

Visalia Parks & Recreation Commission
Meeting Minutes January 15, 2013

1. Call Meeting to Order/Roll Call

The Visalia Parks & Recreation Commission met in a regular meeting on Tuesday, January 15, 2013, at the Council Chambers, 707 W. Acequia Street, Visalia, California. The meeting was called to order by Chairperson Mann at 5:30 pm.

Present: Lesa Mann, Robert Doi, Ben Filiponi, Dolores Taylor, and Shann Blue

Absent: Carla Calhoun

Guests: Scott Woodhouse

Staff: Vince Elizondo, Jeannie Greenwood, Jim Bean, Jeff Fultz, and Brenda Miernik.

- 2. Review and Approve the Minutes of the Regular Meeting, December 18, 2012.** Commissioner Mann requested a motion to approve the minutes. Ms. Miernik stated Commissioner Calhoun emailed her a correction, it was added to the minutes for approval. Mr. Bill Huott, private citizen, requested that his public comments, e-mailed to Mr. Elizondo last month, be added to the December minutes. Commissioner Filiponi moved to approve the minutes with noted changes, and Commissioner Dolores Taylor seconded the motion.

MOTION

Motion passed 4-0

- 3. Public Comment:** Mr. Huott said the City of Visalia presented a review of the road project around Oval Park at a North Visalia Advisory meeting and it was impressive.
- 4. Annual Election of Chair and Co-Chair.** Commissioner Mann tabled this discussion to the February meeting.
- 5. Proposed Concept Plans for Undeveloped Property at the Riverway Sports Park (Continued From December).** Mr. Elizondo, Parks and Recreation Director, stated that at the November meeting Mr. Steve Canada, Principle of the HLA Group in Sacramento, presented various concepts for the former BMX area at the Sports Park. Mr. Elizondo said many ideas and suggestions were presented, costs were discussed, and Mr. Canada was asked to return with a Preferred Concept in December.

Mr. Elizondo stated that at the December meeting, many of the local organized youth groups attended and Mr. Canada presented the Preferred Concept. The Commissioners tabled the discussion until this meeting. He said staff is recommending the commission approve the concept plan and it will be presented to City Council for approval.

Mr. Elizondo summarized the concept plans.

Concept 1: small fields for younger groups, multipurpose with existing lighting, open turf area. Cost estimate \$231,000.

Concept 2: included courts i.e., handball, tennis, basketball and bocce ball. Cost estimate \$562,000.

Concept 3: Kompan court, large facility designed for soccer play, the most expensive of the concepts. Cost estimate \$958,000.

Concept 4: Kompan court, bocce ball, tennis, handball and basketball courts. Cost estimate \$685,000.

Commissioner Mann announced that since Commissioner Calhoun knew she was going to be absent this evening she emailed a message to the Commission with the following points. She is pleased with the diversity and design of Concept 4. It provides a diverse range of sports of interest to adults and seniors. The City owns other land that can be developed for youth sports. She suggested the project be designed in phases, adding features as funding becomes available to the City.

Frank Gerrazo, a volunteer coach with Visalia Youth Baseball for 25 years, said he wanted the Commissioners to consider the growth rate that is happening in the youth organizations. He said the BMX area is ideal for the younger children and is well within the City budget.

Craig Barnes, with Visalia Little League, asked if there were any plans to build an area where the courts might be placed. Mr. Elizondo stated there are no plans at present.

Jeff Boswell stated Concept 4 is going to be built with the hope that people will use it. He reiterated the safety factor for the younger kids and stated the minor changes would be well within the City budget.

Commissioner Taylor asked how the baseball diamonds are being used currently. Mr. Boswell stated they are used on Saturdays by about 75 teams. She said after listening to the youth sports organizers she feels the City should provide what the people are asking for, while staying within the budget with Concept 1.

Commissioner Doi asked Mr. Boswell if his organization has already grown out of the available area. He said the organization has grown out of the area but he is working around it. Commissioner Doi asked Mr. Elizondo if money was saved on Concept 1, could the remaining money be spent in another area of town.

Mr. Elizondo said the money for this project comes from a Sports Park Reserve Fund, a combination of park impact fees (from developers) and general reserve funds set aside for this purpose. He said the unused funds would remain in this account for the use of the sports park, not other established parks in older areas of the City.

Commissioner Mann called for a vote.

Concept 1 – Two votes Concept 2 – One vote Concept 3 – Zero votes Concept 4 – One vote

Commissioner Doi moved to accept Concept 1 as the recommended Commission choice. Commissioner Taylor seconded the motion.

