

**RECREATON COMMISSION SPECIAL CALL MINUTES  
TUESDAY, JANUARY 8, 2019 6:00 P.M.  
CITY HALL, COUNCIL CHAMBERS, VERO BEACH, FLORIDA**

**PRESENT:** Chairman, Richard Yemm; Vice Chairman, Sue Dinunno; Members: Bobbi Burdick, Judy Jones, Brooke Malone, and Alternate Member, Greg Holtan **Also Present** Recreation Director, Rob Slezak; Assistant Recreation Director, Patty Howard; and City Clerk, Tammy Bursick

**Excused Absence:** Garrett MacMillan

**1) CALL TO ORDER**

Chairman Yemm called today's meeting to order at 6:00 p.m.

A) Roll Call

The City Clerk performed the roll call.

**2. ITEM FOR DISCUSSION:**

**A) This Public Workshop is being held to receive Public Input for creating a Master Plan for the Parks and Recreation for the City of Vero Beach.**

Mr. Dick Yemm, Chairman of the Recreation Commission, expressed today that he is looking for input for the master plan for the City of Vero Beach Parks and Recreation. The last master plan that was done took place in 1992 for Indian River County and did not include the whole City. He said they will need to consider having a master plan done in-house or hiring a consultant, which would cost roughly \$100,000. The Recreation Commission is interested in hearing what the public has to say. He has asked Ms. Alma Lee Loy to be at their meeting today to speak because she is one of the founders of the Recreation Commission. Then he will ask Mr. Rob Slezak, Recreation Director, to give them an update as to where he is at this point. Then it will be time to have public input. He asked the public to keep their comments just to what is being discussed today.

Ms. Alma Lee Loy stated that she was delighted to have the opportunity to participate with the Recreation Commission as they all work together in planning sessions for their City. She recalled a couple of months ago she stood in front of the City Council suggesting that they do an inventory of the Parks in the City of Vero Beach. She also suggested having a moratorium put in place with no changes made to the Parks until this inventory had been completed. That would give the citizens of this community time to make suggestions on improvements with a final analysis going to the City Council. Today they have a golden opportunity for upgrading and improving their Parks for all of them to enjoy. They all know the value of their Parks. She briefly went over the benefits. She said that their quality of life is enhanced by their Parks. She went over the different things that could be done with the Parks that are already in place. She also

agreed that the Dodgertown property was a one of kind asset to the City. She said the future of this property is being discussed by the City Council. She had a few thoughts about the three (3) corners property and the Waste Water Treatment Plant and said that there is no need to be in a hurry. They do need professional help in leading the discussion for a master plan for this area. This is the last opportunity for another showcase of open space to the City of Vero Beach. She asked everyone to please take the time to reach out to their citizens and that everyone comes to a consensus. This will be a showcase for every citizen and visitor coming into their special City. She looks forward to helping them engage in projects to help this City.

Mr. Yemm mentioned that when he spoke to Ms. Loy about being at this meeting she gave him some history of the Recreation Commission. The Recreation Commission was founded in 1955 and she was one of the founding members. How fortunate it is for them to have all of this advice today.

Mr. Yemm asked Mr. Slezak to explain to the public what the master plan they are operating off of today entails.

Mr. Rob Slezak, Recreation Director, reported that in 1992, there were some professional consultants hired to discuss recreation and come up with a master plan that really didn't include Parks. He realizes that Council is looking for a master plan that includes both Parks and Recreation. He noted that the Planning and Development Department is putting together an RFP for the three (3) corners property and the Planning and Development Director is at today's meeting to speak on that.

Mr. Jason Jefferies, Planning and Zoning Development Director, recalled that months ago Council instructed staff to put together an RFP for the three (3) corners property. This plan is intended to include the public's input. They would be bringing on a consultant to work with the City in developing this project. The conceptual plan would be based on citizen's input. This is the process that they will be going through. He plans to present something to the City Council in February for them to give staff direction concerning the RFP and to get a consultant hired.

Mr. Slezak noted that there have been a number of citizens coming forward that are interested in having a master plan of all the properties in the community and what they would like to see. He knows this will be a good forum for the future as they move on.

