrison, and Karen Conison, Auditor Dan Miller, 6 citizens and representatives for the MSA design team.

Carr reviewed the agenda and stated that this was the first of two meetings and the goal was to develop a 1 – 5 year plan for the Parks and Recreation department.

The meeting began with a brief presentation to update the participants on the spray ground project and the renovation of the Activity Center.

MSA presented conceptual drawings of the spray ground and accompanying shelter/ bathhouse. The plan provided a few more detail than the last presented plan including pre-cast “leaf benches” instead of sea walls. The spray ground itself will include 3 zones delineated by a tide pool, with each zone including age-appropriate water features.

MSA is currently preparing construction documents and pricing materials. They plan to have the bid documents and permit application ready by January 31, 2016. The project will then go out to bid for 4 – 6 weeks (with permitting occurring simultaneously). The goal is to break ground in mid-March, weather permitting.

MSA then reviewed the concept plans for the Activity Center renovation. This plan is still in the conceptual stage. The plan includes keeping the fitness/exercise room and permanently raising the moveable stage to create a third programmable space. Carr explained that the department could make a small investment in risers to accommodate the loss of the movable portion of the stage.

Next, the group started the open discussion with a focus on Whitehall Community Park. Carr began the discussion by informing the meeting participants of what is already taking place at WCP. These projects include:

- Expanding the disc golf course to 18 holes. This project has already been funded and is under way. The department has employed a professional designer and its construction is currently weather-pending. Staff feels this will be a tremendous asset, not only for recreation, but to promote positive activities/patrons and more “eye and ears” in remote parts of the park which will create a safer environment for all users.
- Removal of structures previously marked for demolition according to the park master plan. Staff has completed the removal of 2 picnic shelters, the Civil Air Patrol building, 1 restroom building and is currently completing the removal of the Buckeye Building. While having park

maintenance staff complete these tasks may be slower, doing the work in-house has been a tremendous savings to the city.

- The city has also planned a multi-use path for the east side of N. Hamilton Road.

The group also quickly came to a consensus that Whitehall Community Park should be a passive park styled after the Metro Parks System. It was agreed that WCP's size and mature trees make a very unique asset, like an oasis in an otherwise urban setting. All future projects and programs should take this into account.

The group engaged in a brainstorming session about what other amenities/features people would like to see at WCP. They are listed in no order of priority.

- Connectivity. Using WCP to link Whitehall to central Ohio's bike trail system. Carr explained that this is a general (if long-term) goal of MORPC. Auditor Miller further explained that negotiating terms with the Airport Golf Course continues to delay this project.
- Crushed limestone paths (as identified in the master plan).
- Making the park's lower level more handicap accessible.
- Replacing aging shelter houses.

Next, the participants focused on John Bishop Park. Carr provided up update on the state of the Armory. The city will retain the garage and old drill room to serve as the department's new maintenance complex. The remainder of the building will be razed and replaced with new soccer fields. The city's engineer firm is almost finished with the bid documents and specs so the project should move forward soon. Carr also updated attendees on the new Park Ranger program that will be implemented in 2016. Staff is optimistic that the presence of 2 part-time rangers will help curb bad behavior in the parks.

Carr continued the discussion with several ideas, most stemming from the master plan:

- Add a new shelter house to replace the one that is becoming part of the new splash pad.
- Enclose part of the shelter/concessions (located north of Etna) to provide storage for youth football and baseball.
- Add a new playground to serve the shelter house and south end of the park.
- Expand the parking lot on Langley Ave. to better serve the shelter houses.
- Update the amphitheater.
 - This would entail removing the concrete and benches in front of the stage and creating a natural, sloped lawn for viewing. A retaining wall would be used to support this slope. The back side of this wall would become the new "wall of fame" and replace the current "walk of fame". Such a renovation would serve a dual purpose. It would create a better viewing area for spectators and provide for a more cost-effective and space-saving way to honor the city's notable citizens. Carr noted that he understood changing the memorials could be controversial but none of the participants voiced opposition and the general consensus to replace the benches with a lawn was favorable.
- Renovate and reinstate the basketball court north of the splash pad site. This would be a full court enclosed with a gated 8-foot chain link fence. While this idea was met with an overall

favorable response, it garnered much discussion about how to best monitor the court to curb negative behavior. Suggestions included:

- An in-person monitor on the court during park hours.
- Restricting use to Whitehall residents only (with or without a guest policy).
- Prohibiting use of the court for a weeklong period if conduct gets out of hand to encourage self-policing.