MOTION

Motion passed 3-1

6. Presentation on Flood Control Fee. Adam Ennis, Public Works Department Head, stated that Visalia property owners currently pay 48-cents per parcel of land for the critical flood control project that was constructed on Kaweah Dam. Now complete, property owners can choose to continue to have the fee used to further reduce the risk of local flooding. Increased maintenance will enable the system to better handle large volumes of water that could otherwise overwhelm it, causing pipelines and manholes to plug up, leak, or break.

Mr. Ennis said property owners are required to give their approval to continue and expand the use of any fee. A ballot will be sent to property owners in a few weeks asking them to help reduce the risk of flooding through increased maintenance and repairs on Visalia’s storm water system by continuing the 48-cent monthly fee. Mr. Ennis said the funding has not changed since 1994, and it is less than ½ percent of the total value of the system. He added that flood insurance costs and requirements will not be affected by the outcome of the vote.

Mr. Ennis said a nine-man crew is responsible for the care of the current system and the fee would be used to increase the maintenance of the following.

- | | |
|---------------------------|--|
| 47 permanent storm basins | 16 temporary storm basins |
| 249 miles of storm pipe | 4,130 manholes |
| 41 pump stations | 29 miles of channel including Mill Creek, Packwood Creek, Modoc Ditch, and Evans Ditch |

Mr. Ennis said the funds would be used specifically for jobs dedicated to the increased maintenance of the storm water system. These funds remain local and cannot legally be used for any other purpose. He said City Council may authorize an increase of the fee in the future. Sources for further information include calling 559-713-4310 or email-reduceflooding.com.

Commissioner Taylor stated she thought most homeowners would be disappointed to know this fee would not affect the flood insurance policies that homeowners have to pay.

Commissioner Blue asked if there were any plans to increase the capacity of storm drains. Mr. Ennis said a new General Plan Update Project is almost complete. Once completed, the Storm Drain Master Plan would be updated.

7. Update on Proposal to Establish a Park Site at Houston Elementary School. Mr. Elizondo stated a concept plan for the east side of the Houston Elementary School playground was presented at the December 2012 Commission meeting. Many of the area residents were in attendance and spoke in favor of the park concept and urged the Commission and the City to develop a park there.

Mr. Elizondo said the Neighborhood Community Church is the primary advocate of the new park-like playground and is prepared to back the project with some level of financial support. Ms. Bartsch is desirous of a VUSD-City partnership to improve and maintain the new park.

Mr. Elizondo said as the Commission knows, the City adopted its 2012-14 budget a few months ago and no funding is currently allocated for this type of project. He said City staff has developed some preliminary cost estimates to develop and maintain the proposed park concept as presented to the Commission in December. The estimated cost to fully implement the park plan would be \$450,000 to \$500,000. The estimated cost to maintain this facility would be roughly \$24,000, including City labor, contract labor, and utility costs.

Cost factor assumptions:

1. A 2.42 acre park; 105,000 square foot.
2. Assumes the City will pay for all costs associated with the project.
3. Assumption this would be a non-prevailing wage job. A prevailing wage job would be more expensive if CDBG funds are used for park improvements.
4. Construction costs based on actual per acre costs over the last decade for City neighborhood park projects.
5. Existing irrigation system would be abandoned and a new modern irrigation system would be installed to meet current code.
6. Maintenance costs based on actual per acre (sq. ft.) costs to maintain City parks.

Mr. Elizondo said City staff has had some preliminary discussion with the school district regarding a potential joint venture to improve this area and/or the school districts interest to participate in the project. These discussions included the City Manager and the Superintendent of Schools. Here are points made by the school superintendent.

- A. The school has no interest in selling or releasing the subject property (east half of playground). The superintendent did express a willingness to enter into a lease with an entity interested in making improvements.
- B. School district staff indicated there is no desire to invest additional school funds to improve the property (east portion of the playground). The school would be open to working with other entities interested in working to improve school district property.
- C. The school district is looking into the feasibility of moving the existing fence that splits the playground further to the west to allow public access to some of the school amenities.
- D. School district staff explained there is no minimal acreage needed for open space at a school site based on student population. The principle of Houston Elementary School expressed this concern at the December commission meeting.

School district officials stated that while they investigate the relocation of the fence, school security remains a concern and the playgrounds and tables located adjacent to the school buildings will be secured and protected with fencing.

Ms. Greenwood, Recreation Manager, said last July 2012, she was asked to project a summer day camp at Houston Elementary School. If the City were to implement a summer program (2013) for the school it would be appropriate to begin planning now. She said the estimate would be for a nine week day camp program providing supervised activities such as games, arts and crafts, sporting activities and local field trips.