Mr. Yemm asked the public to come up and speak and to say whether or not they are a City resident.

Mrs. Phyllis Frey resident of the City, said she would like to speak about MacWilliam Park and the Marina.

Mr. Yemm reminded everyone that they were discussing Parks and Recreation today. The Commission involved with the Marina is the Marine Commission. He asked them to keep in mind that the purpose of today's meeting is to talk about having a master plan.

Mrs. Frey felt that MacWilliam Park is under attack. The City Council has decided that they have too many Parks. They want to commercialize their green spaces. Developers can then increase building heights especially on water park land. Certain politicians consider their Parks as wasted land. Parks are the people's land and they are being taken away from them. She said the population in the County is growing and the National Parks Association says that they need more green space and not less. People come to this area because of their Parks. Everyone needs to stand up and fight for their Park lands.

Mr. Rory Ellison, City resident, 9<sup>th</sup> grader at Indian River Charter High School and a member belonging to "Lines in the Lagoon," which is an organized Committee that entails having a Lagoon fishing tournament. He asked that they continue to support their Parks and enhancement for current and future generations. There is no such thing as too many Parks. He then read a prepared statement.

Mrs. Melissa Ellison, City resident, said that she teaches a bike safety program in the Elementary Schools and is working on a new triathlon program. She suggested taking a measure of the economic impact of physical activity and look at their Parks and Recreation expenditures because they improve their quality of life. Many community leaders around the Country consider Parks and Recreation facilities as discretionary and don't contribute to the value of the community, but research shows the opposite. It is important to keep the population physically active as much as possible. This benefits by keeping health costs down.

Mr. Bill Fish, City resident, recalled a meeting that took place at the Indian River College and those in attendance were the City Council, Indian River County Commission and Indian River Shores City Council. One of the things they discussed was getting rid of the Waste Water Plant and one (1) of the County Commissioners was looking at the development that could occur on that piece of land. He mentioned Troy Moody Park and once some money was spent to upgrade the Park and equipment there are a lot of people that use that Park now.

Mr. Joseph Guffanti, City resident, commented that some of the most valuable property is in Manhattan and 25% of that Island is Park land. He said the reason for this meeting is all about money. The City of Vero Beach sold its power system and got \$20 million for it and prior to that were putting six-million dollars in the General Fund that the electric system generated. Now they are in panic mode. They had to sell the Post Office and are looking at selling other City assets, which is why they are at this meeting today.

Mr. Stu Keiller, Executive Director of Youth Sailing Foundation, commented that his organization occupies part of the property at 17<sup>th</sup> Street and they are now celebrating their 10<sup>th</sup> year. They lease property at the Water Plant and have been there for the last 7½ years and are in their second year of a five (5) year lease. They currently have 85 sailboats. There are 150 sailors that come out every week ranging in ages from fourth grade to high school. In addition to sailing they are involved in many other things like partnering with ORCA, they installed an ADA compliant ramp and work with Special Olympics and teach special needs people how to sail. Their dream is to build a building somewhere near the Power Plant and occupy a small sliver of that land. He said he

thinks that they have done a good job with the resources that they have and would like to be a part of the development of the 17<sup>th</sup> Street property.

Mr. Herb Whittall, City resident, lives on Park Avenue where at the end of Park Avenue is Young's Park. He said twice the City Council tried to sell it and develop it into condos and twice the people showed up and encouraged them not to do that. He said there are a lot of cars that go down that road driving too fast. The City did a survey and in the summer 550 cars a day go to that Park. The City has done a great job of improving that Park and it is well used.

Mr. Bob McCabe, City resident, thanked everyone for retaining all the City Parks and Recreation properties for future generations. The Parks are which help make Vero such a special place. As population grows they need to have these Parks available. He said once they are sold the City will have no control over these properties. He thanked the Recreation Commission for having these public meetings for the future needs of these properties. The Rotary Club uses the River House for their weekly meetings and they pay rent to have their meetings there. The Rotary Club recently purchased a new dishwasher for the Riverhouse. He is President of the Vero Beach Chamber of Commerce and they sponsor the Pirate Fest and are now becoming more active with the Main Street activities because of where the Chamber is now located. He again thanked the Recreation Commission for having this meeting and hoped more hearings like this one would be held.

