



City of Helena

CITY-COUNTY PARKS ADVISORY BOARD SUMMARY

Wednesday, November 4, 2015



City Members

- Pat Doyle
- ~~Melissa Lewis~~ *excused*
- Ross Johnson

County Members

- Jane Kollmeyer
- Dave Payne
- ~~Nyle Hawson (Lincoln Parks Board)~~ *excused*

Joint Member

- ~~John Carter, School District Rep~~ *absent*

Commission Representatives

- Andres Haladay, City Commissioner
- Susan Good-Geise, County Commissioner

Staff Contact

- Matt Heimel, Lewis and Clark County Special Districts Planner
- Amy Teegarden, Parks and Recreation Director
- Craig Marr, Parks Superintendent
- Jennifer Schade, Recorder

LOCATION: City-County Building, Room 426

TIME: 11:30 am – 1:00 pm

Visitor(s): Ron Alles, City Manager, Becky Baraby, Mike Butzlaff, Paul Fetz, Bill Houston, Thomas Jodoin, Jenny Kaiser, Al Knauber, Karen Lane, Troy McGee, Hailey Miller, Daniel Pocha, Tracy Reich, and David Smith, Stacy Sommer.

1. Call to Order

Vice Chairman Pat Doyle called the City-County Parks Advisory Board Meeting to order at 11:27 am. A quorum was present.

2. Consent Action Items

Approval of minutes: October 7, 2015

- o After review of the minutes, Dave Payne moved to approve the October 7, 2015 minutes as presented. Ross Johnson seconded. Motion carried.

3. Establish Quorum/Review Agenda/Introductions

4. Comments from Persons Present

- o None

5. Presentations

- American Legion Baseball – Bill Houston

“The City-County Parks Board’s mission is to promote investment in the development and maintenance of parks, recreation, trails and open space.”

- Bill requested to present a proposal on behalf of the local American Legion Baseball. There are only two states in the United States that don't have high school baseball – Montana is one of those states. If it wasn't for American Legion Baseball, our kids would not be playing baseball.
- Two years ago, ALB entertained the thought of getting more young people on the field. We created a B team for younger kids. The reason for doing so was because we had young people try out, but because they weren't physically or mentally ready to play they would get cut from program. Basically, we are losing kids and not giving them the opportunity to learn and grow. Helena was the first AA program to start a B program in the state. Two years ago Helena started their B program and by next year, the state of Montana will have 20 B programs. In creating the B programs, we have put other teams on legion field. The field now is getting way too much pressure. Maintenance is difficult as there is not enough relief to do proper maintenance.
- We are working to come up with an idea of where younger kids can play. The Brewers, City of Helena, Lewis and Clark County, and Babe Ruth are working on finding solutions to this problem.
- There is an available field at the Ryan complex located at the fairgrounds. Bill did an analysis to determine if this could meet the needs of the players. Hopefully between grant money, donations and fundraisers, we will be able to make necessary improvements to the field so these young people can continue to play.
- An initial assessment identified the following areas that need improvement so the field will qualify as an American Legion Baseball field:

✓ Redo the infield to include building two bullpens	✓ Bleachers
✓ Warning track (which could come later)	✓ Dugouts
✓ Bleacher	✓ Contract Concessions
✓ Need to add restrooms	✓ Scoreboards
✓ Need ticket booth and fence to fence off area	✓ Field Maintenance
- While we know we won't be able to accomplish this all at once, it is a good list that we can prioritize.
- Bill stated they are working on a cost analysis that will be submitted to the County. They will also be working on writing a grant and will work on donations through the local communities.
- Amy added that the City has a great partnership with both the American Legion and the Helena Brewers and we value those relationships. Unfortunately, the amount of use that is starting to occur at Legion fields is hindering our ability to support both teams and while we appreciate the growth of baseball in our community, we simply cannot accommodate with one field. We can't maintain player development and safety with the use of our current field. Amy added that this is a good problem to have in our community.
- Jane asked if there was a ballpark figure of what the cost will be to renovate the other field. Bill doesn't have those figures yet; however, he was given a quote of \$2,800 for fencing. The grass and field seem to be in fair condition. Bill added that ALB is also in need of another bus.