Ms. Greenwood said there are several options that should be considered in the planning of a program.

1. Free recreational opportunities are already being offered at facilities within walking distance of Houston School.
 - a) Anthony Community Center – Visalia YMCA offers the UCYC free drop in program Monday through Friday from 2-6 pm during summer hours. This location is .6 miles from Houston School.
 - b) Manuel F. Hernandez Community Center offers a free drop in program from 12-6 pm Monday through Friday during summer break. This facility is .9 miles from Houston School.
 - c) Wittman Community Center - Proteus, per contract with the City, provides a free drop in program during summer break, Monday through Friday, from 12-6 pm. This facility is .7 miles from Houston School.

NOTE: All three of these centers offers year round drop in programs, most operating from 3-6 pm during school months.

2. The City operates the LOOP bus service during the summer months to provide transportation to recreational facilities. Rather than adding a new program, students from the Houston School area could utilize this service. Houston School has, in the past, been a stop for the LOOP.
3. Utilize a non-profit community based organization or church group to provide programs and services for this specific target market:
 - a) Neighborhood Church has “adopted” Houston Elementary School and currently assists with programs and services for Houston School children. For example, representatives from the church have sponsored students in the City’s youth sports programs as well as enrichment classes.
 - b) There are several community based organizations (CBO) in our community whose purpose is to provide programs and services to low income children and families. Based on their type of organization, usually a non-profit, they are often able to obtain financial support through grants and contributions that the City may not be eligible for. Examples of these types of organizations include PROTEUS, YMCA, Boys & Girls Club and PAL, to name a few.
 - c) Last year, Clay Ipsen, FDL Camp Solutions, offered a one week day camp pilot program at Highland Elementary School for \$25 per child. This program was offered to elementary school age children from 9 am to 3 pm. At that time, it was our understanding that Mr. Ipsen was interested in working with Visalia Unified School District and/or Tulare County Office of Education to offer future programs to low income school areas during the summer months.

Ms. Greenwood said the concept of adding a free drop-in program at Houston School has merit. If funds were available one could argue that free programs could and should be offered at many school sites within Visalia to provide services for youth focusing on health and wellness, positive socialization and gang avoidance. Unfortunately, in these tough economic times, budget dollars are limited. This program has not been budgeted or funded for implementation and a funding source would need to be identified or other program areas would need to be cut to accommodate this addition.

Mr. Elizondo stated the challenge with a park in this area of the community is primarily financial. The City would probably have to establish a minimum budget of \$1.5 million dollars to acquire and develop a 3 to 5 acre neighborhood park. Only a few undeveloped parcels remain in this area, and the target site is developed as a productive orchard. Since this is an older developed section of the City, park impact fees would not be a source of funding; meaning the general fund might be the only source of funding for this type of project.

Mr. Elizondo said, as an alternative, Mr. Bill Huott has partnered with Neighborhood Church to explore the concept of developing a playground into a park-like atmosphere at Houston Elementary School, located at Houston Avenue, between Giddings and Turner. He said Neighborhood Church has been a long time “supporter” of Houston Elementary School and has a long history of providing resources (both volunteer and financial) to assist the school with various projects. Ms. Stephanie Bartsch has been involved with Mr. Huott and the school district on this project.

Mr. Huott said he took a photo of Visalia’s park map and found a large empty area. He said this area has no park or community center. He said he is asking the commission to take a long look at this area and assist the community with a park.

Commissioner Mann asked Ms. Greenwood where the enrichment classes are held that some of the children are attending. Ms. Greenwood replied the Whitendale Center and that the parents are driving them. She said sports are at COS, Mt Whitney, and in springtime Riverway Sports Park is utilized.

Commissioner Mann asked if the classes are full or could they absorb more children. Ms. Greenwood stated the classes are not full and could accommodate more children. Ms. Mann then asked what the ages were for the children to use the LOOP bus. Ms. Greenwood replied school age, 5 years to 17 years-old.

Mr. Elizondo said neighborhood parks are used heavily. He said the sports groups won’t use Houston Park because of safety issues. He stated the school district is aware of the discussion regarding a park being established at Houston School, and they would assist with maintenance. However, Mr. Elizondo stated the school district has different standards than the department in their maintenance programming and the City will provide the maintenance.

Commissioner Mann stated she would like more input from Houston Elementary School regarding why the school is not being used as open space right now. She suggested moving the fence and see if the children use it.

Mr. Elizondo said the Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) funding can be used in older areas for projects like this. He said requirements that must be met are as follows.