Mr. Brian Heady, City resident, said they would not have to worry so much about the master plan if the City paid off all the debt on the Dodgertown property and the Marina property. He said that their Parks are not going to make money.

Ms. Peggy Goodnight, City resident, has been in Vero for the last 40 years. She remembers other treasures that have been up for discussion and possible destruction, such as the Oslo Boat Ramp and the Heritage Center. People put money in to buy McKee Gardens. Now they have the chance to save another piece of property along the river. She encouraged them to have something that people can enjoy and go for walks at. All of these mentioned projects were almost done away with and now they have been preserved.

Mrs. Penny Chandler Norris, was at today's meeting representing the Board for the Vero Beach Dog Park. She commented on the value of the Vero Beach Dog Park and urged them (Recreation Commission) to include it as part of their planning recommendations. They provide a free place where people can take their dogs. In 2014, the Dog Park leased land from the City to develop and manage a Dog Park and since then the property is continually upgraded. It cost over \$50,000 to run the Dog Park and a lot of money has been raised to go towards capital improvements like fencing, handicap spaces, parking lot improvements, etc. Over \$100,000 has been spent on improvements for this year alone. They maintain the Park at no expense to the City or residents. They are a great partner with the City and the Dog Park will continue to thrive and she hopes that the Recreation Commission will continue to have these meetings and have the Dog Park as a part of the master plan.

Mr. Yemm asked Mrs. Chandler for her opinion on what she thought that the importance of these Parks are.

Mrs. Chandler said that the importance of their Parks is huge. Their Parks are a part of what keeps their citizenry healthy. The Parks in general are a huge plus for the community.

Mrs. Brooke Malone, Recreation Commission member stated that the Commission needs to come up with recommendations and ideas and if there are particular things that the public is interested in seeing or having then this Commission needs to hear that. She said like protecting the Dog Park in their master plan.

Mr. Jay Miller, not a City resident, would like the Power Plant site to become Mr. Miller Music Mill. It would be a 5,000 seat auditorium like the Kravis Center in Palm Beach. A building like the Fort Pierce City Hall extended from the present power building to the river. There will be no parking problems. They could put a parking garage where the old Water Plant is. It would bring additional people to Vero to spend money at local places.

Mr. Malcom Allen, County resident and owner of Orchid Island Bikes & Kayaks, suggested part of the property be used for a canoe and paddleboard launch. Existing boat ramps are busy with boats and trailers, leaving little room for the smaller watercraft.

Mrs. Malone asked Mr. Keiller if he had room for canoes.

Mr. Keiller mentioned all the different entities that they would like to work with, such as the Power Squadron and paddle craft, which would be strictly for sailing craft.

Mrs. Chris Pope, County resident, brought up Youth Sailing and wanted to make it straight on some of the misconceptions that people think they are like such as the Yacht Club, which they are not. She said every child in Indian River County is able to take sailing lessons from Youth Sailing free of charge. Another misconception is they want a large piece of the Power Plant land, which they don't. They just have to be on the water and there is no other place for them. She said that Youth Sailing has grown a lot from when they started 10 years ago. She advocated the Recreation Commission in getting them a long term lease. She said that they have 3 ½ years left on their current lease.

Ms. Joan Clark, City resident, suggested coming up with a wish list of things that people would like to see done with the property and then narrow it down to what is possible. She would like to see a boat ramp on the west side of the river. The same with a Dog Park in that it would be nice to have one on the west side of the City. She said move the Dog Park to the old Post Office property. The Dog Park doesn't need waterfront property. The Marina needs to be expanded and waterfront is where it has to be.