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- Amy stated that the ticket booth and concessions will make a huge impact on the new field.
- Bill thanked the members for their time.
- Ron Alles, City Manager then added that this is an outstanding program! He recommends that we invite Bill and others from the American Legion Program to our next City–County Board meeting.

ACTION ITEM: Jennifer will include Bill Houston and other representatives from the American Legion Program on the agenda for our next meeting.

- **Park safety concerns**

- Amy began this discussion by providing the background of some of the park safety concerns. On August 28, Heidi Obrien convened a meeting of business owners, parks staff, and the police department to discuss concerns of safety in the city parks. It was during this meeting that everyone agreed it would be a good idea to include the topic as an agenda item for the September City-County Parks Board meeting. During the September 2, 2015 meeting, several people from the public voiced some serious concerns regarding park safety. At the end of this meeting, County Commissioner Susan Good Giese stated she thought it would be helpful if the Police Chief could come to the next City-County Parks Board meeting to discuss some of the limitations, and what can and can't be done in regards to park safety.
- Chief Troy McGee commented that this community issue has been around for many, many years – with the increase in transients, it has become more problematic. This is a “community issue”, not just a police issue or the city parks department issue.
- The police department has responded to several incidents in the parks. This is where young people congregate as do some of the transients. The problems really came to a head this summer. This summer the PD assigned one SRO to the parks. The SRO issued many citations and park ban letters. Some of the people cited were banned permanently.
- The problems at Women's park seem more geared towards transients. The PD responds the best they can with the resources they have. One business owner was assaulted at Women's Park – the transient was cited and we will be going to trial in this case.
- Chief McGee then stated the police department went into the parks a lot this year. Because they have been keeping records, they now have statistics on how many times they responded to incidents. While not exact numbers, the police department has responded to over 600 incidents, covering many parks. Many citations have been issued.
- Per Amy – from a parks management perspective, the transients make parks less desirable. The parks maintenance crews began thinning hedges so people can't camp out at the parks. We also met with the Helena BID to discuss alternative structures for a shelter at Women's park.
- Chief – there are many transients in Women's park and unfortunately, if they are intoxicated, God's Love won't allow them to stay there. They live in the streets and

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- sleep in the parks. They defecate and urinate in the parks. Chief recommended the possibility of putting toilets in some of these parks.
- Ross – Have you issued citations in all city parks? Do officers document park visits as normal procedure? Per Chief - this summer we knew there were many issues in the parks and as a result, officers were given specific directions to log their visits. In doing so, we created an incident and we knew how much time was spent in all the parks.
 - Police Officer Corey Livesay added that the parks staff, business owners, and residents have communicated to police concerns about the issues with trash, graffiti, and lots of gathering. Officers have observed certain groups causing many of the problems. Some parks don't have these issues.
 - Ross – the things we have heard by public comment the last few months is that the problems have become more significant such as the vandalism and assault. Are there any other resources that the PD could use to assist in prevention? Is there anything we can do?
 - Chief – in regards to the assaults, there really isn't anything the public can do. The fights occurring in Memorial park are between participants who know each other. In Women's park the problems seem to be the drunken transients who get belligerent. In Memorial Park we can try to keep these groups away from one another as much as possible. Can we pull resources from elsewhere? Yes, but when we cite/arrest people, there are many city departments affected. The city attorney has to use resources to prosecute. And what do we do with them after they have been found guilty? Do we fine them or put them in jail? The judge has placed some transients in jail for 3 – 6 months.
 - Ross – do you have a recommendation as far as public avoiding potential situations? Chief stated we shouldn't make this too big of an issue. The parks are basically safe – assaults are at a minimum. Perhaps we could look at more lighting, especially in Women's Park. Again, trimming the vegetation/hedges helps. Looking at a different structure than the covered bandshell is a good solution as well. In Women's Park it would help to clear the vegetation as that seems to be where transients like to sit and drink. In Memorial Park the bathrooms seem to be a problem area. Maybe we could keep those locked at night – it was clarified that we do keep the bathrooms locked at night. In Centennial Park, the problem area seems to be the skate park. We get calls there quite often. Per Stacy – there seems to be group of trouble makers that congregate at Centennial. Chief - Centennial is harder to patrol. It is a large area. This summer we also had a few problems at the park by K-Mart.
 - Jenny thanked Heidi for facilitating the meetings between the city, the police department, and business owners. She has made many phone calls to the police department and thanked Police Chief McGee for responding when they can. She was assaulted by a transient right outside of Women's Park. She walks her dogs every day. There is a group of transients that like to "hang out" together. They have a "pack mentality". She came upon a couple fornicating in the park and told the woman to pull up her pants. That was when she was attacked. A lot of business owners struggle. Jenny has visited with officers who have expressed concerns that