1. Property must be leased,
2. Property must be publicly accessible,
3. Property must be accessible for long hours to the public.

Commissioner Filiponi suggested that a sub-committee be formed to address this item in the future, to work with the school district, Neighborhood Church, Mr. Huott and Ms. Bartsch, and all interested parties. Commissioner Taylor said she would be willing to sit on the sub-committee and Commissioner Blue said he would share the responsibility with her.

Mr. Elizondo stated that City staff recommends the commission accept this staff report, accept public testimony, and provide direction and comments, as appropriate, for consideration by City Council.

- 8. Annual Commission Report to be submitted to City Council.** Commissioner Mann stated the Annual Report is in the packets and ask for comments from the commissioners. Commissioner Filiponi requested a change on page 2 to read Waterways & Trails Committee instead of Waterways & Pedestrian Committee. Commissioner Mann suggested leaving last year’s goals off since they have a meeting scheduled to review and adjustment them for the coming two years. She called for a motion to approve the report with the stated changes. Commissioner Filiponi so moved and Commissioner Doi seconded.

MOTION

Motion passed 4-0

- 9. Discussion of Topics for Joint Meeting with City Council, Tuesday, March 19, 2013.** Chairperson Mann requested to table this discussion until the February meeting.
- 10. Review and Discussion of New Commission Applications.** Commissioner Mann asked if the Commission would like to have another alternate and if so, when they might like to have the applicants come for interviews. Commissioner Doi said he would like another alternate and Commissioner Filiponi said he agreed. It was agreed by consensus to invite the applicants to the February meeting.
- 11. Upcoming California Parks & Recreation Society Conference, March 5-8, 2013, in San Jose, California.** Mr. Elizondo, Parks and Recreation Director, stated the conference is held annually. Commissioners and staff usually attend and if you are interested please let Ms. Miernik know in order to make your arrangements.
- 12. Update on City Council Reports & City Staff Announcements:**
- **Upcoming Recreation Programs & Special Events.** Ms. Greenwood reported the following.
 - Youth basketball has 550 participants currently.
 - This Saturday is the Tule Fog Run at Cutler Park at 8:00 am. Currently there are 350 participants.

- Riverway Sports Park – Chamberlain Baseball Academy is holding a tournament.
 - Michelle is working on the Father Daughter Dance which will be held February 22.
 - The spring brochure is coming out the end of January.
 - Winter Day Camp was held over the break and average attendance was 40 students per day.
 - We are just beginning our winter classes.
 - The Rec Report publishes in the Visalia Times Delta every other week. This has been well-received.
 - Projects forthcoming – Manuel Hernandez Community Center doors and Senior Center Fencing.
 - New Recreation Supervisor began working yesterday.
- **Upcoming Parks & Urban Forestry Projects, Programs & Special Events.** Mr. Bean, Parks & Urban Forestry Manager reported the following.
 - Modoc Trail and Packwood Trail projects are in progress.
 - Mill Creek Trail project is stalled due cold weather. When it is warmer the asphalt will be repaired and then the trail will be completed.
 - St. John’s Trail project will begin from 148 to Cutler Park.
 - The Recreation Park basketball courts are complete.
 - The playground shade structure program has begun and will be complete in March.
 - The Garden Street Plaza project began last week. All the poles are in place.
 - An Eagle Scouts project installed a cement pad and table at Memorial Park.
 - Arbor Day is April 27.
 - **Director’s Report on Administrative Items.** Mr. Elizondo stated this was a good week for publicity for the department. He also noted the \$200,000 donation agreement between the Rotary and the City for the Recreation Splash Pad was approved by City Council. They also approved hiring the HLA Group for the design of the Splash Pad.

13. Commissioner’s Requests & Comments:

- **Parks & Recreation Foundation Monthly Report.** Commissioner Taylor said the Foundation did not meet in December.
- **North Visalia Neighborhood Advisory Committee.** Commissioner Doi said City Engineering presented a report on the Oval Park’s roadway upgrades and the sidewalks were also discussed.
- **Senior Citizens Advisory Committee Update.** No report.

14. Waterways & Trails Committee Report. Commissioner Filiponi said the hospital concept was presented by Lindsey Mann and Mr. Ennis.

15. Adjourn to Regular Meeting March 12, 2013, at 707 W. Acequia, City Council Chambers at 5:30 pm. Commissioner Filiponi made a motion to adjourn and Commissioner Taylor seconded the motion.

MOTION

Motion passed 4-0

Brenda Miernik
Senior Administrative Assistant