Councilwoman Laura Moss, City resident, told the Commission to think about what they have heard this evening from the young gentleman who spoke so eloquently to the eldest member who was Alma Lee Loy. She wanted to thank Ms. Loy while she still at the meeting and also to Mr. Jay Bird and thank you to the Commission for having this

meeting. She said to address some of the concerns Recreation is not going to go away. She showed one (1) of the less interesting items that the Council accomplished last year, which is the Comprehensive Plan Policy Document. She asked the City Clerk to give each of them a copy. She referred to Chapter 7 and read for the community what the goals are. She said that this document has gone to Tallahassee and is the weight of a legal document. She reiterated that Recreation was not going away. She also mentioned under policies in the document Section 2.5 it reads: *“The City should support efforts of not for profit organizations to facilitate the funding of recreation capital improvements.”* Councilwoman Moss said in 2017 there were three (3) meetings where they revisited the Vision Plan. She asked the City Clerk to provide these documents to the Recreation Commission. The meetings went on for hours and it was all public comments. She said the City Council didn’t speak. It was a very wide range of ideas about what to do and it was primarily recreation, which might be of interest to the Recreation Commission. She said that anyone that wants to read the minutes they are on the City’s website. The dates for the meetings were March 13, 2017, April 17, 2017 and May 17, 2017. There were three (3) separate meetings and they were very positive. She did not hear that they have too many Parks and that defies explanation to her. She said no one said anything like that. There were a lot of good ideas. She thanked Mrs. Malone for saying that the Commission wants ideas that they can work with. She said some of the ideas were pretty good. They didn’t get picked up at that time because the Council was working on other issues. But, the electric issue is off the table now and that took a lot of time and energy away from other things. She said those minutes might be a good starting point to look at and she asked the City Clerk to distribute them to the Recreation Commission. She thanked the Recreation Commission for calling this meeting. She thought it was good to have new input. She mentioned in speaking with people since Dodgertown has come up several times and the Power Plant property, she has told them that she looks at Riverside and Dodgertown as book ends with open space and jewels to this community. She suggested doing whatever they are going to do to the Dodgertown property first and then decide how much open space is needed. In terms of the revenue from FPL it is actually \$58 million and the Finance Commission has made recommendations concerning that revenue at their April meeting last year and those minutes are available on the website. It shows what their recommendations were as far as paying down debt. She said the City is not in panic mode and are in very good financial shape.

Ms. Vicky Gould, City resident, thanked the Recreation Commission for having this meeting. She said the Recreation Department is amazing and the funding for recreation continues to get sliced. She complimented all the Recreation staff.

Ms. Rosemary White said with the Dodgertown property she thinks it would be stellar to have a track and field complex. The three corners property in Vero Beach could be the Centennial Water Park.

Mr. Steve Reems said the one problem with the pickleball courts is that there is no lighting. If there was lighting it would eliminate the overcrowding of the courts that occurs during the day time.

Mrs. Linda Hillman, City resident, would like to advocate for this Commission to go to City Council and ask for a longer and better worded lease for the Dog Park. She said that is an important Park for their City. The wording in the present lease is scary and she didn't like to hear that they could be thrown out at any time. They need to have a more expanded life term for the lease and this goes for Youth Sailing also. She doesn't want to see any of their Parks sold. She feels that Young's Park is being ignored and needs some repairs. She likes the idea of name dedications to the pavilions (as mentioned by the Recreation Director). She knows that their Recreation Department has been neglected and money has been taken away from them when it is needed somewhere else. The same goes for the Marina. She said this present City Council is slamming both of those departments. She said if money had not been taken away from them they would be beautiful. She reiterated not to sell any of their Parks. Their Marina needs to be taken care of and does not need to be leased out.

Mrs. Saskia Fuller, resident of the City, and mother of two (2) teenage sons who would like to have a skatepark in Vero Beach. She said her sons have been cited while skateboarding to their friends' homes and that a skatepark is needed.

Mr. Brian Heady explained the purpose of this meeting was for the Recreation Commission to bring ideas to the City Council. He said what they need to do is pay off all of the debt on all of their City Parks including the Marina and reclaim the bed tax from the County and use it for City purposes and to get a master plan done.

Mrs. Dinneno was handed a note from someone who could not stay for the entire meeting who said that she would like to see the three (3) corners property become a walking path with bocce courts and perhaps chess tables where people could gather.