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- they can only enforce so much. There is not a time when park closes – perhaps this needs to change. It seems things really begin happening during evening hours. Thinning out shrubs has made a huge difference and Jenny thanked the Parks Maintenance department for taking care of that. She does feel a curfew might help. Mike agreed and added that many of the transients come into his business asking to use the bathroom. He added security cameras so he hasn't seen as much of an issue.
- Amy stated that the reason we have not historically provided porta potties is because the transients would sleep in them. Jenny and Mike both agreed and stated they feel that porta potties would just attract them more.
 - Curfews on parks have been discussed; however, the commission is reluctant to place curfews on park use. Per Chief - police could enforce curfews but this would be enforced across the board. If we put curfews on parks, the transients will go somewhere else. If someone breaks a curfew, it is a misdemeanor. Jane stated the trail head close to her home is for day use only. If she sees vehicles, she can call the sheriff.
 - Amy – our parks don't have open/closed hours – we rely on city curfew of age 14 or younger. Many of the offenders we are discussing are older.
 - Ross – do you have any thoughts on the use of security cameras as deterrent? Chief said that in his experience, security cameras are one of the best deterrents you can use.
 - Heidi Obrien shared some other things going on in the parks. It is intimidating to walk through Women's Park and she would not want her older kids to walk there. She also has friend whose child plays soccer at the YMCA and has to go through the skate park. This friend has stated she will not leave her child alone at soccer practice.
 - David Smith, YMCA stated he has seen several people cleaning up garbage in the parking lot – sometimes for hours. He has seen kids spinning brodies in the park. There is broken glass everywhere. There was a break in last week at the YMCA and the offenders were going through lockers. A 14 year old girl was recently assaulted. Chief McGee stated that a security camera would help in these situations; however, if people aren't doing bad things, the police can't do anything. Dave said he has been scared to approach these people. The Chief said to give the police department a call and let them deal with the issues.
 - Amy – we added an extra dumpster at Centennial parking lot. This hasn't really helped. The bottom line is we that want our parks to be a safe place for healthy activities. Hopefully as a City-County Parks Board, we can come up with some solutions to these issues.
 - Jane – are you going to come back with suggestions for us? Amy stated this meeting was an opportunity to hear Chief McGee's perspective. The next step for us as the City-County Parks Board is to further discuss what our options are. This needs to be a community discussion. Parks can help facilitate that discussion and then if there are some suggestions, we will take that forward to the appropriate policy makers.
 - Chief offered to have Captain Livesay come to park board meetings. Amy discussed the possibility of getting a seasonal report of how often the police have been in the

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parks. She has asked Jennifer to work with the PD admin office to share data on what the issues are, how many incidents, and more of a streamline sharing of what is happening.