The last topic of discussion involved programming. The conversation specifically focused on more programs and activities for high school students. Ideas included:

- Fun and exciting classes like rock-climbing or grappling.
- Using high school facilities to run an intermural program.
- Build a club house. Start small with a few activities then slowly grow and build the program.
- An official Boys and Girls of America Club.
- Park sponsored movies.

Participants acknowledged that teenagers are a notoriously difficult group to program for. Opinions varied on the need and potential success of such programs. Some feel the need exists and teens will participate in great programs. Others were of the opinion that such opportunities already exist (through the schools and churches) and the real problem is generating interest.

Carr pointed out that if the citizens really desire such programming, it will require a serious commitment from the city to fund the necessary personnel positions because, at current staffing levels, the department is simply not equipped to do this kind of programming.

The meeting concluded with an agreement on a rough agenda for the follow-up meeting schedule for January 21, 2016.

1. Identify and prioritize the top 5 capital projects.
2. Discuss the 3 neighborhood parks.
3. Further discuss potential programming.

There being no further business, Charles moved, seconded by Barnes, and the meeting adjourned at 8:12 pm.

To the best of my knowledge these minutes are true and correct.

Chairperson

MSA Architects

MEETING MINUTES

Whitehall Parks and Recreation
Spray Ground and Community Activity Center Renovation
15198.00

Date: January 7, 2016

Time: 6:00 PM

Location: City of Whitehall

Meeting Number: 6

Subject: Parks & Recreation Summit (Special Meeting)

Members: Present / Copied

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Spray Ground Discussion:

- > The spray ground design was introduced to the Whitehall residents present. MKSK discussed the changes made to the design since the last meeting; the biggest change was replacing the cast-in-place seat walls with a group of 6' to 8' long precast leaf seats.

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- Several topics that have been previously discussed with the commissioners were revisited with the public audience. Those topics include:
 - The need to prevent blind spots within and outside of the fencing;
 - Provisions needed for large groups, such as pre-schools, so that the spray ground is not inundated with people;
 - The potential for using the space for non-aquatic-related special events;
 - Winterizing and maintenance of the park;
 - Limiting access to the park to the residents of Whitehall.
- The future possibility of providing a concessions stand was discussed. This had been previously addressed by the team and will be reconsidered with the most recent building design.
- Security and vandalism concerns were raised by the Whitehall residents in attendance. Residents are concerned about trespassing occurring after operating hours and out of season. MKSK agreed to research anti-climb security height fencing to replace the currently proposed 42" decorative fencing.

Community Activity Center Renovation Discussion:

- The proposed addition and renovations to the Community Center were presented and discussed.
 - Changes made to the design since the previous meeting were discussed, primarily moving the office suite north into the existing office / classroom area.
 - MSA addressed the adjustable stage in the Great Hall; at the previous meeting, commissioners expressed the desire to maintain its adjustability; however, MSA recommends that the stage be permanently raised to maximize usability of this room as a classroom.
 - The second proposed addition, to the south of the Great Hall, was discussed and deemed as a necessary place for storing event furniture that currently occupies the building's hallways.
- Access to the basement was discussed; there is concern about using the basement as storage because it is difficult to transport heavy items using the existing stairway. MSA discussed the considerable cost involved in installing an elevator to the basement, which makes it prohibitive from pursuing.
- Residents of Whitehall would like to increase size of the windows in the proposed exercise area.
- Overall, the public expressed excitement about the project and the potential to use the building to serve civic needs.

Next Commission Meeting: January 21, 2016 6:00pm

End of Meeting Minutes