Mrs. Malone thanked everyone for coming out. She said the Commission appreciates their interest in being here. She wished that the Commission was in a position to address the major overwhelming concerns they have heard tonight. She suggested to the public that they go to the City Council meetings. Their job as the Recreation Commission is to make recommendations on how to handle recreation matters and help Mr. Slezak on what he needs in order to fix things. She expected people to come to the meeting and show them pictures and maybe say they need to revisit this as the master plan gets reapproved. She encouraged the public to go to their nearest Park, go and look at the recreation facilities near them. There are budget cuts that keep occurring to this Department and they are despairingly sad. She said some noise needs to be made by the public so that the Council knows what they are experiencing or else nothing will change. She sat on the Board for the Skateboard Commission and left that Commission because she couldn't get anything done.

Mrs. Burdick thanked everyone for coming to the meeting tonight. She said that it does not stop here. They can give recommendations until they are blue in the face, but if the citizens don't stand behind recreation then it will be no good. She said that the Recreation Commission will do their part, but the public needs to back them up.

Mr. Holtan recalled that he has met a number of the same people speaking some months ago and they are bringing up some very important things that eventually will get taken care of.

Mrs. Dinneno commented that the Recreation Commission has been asked by the City Council to make recreation pay for itself. She said that is beyond ridiculous. The national average for cost recovery of a Park's and Recreation Department is 17%, which says that 83% needs to come from the City. There is no way that a Recreation Department can turn a profit and they should not be expected to. It is part of the cost of living well and that is what the citizens deserve. She said under funding (year after year) of the Recreation Department leads to decline in the use of the facility. She said while development of a comprehensible master plan is important it also is very expensive. The financial investment in a master plan is just the beginning and those people who took part in the Vision Plan know this. She said getting a plan is one thing if it is used, but if it sits on a book shelf and is never looked at it never gets funded and the funding doesn't get released at the time it is supposed to be released then what is the point of creating a master plan. She said they need to create a movement in this town. She said when you consider the growth occurring in this County their Parks and Recreation facilities need restoration and expansion now. She said that the City Council needs to be lobbied and the public needs to be loud about it and not take "no" for an answer.

Ms. Jones commented that the young man who spoke earlier is the future of this City.

Mr. Slezak commented that what he has taken from this meeting is that there is an economic benefit and a real benefit to the people in this community through the Recreation Department. He brought up the Dog Park and said in 2002, a group came to them and said that they would love to have a place for people to exercise their dogs. He said now look how the Dog Park is thriving. He said 10 years ago the Youth Sailing Foundation came to the Recreation Commission with a great idea that they had and now look at Youth Sailing. He said all of these are drivers to their economy and what is going on and the quality of life. These are people that first started with the Recreation Department. He brought up pickleball, which started with 25 people who said they had an idea of what to do with some of the tennis courts that were not being utilized that much. Now there are over 400 pickleball players and they need more courts.

Mr. Yemm commented that one question that comes to his mind is who is going to put together a master plan. Is it going to be done in-house by Mr. Slezak and the Recreation Commission or do they (City Council) want to hire a consultant to do it. He asked the audience to raise their hands if they want to hire a consultant to do the master plan, which would cost close to \$100,000. There was one (1) hand that was raised. Mr. Yemm felt that they could use that \$100,000 to put towards fixing up the Parks. He then asked the audience to raise their hands if they think that there are adequate number of Parks in the City. There was only one (1) hand that went up. Mr. Yemm said the trouble with that is that they are land locked in getting available land to expand. He encouraged the public to send in their recommendations on how to improve the amenities that they are offering through Parks and Recreation. He also mentioned the importance of green space.

Mrs. Dinneno asked Mr. Slezak if he has ever considered using volunteers to help out with maintenance.

Mr. Slezak said that he loves having people volunteer to help the Recreation Department as long as they pass the necessary background check.

Mrs. Burdick said one of the things that the Recreation Commission could do now, which doesn't cost any money, is recommend to the City Council that they expand the terms of the leases for the Dog Park and Youth Sailing in helping to protect those organizations.

**3. PUBLIC COMMENTS**

This item was heard earlier in the meeting.

**4. RECREATION COMMISSION MEMBER COMMENTS**

This item was heard earlier in the meeting.

**5. ADJOURNMENT**

Tonight's meeting adjourned at 7:49 p.m.

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