- We will keep this on as an agenda item for next meeting.
- **Tobacco Free Resolution** - Carryover discussion from the August and September City-County Parks Board meetings
 - There has been discussion on whether or not we need to readdress tobacco free parks resolution. Dan Pocha with the Native American Center contacted Susan Good Geise about concerns with this resolution. He asked for some time to present at today's meeting.
 - Daniel began his presentation by referring to the American Indian Freedom Act of 1976. This was enacted to protect and preserve the tradition religious rights and cultural practices of American Indians. The Act requires policies of all governmental agencies to eliminate interference with the free exercise of Native American Religion based on the First Amendment, and to accommodate access to and use of religious sites to the extent that the use is practicable and is not inconsistent with an agency's essential functions. With natives, there are many things done with tobacco that have nothing to do with smoke. There are 22 sacred plants. Previously, there was a ceremony held in Memorial Park in honor of Native American day. There were many dignitaries present. Our tobacco ban needs to recognize the rights of natives.
- Open for discussion
 - Per Ross – the intent of the tobacco ban was to provide an opportunity to establish healthy activity and community wellness in our parks. There is nowhere in the resolution that addresses use of tobacco for religious purposes.
 - Our main objective in putting this resolution in place was education.
 - Daniel asked if we could add “respect traditional tobacco” on bottom of our signage. A blanket ban on tobacco use goes against the American Indian Religious Act. Amy then stated that the American Indian Religious Act would override our resolution and not enforceable. Thomas agreed with this.
 - Vice Chairman Pat Doyle stated there are two requests on the table – one is to change the language on the sign and the other is to amend the resolution. Are we asking to do one or both of these changes?
 - Amy – our signs are generic. They would be costly to change. We could however change the language within the resolution.
 - Karen added that when raising public awareness, the educational group will include specific articles to make clear the difference between regular use and traditional use of tobacco. She invited Daniel to help with that campaign.
 - Jane made a motion that we amend the current Tobacco Free Park resolution to acknowledge Native American use. The board will give direction to the staff of correct verbiage. Susan seconded. Motion carried.
 - Daniel stated he can offer a copy of what the Helena Indian Alliance has written. It is worded very nicely. Amy said she would like a copy.

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- Staff will bring forward recommended language. The City/County parks board will approve. This may or may not go to the commission.

ACTION ITEM: The Parks and Recreation Department will amend the current Tobacco Free Park resolution to acknowledge Native American use of tobacco. The board will give direction to the staff of correct verbiage.

6. Discussion Items

None

7. Action Items

None

8. Reports

City	Amy Teegarden	Parks	Craig Marr
County	Matt Heimel	Fair Board	Dave Payne
HOLMAC	Jane Kollmeyer	Playgrounds	Stacy Sommer
Lincoln Parks Board	Nyle Howsman	School District	John Carter
Recreation	Amy Teegarden		

- Amy - we have been contacted by Kiwanis club. They want to do a signature fundraising project to replace a playground and possibly include a rubberized play surface. More information will be coming. Amy, Greta, Craig, and Pat attended a wonderful conference in Bozeman. Lastly, we are reviewing applications for the Aquatics / Recreation Manager.
- Jane had nothing to report.
- Craig – parks is winterizing water systems and ramping up for snow removal. We are still doing some work at 6th Ward. We have been dealing with the dog park issues. We are also working with engineering on tree root/sidewalk issues.
- Dave Payne – nothing to report.
- Stacy Sommer - Our imagination playground is up and running at Exploration Works. We are in need of a trailer approximately 6 x 12 to use for hauling.
- Susan – Hooper Park in Lincoln was awarded a \$66,000 grant to build restrooms to include showers in the park. Pat added that some of the state parks are doing the same thing.
- Matt – the canyon ridge subdivision is close to the final plan. Lands program is going through review. 2 parcels – 100 acres on Mount Ascension will be transferred over to the city.

9. Communications and Future Agenda Items (Board Members)

- American Legion B-Team field Improvements
- Park Safety Concerns – Continued Conversation

10. Next Meeting Date: Wednesday, December 2, 2015

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11. Adjournment

With no further business, the City-County Parks Board meeting adjourned at 12:53 pm.

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citycommunitydevelopment@helenamt.gov
316 North Park, Avenue, Room 440, Helena, MT 59623

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